



Mountain Telephone

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

CONNECTION

SOLDIERING ON

From Frenchburg
to Vietnam



KEEPING A LOOK OUT

Fannin's Vegetable Farm
secures its legacy

NOVELS IN NOVEMBER

Broadband boosts rural writers



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Committed to a fiber future


For several years, NTCA has encouraged policymakers to think with a hand in the present but an eye toward the future. But in Washington, D.C. — where every technology and every interest has lobbyists and political champions — that mission is easier said than done.

Many of the nation's internet providers believe in a fiber-or-bust approach. As long as it's physically possible, which is not always the case in rural areas, fiber should be the goal. As lawmakers weigh infrastructure investments, why should internet providers settle for less?

Many NTCA members are working diligently to extend fiber optic networks, despite challenges like slow supply chains limiting access to the materials needed to build these robust networks. They are making strides.

In our most recent broadband survey, 70% of NTCA members' customers enjoyed fiber to the premises. It's a technology that makes it possible for internet providers such as yours to easily scale their services to meet demand.

Fiber infrastructure is also a key component of building a better future that includes higher-performance services, real-time applications, smart communities, precision agriculture, 5G superiority and better access to health care and education. To achieve our goals as a nation, we need a strong foundation of fiber connectivity.


Connecting rural communities to the rest of the nation and to the resources they need to excel matters. Broadband matters, because its speed and capacity are the new baselines for working, learning and growing the economy — from wherever we might be. Investment in fiber optic internet ensures rural America will not be relegated to second-class status. It's more than a worthy investment in infrastructure development, it's an investment in our nation's future. 

SOS

FBI program helps keep kids safe online

The holidays often bring new gadgets and devices, as well as some free time for kids enjoying a break from school. This time of year is a good opportunity to remind younger technology users of the risks of being online and to share strategies to keep themselves safe.

The FBI offers tools to help build a digital defense to protect kids online. These tools include the agency's free computer literacy program, Safe Online Surfing, or SOS. Designed for children in grades three through eight, it's available to teachers, administrators and parents, who can introduce children to the concepts one-on-one.

The program engages children through a series of online games that mix fun with education on a variety of topics, including online etiquette, managing cyberbullying, the importance of strong passwords and double authentication, and more. Visit sos.fbi.gov to access the guide. 

The FBI offers a few additional tips for parents:

- Discuss with your children what kind of information, photos and videos are appropriate to post online — and what's not.
- Emphasize that kids should limit the information they post on social media platforms, such as their full name, date of birth and school information.
- Teach that, while free software and apps seem enticing, using them may open phones and computers up to malware or worse.



Tech the halls

GIVE GREAT GADGETS

Great tech gifts don't have to be expensive. There are plenty of options under \$50 that will make the holidays merry. We've got some suggestions, whether you're shopping for a more budget-friendly gift for that gadget-crazy person on your list or a fun stocking stuffer that won't break the bank.

\$29.99
MSRP at
us.tomy.com



KIIPIX PORTABLE PHOTO PRINTER

This one's a neat gadget that reproduces images from your smartphone without the need for Wi-Fi or even batteries. You just place your phone on top of the KiiPix, and it takes a picture of your screen and prints a photo in minutes. Reviews point out that the device can be finicky with ambient light, and the quality will be closer to those instant Polaroid pictures from the '70s than a professionally printed photo, but the retro look is part of the fun. Available in pink, blue and black.

8BITDO SN30 PRO+

Any gamer would appreciate the SN30 Pro+, a customizable controller compatible with a variety of systems. Featuring rumble vibration, motion controls and 20 hours of play off a four-hour charge, the controller can also be used wired through USB or wirelessly via Bluetooth. Compatible systems include Windows, macOS, Android, Steam, Nintendo Switch and Raspberry Pi. Free software allows you to customize buttons, adjust stick and trigger sensitivity, and create macros with any button combination. The controller is available in black and in color combinations reminiscent of the classic Nintendo Entertainment System and the Super Nintendo.

\$49.99
amazon.com



POWERUP 2.0 PAPER AIRPLANE CONVERSION KIT

Even if your design skills are more Wright brothers than Boeing, you can still transform a regular paper airplane into a dream flying machine, while kids can learn about basic principles of physics and working with simple electronics. The POWERUP 2.0 kit includes two sheets of high-quality paper to get you started, a charger, a carbon fiber propeller shaft and an ultratough rear propeller — for those inevitable crash landings. The POWERUP 4.0 model, which is \$69.99, comes with stabilization technology and can be controlled with your smartphone. Either way, get ready to take to the skies!

