



CONNECTION

HELP – THE MOUNTAIN WAY

A new local call center is ready to assist



MODERN JOBS

Work-from-home employees share their stories

LIVE THE LOW-CARB LIFE

Enjoy a delicious way to reduce weight



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Working together for rural broadband


With few exceptions, we can accomplish more by working together than when we stand alone.

People impact others through churches and community organizations. Businesses support one another through chambers of commerce and trade associations. Your telecommunications provider joins forces with other independent and cooperative telcos through NTCA.

These examples show people acting jointly to ultimately improve the quality of life for those around them. Across the U.S. we are seeing this spirit play out in new ways to make real progress on the issue of rural broadband.

We have seen this before. Creating a nationwide electric grid and connected landline telephone network that included rural America was an enormous undertaking. The same was true for our network of highways that connects us from coast to coast and all parts in between. Now, our greatest challenge is connecting all of America — urban and rural — to a reliable broadband network.

NTCA member companies are uniquely positioned to tackle this challenge, and increasingly we are seeing them partner to develop creative solutions. For example, telecommunications providers are developing partnerships with one another to serve new areas and operate more efficiently. We are even seeing electric providers join with telecommunications companies to deliver broadband to unserved rural areas.

These efforts are encouraging, and NTCA is focused on supporting such cooperation among providers. After all, that spirit is the very foundation on which our industry is built. 

Farm bill will impact future of broadband for rural America

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

The legislation known as the “farm bill” making its way through Congress affects far more than farmers. It will also impact access to internet service in rural America for years to come.

The farm bill, which is reauthorized every five years, governs how food is grown in America by legislating farm subsidies, trade, conservation, research and related issues. The Rural Development portion of the bill includes funding and guidelines for the Rural Utilities Service and its Rural Broadband Program.


This program makes funding available to help service providers bring broadband to rural areas.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed its Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 on June 21, with the U.S. Senate passing its version a week later. There are many differences between the two bills on issues such as food stamps, conservation programs and farm subsidy payment limits. These will be addressed as part of the conference committee process.

In speaking with the publication Hoosier Ag Today in July, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said, “The farm bill has always been bipartisan, and it will be so at the end.” He added that lawmakers “don’t want to go back and face midterm elections in November without having a farm bill” in place.

Members of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association were among those testifying before Congress as the bills were debated. Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of the association, says rural telecommunications providers shared the importance of investing for the long term and “looking to providers with a proven track record of success deploying and maintaining services in rural communities.”

Bloomfield says rural broadband providers have deployed robust broadband networks in rural areas through a combination of community commitment, entrepreneurial spirit, private capital, the FCC’s Universal Service Fund and “critical programs like those made available through RUS.”

NTCA members will remain engaged in the process. “We look forward to building upon this early progress, and making the best possible use of the valuable resources through programs such as those contained in the farm bill to advance and sustain rural broadband,” Bloomfield says. 

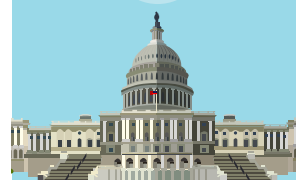
What happens next?

1



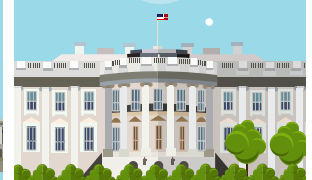
The Senate and House versions go to a conference committee to work out the differences and create one bill.

2



This combined bill goes to the full House and Senate for a vote.

3



The final bill goes to the president for his signature.

Deadline for action: Before the current farm bill expires on Sept. 30

Rural Broadband Matters to America

Internet-based transactions drive half the U.S. economy, and rural residents—who make up almost 20 percent of the population—have the same vital need for internet access as urban dwellers.



Internet Usage

Compared to urban areas, rural residents:



use Wi-Fi in their homes at the same rate



connect the same types of devices to the internet



use the same types of broadband access (although urbanites have greater access to fiber-based service)



use the internet for approximately the same amount of time each day



use smartphones to connect at nearly the same rate

Internet-Driven Commerce

The Numbers

→ **15.5%** ←

Rural America is responsible for 15.5% of all consumer, internet-driven transactions.