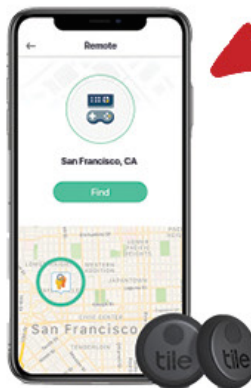
\$69.99
poweruptoys.com



TILE

The best Bluetooth finder on the market, the Tile line of products can be attached to your keys, backpack, purse or TV remote — anything that can be lost or misplaced. A free app for iOS or Android can then be used to find the missing Tile within 150 to 400 feet — depending on the Tile size — or you can ask Siri, Google Assistant or Alexa for help. When outside of Bluetooth range, the app will show the Tile's most recent location, which is updated whenever another Tile user comes within range of your device. You can also subscribe to Premium service, which includes free battery replacement and smart alerts that warn you when you've left something behind, or Premium Protect, which reimburses you up to \$1,000 if Tile can't find your things.

\$24.99
thetileapp.com



Giving thanks

Find reasons for appreciation in day-to-day excellence

As the year winds down, this is the season when the pace of everyday life just seems to pick up. Family gatherings, sports, special events, shopping — the list of chores, commitments and celebrations gets long. It's always a whirlwind, and 2021 is no different. While time is at a premium during the holidays, I think it's important to find a few minutes for reflection, to take stock and to give thanks.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

There's plenty to be thankful for. I could list the projects we've accomplished, the services we've provided and all the work we've done this year. I am thankful for all of those, and they're all important parts of keeping our community current and connected. But this year, I'd like to offer thanks for the often unsung day-to-day interactions, people and services at the core of who we are as a company. Because when quality performance is the norm, it's easy to take it for granted.

For example, I'm thankful for our team of customer service representatives, help desk and dispatch groups who's roles are to make your lives and the business you do with us as seamless as possible. They answer questions, solve minor issues and initiate new services — seemingly basic tasks that make a big difference

every day. By being the professionals they are, they make others' lives better.

We have other teams of professionals that you might rarely notice, such as construction, install/repair, engineering and central office. On any given day, there's likely a crew hard at work somewhere near you maintaining the physical infrastructure that allows us to provide the services you rely upon. Often, these crews work in inclement weather and the most trying of conditions. After a storm, they lead the effort to restore service so you can get back to living your life and conducting business as quickly as possible.

At the office, we have others with the financial expertise needed to keep our house in order, and they do the painstaking work needed to make us what we are now. There are also technical experts, back office personnel and so, so many more. Thank you, everyone. You and your efforts are valued and appreciated.

There are also the members of our board of directors, who dedicate their time and expertise to creating the oversight that defines us as part of this community. We do not serve outside investors as do larger regional companies. Our board is the link to you, and board members are charged with ensuring we keep your needs at the forefront.

Now, let me ask you something. The last time you picked up the phone, did you consider all the miles of cable, the sophisticated hardware and human expertise needed to make that call happen? Or, when you connected your computer to the internet, did you think about the complexity of the network needed to link your home to the online world? Most do not, and we wouldn't expect you to.

The services we provide should be out of the way, even invisible. They should just work, and all the people I've described make that possible.

Because everyone at Mountain Telephone performs well, it's easy to take our team's work for granted. Often, it isn't flashy. It's not going to make news. But every day, their work benefits those around them. When you're helping others, can there be a better reason to be thankful?

From everyone at Mountain Telephone, we are thankful for you. Enjoy the holidays. 📺

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



Mountain Telephone

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

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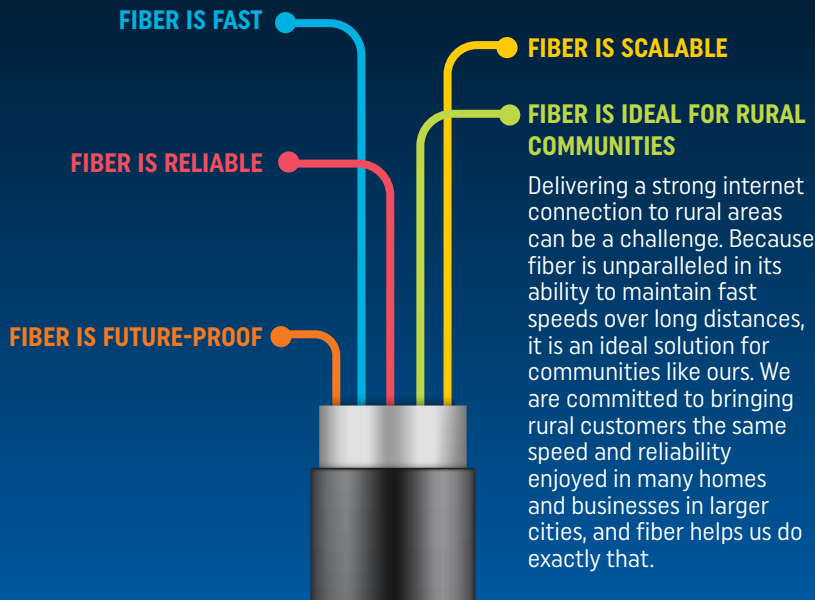


Frenchburg native Victor Carter talks about serving his country in the Vietnam War and staying in touch with old friends.

See story Page 8.

Benefits of fiber

At Mountain Telephone, we've been committed to bringing local businesses and residents the best in communications technologies for decades. Today, we are proud to bring you the best in internet technologies with a fast, reliable, fiber-based network.



With our advanced fiber network, Mountain Telephone is providing fast, reliable internet that enables access to cutting-edge technologies for improved health care, education, agriculture, business and much more.



'Tis the season!

May the melody and spirit of this glorious season fill your homes with love and peace. We wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Mountain Telephone will close on the following days in observance of the upcoming holidays:

Thanksgiving — Closed Thursday, Nov. 25, and Friday, Nov. 26

Christmas — Closed all day Friday, Dec. 24

New Year's Day — Closed Friday, Dec. 31

To: Our customers
From: Mountain Telephone

Shop our holiday specials

Give your budget a break with these amazing holiday specials from us to you!

BROADBAND

One month FREE with all new broadband plans or upgrades. Sign up for VoIP and get a \$5 credit for a year.

MTTV

One month FREE with all new MTTV plans or upgrades. *12-month agreement required on new subscribers.

SECURITY

One month FREE when you sign up for any Mountain Telephone Security plan. Call for a FREE consultation.

BROADBAND ONLY

One month FREE with all new broadband ONLY plans or upgrades. Sign up for VoIP and get a \$5 credit for a year. You'll also get MRTC Total Command FREE for two months.

Starry, starry nights

Story by ANNE BRALY

The evening sky over Clear Creek was speckled with clouds. But as darkness settled across Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau, the clouds parted and the Big Dipper came out, nodding to the moon as its halo crept closer to Orion and his belt.

This scene is played out regularly near Wartburg, Tennessee, at the Obed Wild and Scenic River, a 5,100-acre park with 45 miles of waterways snaking their way through canyons guarding the banks of the Obed River, Clear Creek, Daddy's Creek and Emory River. In 2017, the park was designated as an International Dark Sky Park by the International Dark Sky Association, making it one of only two in Tennessee and one of 69 in the United States.

Getting the designation was a five-year process, says Rick Ryan, an interpretive ranger at the park. "It required a lot of patience and persistence," he says.

The process involved, first and foremost, the obvious — being dark. That may sound simple, but a sky-quality meter was used to determine whether or not the park had too much ambient light from neighboring towns. It didn't. So the park passed that test. "It's not enough to be dark, though," Ryan says. "You have to be committed to preserving the night sky."

That's done through street lighting and lighting paths and parking lots using only dark-sky-friendly lighting fixtures, something that was easy for Obed Wild and Scenic River since there is no outdoor lighting.

A Dark Sky Park must also be committed to providing educational programs to teach visitors about the importance of darkness as a resource for plants and animals like owls and other night hunters.

A good place to stargaze at Obed Wild and Scenic River is the Lilly Bluff Overlook boardwalk found at the end of the Overlook Trail, a well-marked route once you pass through Wartburg. There's plenty of parking, and it's a short walk over to the bluff overlooking the gorge of Clear Creek. There are two boardwalks with platforms where you can set up your chairs and any stargazing equipment you may bring.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Ryan and a team of volunteers held regularly scheduled stargazing opportunities, providing telescopes and everything needed for visitors to see the universe up close and personal — craters on the moon that look as though you can reach out and touch them, rings

of Saturn so vivid you could feel as though you can make the planet spin, the "spot" on Jupiter brilliant with color.

COVID put a stop to that, but not permanently. Ryan says he hopes to get the programs up and running again as soon as possible.

Now, though, the park is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Stargazers can go on their own, bringing binoculars or a telescope and maybe a chair, blanket and some hot chocolate to keep them cozy as they marvel at the night sky.

The sky changes with the seasons, and winter offers a wonderland of stars and constellations, such as Orion the Hunter and Canis Major — the big dog. And Dark Sky Parks are the best places to see them due to their verified lack of ambient light.



In the West, dark skies are easier to find because there are more deserts and less urbanization. “You know, in places like Utah and Nevada,” Ryan says. “But in the Eastern half of the U.S., up and down the East Coast, you can look at a satellite photo and it looks like a big white blob with cities like New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia and D.C. It’s kind of sad, really.

“But when you zoom in a little bit closer, you see there are regional pockets of darkness,” he continues. “It’s important for people in the East to have Dark Sky locations so that those who don’t get to travel out West will have places like this here to experience.” 📱



Rick Ryan is the interpretive ranger at the Obed Wild and Scenic River.

National Park Service

Stargazing Apps

Several good stargazing apps are available to download on your smartphone, as well. With most of these apps, all you have to do is point your phone toward the night sky and the app will demystify what’s in front of you, be it stars, planets, constellations or man-made objects like satellites, including the International Space Station. Many of them can even alert you to upcoming celestial events, so you’ll never miss another meteor shower again.

- ★ **NASA app:** Not only can you get the latest NASA photos, videos and features — and watch NASA events in real-time — you can look back down at the earth from the International Space Station.
- ★ **Star Walk 2:** This app uses your GPS to find the exact position of celestial bodies. Just point your phone at the stars and let it do the work. If you’re stargazing with young children, there’s also Star Walk Kids for iPhones and Android. Star Walk 2 is free for Android users but costs \$3 for iPhone users.
- ★ **SkyView Lite:** Track your favorite constellations as they move across the sky. This is a preferred app (free) for people who only want to see the major stars overhead and not the ones you can’t see.
- ★ **Star Chart:** Like the others, point this free app at the sky to see what’s above you. But then, when you’re done, point it down on the ground to get a view of the sky on the other side of the world. Pretty cool, huh?
- ★ **SkySafari:** SkySafari has all of the tools you expect in a stargazing app — and you can even control them with your voice. Tell it to find Venus and it will. SkySafari is free for Android users and \$3 for those with iPhones.

Reach for the stars

Stargazing programs will be held at Obed Wild and Scenic River as soon as groups are allowed to gather again. For updates on when this will happen, check the park’s Facebook or web page at [facebook.com/ObedNPS](https://www.facebook.com/ObedNPS) or [nps.gov/obed](https://www.nps.gov/obed).

Remembering VIETNAM

Frenchburg man shares his story

Story by JEN CALHOUN | Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

Every year on Nov. 11, Victor Carter starts up his bright red 1978 Mustang and drives about 80 miles from Frenchburg to Frankfort. His destination is the Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a large, granite-filled plaza bearing the names of the 1,106 Kentuckians who lost their lives in the nation's most infamous war.

The trip is a private ritual for Carter, who fought in the war himself. It's how he pays his respects to the ones who didn't make it out of the jungles alive. "I have no idea why I'm here and 58,000 other people are not," says Carter, a Frenchburg native who retired from his Farm Bureau business seven years ago. "I do not have a clue. I ask myself that every day."

But he feels some comfort from the design of the memorial. A giant sundial in

the plaza moves through time, its pointer casting a shadow on each name precisely on the anniversary of their death. Carter appreciates the personal tribute for each life lost. He also appreciates the care — all that math, physics and precision engineering — that went into it.

CARTER'S WAR

Deploying to Vietnam wasn't a choice for Carter. By 1967, he'd already graduated high school in Menifee County and had spent a little time at Morehead State University before dropping out and finding his way to Laguna Beach, California. "My sister was out there teaching, and I wanted to broaden my horizons," he says with a laugh. "I was trying to get into an art school out there, but I got drafted before I could get in."

Victor Carter spent a long, difficult year in the jungles of Vietnam. Today, he keeps in touch with his war buddies online.

After being drafted, Carter worked his way through the ranks with the goal of keeping himself and his men alive.



After about a year of training, Carter was sent to the Tay Ninh province of Vietnam, in the Southeast region of the country near the Cambodia border. He led a sniper team that protected the base at night by going into the jungle and looking for the enemy before fighting them off. "It was a five-man team," he says. "We went out at dusk and came in at daylight."

As a sniper, Carter carried an XM21 rifle and a night scope that gave him the ability to see objects a little over 300 yards away in the dark and the pouring rain. "I could tell whether you were carrying an M16 or an AK-47," he says. "If it was an AK-47, you were the enemy."

The other men on the team were outfitted with different weapons and a radio. They protected him, and he looked out for them, too, he says. "I wasn't really crazy aggressive," Carter says. "I just wanted to do the best I could for myself and them. I wasn't trying to be a hero. I made sergeant, and I had my own squad. I didn't have to trust someone else to keep me alive, so it all worked out pretty good. I never got shot."

LEAVING VIETNAM

By the time Carter finished his tour of duty, he was in charge of three sniper teams. He never lost a man, which is something he's proud and grateful for. He tried hard to be careful and smart. "Eventually, I had enough snipers trained to where we could rotate them," he says. "I also had enough men trained to where we could rotate the backup men. It meant they might not have to go out sometimes for a few days because of how the rotation went."

One of his soldiers would end up naming his son after Carter. "When I asked him why, he said, 'I wouldn't have had him if it wasn't for you.' So, that was kind of cool."

Carter received several medals, including some for acts of valor. But his biggest reward, he says, was getting to leave 48 days early so he could return to school at Morehead State University. "Whatever they had asked me to do, I would've done to get out," he says. "I was not a happy



Carter visits the Vietnam Memorial in Frankfort annually to pay his respects to the soldiers who didn't make it out.

soldier. I wasn't then, and I'm not now."

When he started back at Morehead, he adjusted by burning the candle at both ends. Then he met his wife, Toni, to whom he's been married 48 years. They raised two children, and he grew his father's Farm Bureau business until it was seven times bigger than it was when he started. In the 1980s, he bought his father's farm, where he still lives.

STAYING CLOSE

Carter keeps in touch with a few of his old Army buddies through Facebook groups and chats. His closest friend from those days, a man from Southern California, started out with him in basic training and served with him until the end of the tour. "We talk every week or two now," he says.

But if that year in Vietnam was the

worst year of his life, Carter says the last seven years have been the best. "I get to tool around on the farm, and I get to play with my grandchildren," he says. "I've had a good life. Not everybody did." 🗨️

"I have no idea why I'm here and 58,000 other people are not. I do not have a clue. I ask myself that every day."

— Victor Carter,
Frenchburg native and Vietnam veteran



NaNoWriMo

November challenge helps writers write

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Growing up in rural East Tennessee, Dani Honeycutt dreamed of writing for a living. She devoured books and wrote poetry as a teen. She'd even study the encyclopedia to pack as much knowledge into her brain as she could. Writing was the natural next step. It was a place to put all her thoughts — a place to create.

Then she learned about NaNoWriMo, a nonprofit organization that grew out of an international creative writing event of the same name. Short for National Novel Writing Month, NaNoWriMo gives participants a goal of writing a 50,000-word manuscript during the month of November.

"I liked the challenge," says Honeycutt, who grew up in the small town of Rogersville and now lives in Greeneville, Tennessee. "Even though 50,000 words is more like a novella, I liked the challenge of saying, 'OK, you have 30 days to do this.' I felt like there was an accomplishment there."



Writers gather at a local NaNoWriMo write-in at a Florence, South Carolina, coffee shop.

Dani Honeycutt and Ashley Long

For a few years, she participated in the event but couldn't quite reach the 50,000-word goal. Until she did. So far this year, Honeycutt has published three nonfiction books through Amazon Self-Publishing.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

NaNoWriMo events primarily take place online — especially during

pandemic times — but official subgroups are generally paired off regionally within states in the U.S. Honeycutt volunteers as a municipal liaison for one of NaNoWriMo's East Tennessee groups. In that role, she markets the program regionally, organizes in-person and online events, and generally serves to support other writers in her group.

Ashley Long, another municipal liaison who lives in a small community near Morristown, Tennessee, says she first tried the NaNoWriMo challenge in 2010. “I wasn’t very successful,” she says. “I didn’t go to meet-ups, and I didn’t take advantage of all the resources the nonprofit offered.”

But in 2011, things changed for Long. “I was able to write 50,000 words in 30 days,” she says. “It wasn’t a full novel, but it was a good beginning.”

Since then, Long has written two rough drafts for two different stories, she says. “NaNoWriMo helps with motivation,” she says. “Writing is a very solo thing. But with this, there’s a collective energy when you do a virtual or in-person event.”

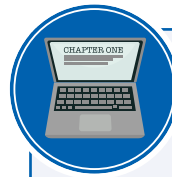
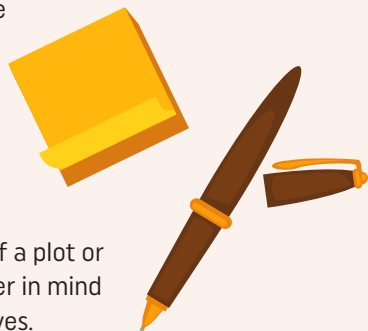
THE BENEFITS OF TRYING

While writing 50,000 words in 30 days sounds like it could be difficult, Long believes the event itself can be freeing for burgeoning writers. “NaNo is about getting the words on the page,” she says. “You write as much as you can in those 30 days. It’s about getting something that’s valuable in front of you that you can actually work with instead of having it run around your brain.”

NaNoWriMo is also a great way to make lasting friendships, Long says. She and Honeycutt became friends after meeting through the organization. “You get to meet like-minded people with the same goals and interests as you,” Long says. “Some of my best friends now are people I’ve met through NaNo over the years.” 🗨️

Writing tips for National Novel Writing Month

- **Just write** — Don’t worry about editing, reading and rereading your words. Just get them down.
- **Don’t listen to THAT voice** — You know the one — that overly critical voice of doubt that tells you nothing’s good enough. While constructive criticism is important, there’s no place for THAT voice.
- **Read** — Reading what other writers write can help you structure and build your own words. It can also free up your imagination and allow you to see how they develop characters and move a plot.
- **Prep** — Whether you’re what NaNoWriMo calls a “plotter” or whether you’re a “pantser” who flies by the seat of their pants, it’s generally best to have a scrap of a plot or even a vague character in mind before November arrives.



Finding the muse

NaNoWriMo and the Great American Novel

Writing is hard. It’s time-consuming and solitary, and it can fill a person with more doubt in their intelligence and abilities than they’ve ever known. But it can also help stretch the limits of the imagination and bring a sense of accomplishment like nothing else.

Chris Baty, the founder of NaNoWriMo, realized this after struggling to write his own book. So, back in 1999, he and a group of friends with similar goals decided to focus on getting words on the page. They gave themselves one month to write a novel. “That was the genesis of the movement,” says Tim Kim, programs director at NaNoWriMo. “Then, word just spread.”

Internet spreads the word

As the internet grew, so did NaNoWriMo. In 2006, the annual writing event also became a nonprofit, Kim says. “We were seeing so much energy behind National Novel Writing Month, and so many people wanted to give back. So, we started thinking about how we could do so much more.”

Now, in addition to National Novel Writing Month for adults, the nonprofit offers a Young Writers Program that serves about 100,000 students and educators across the world in about 2,000 classrooms. In addition, the organization offers Come Write, which helps libraries, bookstores and community centers to double as creative writing centers.

Since its beginning, many books that got their start during National Novel Writing Month have gone on to become bestsellers, including “Water for Elephants” by Sara Gruen, “Fangirl” by Rainbow Rowell and “The Forest of Hands and Teeth” by Greenville, South Carolina, native Carrie Ryan.

One of the things the NaNoWriMo organizers are proudest of is how it’s helped writers from all walks of life to find their voices, Kim says. “In places like New York City or Los Angeles, there are so many resources for people being creative and writing novels,” he says. “But we’ve seen with our programs that writers are coming from all over the U.S. — urban places and rural places, and across the world, as well.”

Getting started

National Novel Writing Month challenges people to write 50,000 words in 30 days. Some finish, some don’t. But everyone involved makes more progress than they may have otherwise. It happens every November and is open to everyone. Find more tools, pep talks, help with structure and a writing community near you at nanowrimo.org.



SECURING A FAMILY TRADITION

Fannin's Vegetable Farm combines heritage with high-tech solutions

Story by JEN CALHOUN | Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

When Sarah Fannin was growing up, she never really planned to be a farmer or sell produce and flowers. But as she got older, she realized her father's dreams of farming had drawn her into an occupation that gave her a sense of place, belonging and service.

Today, Fannin owns and operates Fannin's Vegetable Farm in Index. This is the farm and market her parents, George and Erma Fannin, started in 1995. While the farm is mostly rented out these days and the produce comes from other suppliers in the region, the family still maintains greenhouses to grow about 3,500 mums and other plants.

In addition to overseeing the farm and busy Fannin's Market, Sarah Fannin serves as the Morgan County agent for Kentucky's Cooperative Extension, helping other people in the county find solutions to their agricultural problems.

FINDING THE WAY

Fannin started college with a different career path in mind. In high school, she'd first learned about the significance of her own Appalachian heritage. "I didn't know until I was there what our history really meant and how the history had manifested in my own family story," she says.

She also began to understand the longstanding problems that came out of the history of Appalachia — the economic instability and poverty. But Fannin also knew how resilient and resourceful the Appalachian people were, and she wanted to help. She'd learned that her own grandfather had been blinded when a bag of lime burst while he was on the job at a coal mine. He was later turned out of the coal camp.

At the University of Kentucky, she started out majoring in Appalachian Studies with the goal of working for the Appa-

lachian Regional Commission, an agency made up of the federal government and 13 state governments that works to invest in and strengthen economies in Appalachia. "I thought I'd be writing papers and studies — that kind of thing," she says.



Sarah Fannin, left, and her sister, Robin Fannin, keep up with their mother, Erma, using the Caretaker Sentry pendant that's around her neck. The device from Mountain Telephone allows for two-way communication.



Sarah Fannin's father, George, always wanted to be a farmer. After leaving the coal industry, he started Fannin's Vegetable Market with his wife, Erma, in 1995.

FARM LIFE

Back home, her father had successfully realized a lifelong dream of operating a farm. Earlier in his life, he had given up a scholarship to farm. He eventually lost that farm and had gone to work in the coal mines, but he didn't lose his love of growing vegetables. On his off days, he sold extra produce from home. Eventually, with help from the local extension agency, his little patch and the sales from it blossomed. By the time he and many others were laid off from the mines, his business was fairly thriving. "He was one of the lucky ones," Fannin says.

As her parents' vegetable farm took off, Fannin got more interested in farming practices. She switched to the College of Agriculture but kept a minor in Appalachian Studies.

Then, everything changed. "My dad was getting sick," she says. "I came home for the summer, and I kinda forgot to go back." When her father died in 2001, she continued to help her mother with the farm until finally taking the reins alongside her sister, Robin. "My dad was a great farmer, and he and my mother

worked so hard with that business," she says. "Also, my mother still needed income, so my sister and I committed to keep it going."

The change of plans didn't bother Fannin. "The original founders of the Appalachian Regional Commission said you can make a difference wherever you go, and we need people who care at home," she says. "So, I came back home and helped keep the business going." About four years ago, she also moved in with her mother, who suffers from health problems.

THE BENEFITS OF LOCAL

Today, the Fannin family business continues to change and grow with the times. With the market, her job and the responsibility of caring for her mother, Fannin says she relies on Mountain Telephone's security systems to watch out for things when she and her co-workers can't. "Security cameras are just a wonderful tool for me to be able to make sure everything is OK," she says.

In addition, Fannin and her sister use the Caretaker Sentry pendant they secured through Mountain Telephone to keep in touch with their mother. "We can watch

and even talk to her. She can respond to us, too. It gives her a degree of independence, but the peace of mind it brings to me personally is important."

It's also important that Fannin knows she's in good hands with local people. "Mountain Telephone is just as concerned about my mother and my business as I am," she says. "You can't find that with other companies. You might be able to find similar things elsewhere, but they just don't come with that kind of value and service. You can't put a price on that." 📞

FRESH ALERT!

Fannin's Vegetable Farm sells fresh produce, hanging baskets, flowers, plants and garden transplants. The market, which has been in operation since 1995, is at 2140 U.S. Highway 460 W. in Index, on the outskirts of West Liberty. For the latest updates on flowers and produce, as well as recipes and more, visit the farm's Facebook page.

A tasty tuber

Sweet potatoes offer a holiday treat

Sweet potatoes evoke strong feelings, bringing back tasty memories for some and not-so-good memories for others. It all depends into which camp you happen to fall — pro-marshmallow or anti-marshmallow.

Those white, fluffy confections are the go-to topping for many cooks. But have you tried a savory version? Sweet potatoes aren't necessarily sweet until you begin adding all that sugar and butter to the mix. Instead, consider some recipes that take your holiday sweet potatoes in a different direction.

Try adding cream cheese and chipotle peppers to your sweet potatoes, along with onions and celery. Or jazz them up with garlic, herbs and a sprinkling of parmesan. And don't forget to bake a couple alongside your turkey — mashed and mixed with the turkey drippings, they make an incredible, gluten-free gravy.

No matter the recipe, sweet potatoes are one of nature's superfoods, loaded with an alphabet of vitamins — A, C, B1, B2, B4 and B6 — not to mention fiber, potassium and other minerals important to our diets.

Here are some recipes for putting savory into your sweet potatoes this season. 📖



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

Roasted Parmesan Sweet Potatoes

- 2 1/2 pounds (about 3 medium) sweet potatoes, peeled and diced into 1-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3-4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme leaves
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 1/3 cup finely grated parmesan cheese
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place diced sweet potatoes on a baking sheet. In a small mixing bowl, stir together olive oil, garlic and thyme. Then pour the mixture over the potatoes. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and toss to evenly coat. Spread into an even layer.

Roast in the oven until tender, tossing once halfway through, about 30 minutes total. You may want to broil the potatoes during the last 1-2 minutes for more golden-brown, crispier potatoes. As soon as you remove the potatoes from the oven, drizzle and toss them with the melted butter, sprinkle them with parmesan and parsley, and serve. Makes 4 servings.





SAVORY MASHED SWEET POTATOES

- 1 stick butter
- 2-3 stalks celery, diced
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese
- 1-2 chipotle peppers, chopped, or to taste
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 6-7 sweet potatoes, peeled, cooked and mashed

Melt butter in a skillet and add the celery and onion. Saute until tender. Add cream cheese and stir until melted. Add chipotle peppers a little at a time. You don't want the mixture too spicy. Add salt and pepper to taste, then combine the mixture with the mashed sweet potatoes. Serve warm. Makes 6-8 servings.



TWICE-BAKED GOAT CHEESE & BACON SWEET POTATOES

- 4 large (about 3 pounds) sweet potatoes, scrubbed and halved lengthwise
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 8 ounces bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons evaporated milk or heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon each salt and pepper
- 5 1/2 ounces fresh goat cheese, divided
- 3 tablespoons maple syrup, divided
- 1 tablespoon chopped chives

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Prick the cut side of the potatoes with a fork in a few places. Rub the potatoes all over with oil and put them on a baking sheet, cut side down. Roast the potatoes until they're tender when pierced with a fork, about 45 minutes. Let them cool until you can handle them easily — about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a large frying pan over medium-high heat, stirring often, to very crisp. Drain the bacon on a paper towel, and then roughly chop half of it.

Scoop the sweet potato flesh out of the skins and into a bowl, and reserve the skins. Mash the flesh with a fork until smooth. Add the chopped bacon, milk or cream, salt, pepper, half the goat cheese and 1 tablespoon maple syrup to the mashed potatoes. Stir just until blended. Spoon the mixture into the reserved sweet potato skins, dividing evenly and using all of it. Chill.

When ready to serve, bake the potatoes at 350 F until they are warm in the center, 15 to 20 minutes. Sprinkle the warmed potatoes with the unchopped bacon, crumbles of the remaining goat cheese, drizzles of the remaining maple syrup and the chives. Makes 8 servings.



Sweet potato rolls

- 1 cup mashed sweet potatoes, unseasoned
- 3/4 cup milk, divided
- 2 1/4 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 1/2 teaspoon plus 1/4 cup granulated sugar, divided
- 4 1/4 to 4 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 2 large eggs
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, partly melted
- 2-3 tablespoons melted butter (for brushing)

If using a whole sweet potato: Peel the potato, chop it into 1-inch cubes and put the cubes in a small saucepan with water to cover. Cook over medium-high heat for 20-30 minutes or until fork-tender. Drain. Mash the potatoes with a few tablespoons of milk. Measure out and set aside 1 cup of the mashed sweet potatoes.

Heat the rest of the milk to 115-120 F. Dissolve the yeast and 1/2 teaspoon sugar in the warm milk. Allow to proof for 5 minutes.

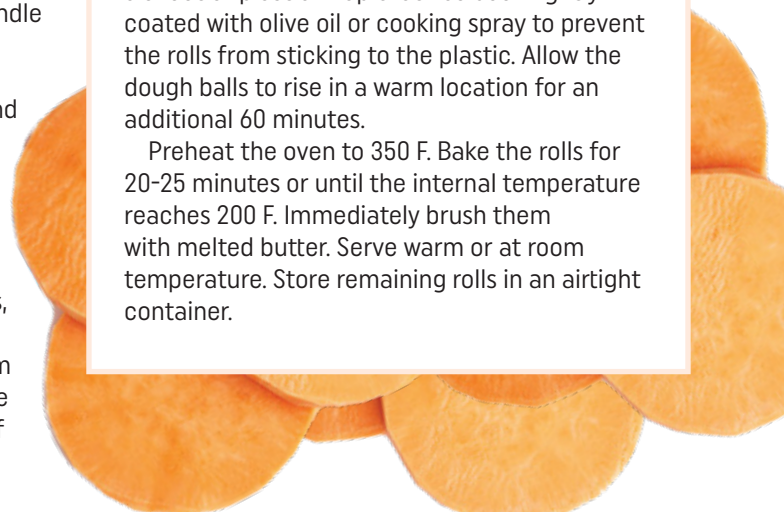
Meanwhile, combine 1/4 cup of sugar, 4 cups of flour and the salt in the bowl of a stand mixer. With the dough hook attachment in place, turn the mixer on low. Add the eggs, one at a time, followed by 6 tablespoons of butter, the mashed sweet potatoes and the yeast mixture. Increase the mixer speed, mixing until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl. If necessary, add up to an extra 1/2 cup of flour.

Transfer the dough to a lightly greased large bowl. Cover, and allow the dough to rise in a warm location until doubled in size, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch pan. Set aside.

Divide the dough into 12 equal portions and shape each portion into a ball, pinching the seams together. Place each ball, seam-side down, into the prepared pan. Cover the rolls with a sheet of plastic wrap that has been lightly coated with olive oil or cooking spray to prevent the rolls from sticking to the plastic. Allow the dough balls to rise in a warm location for an additional 60 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Bake the rolls for 20-25 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 200 F. Immediately brush them with melted butter. Serve warm or at room temperature. Store remaining rolls in an airtight container.





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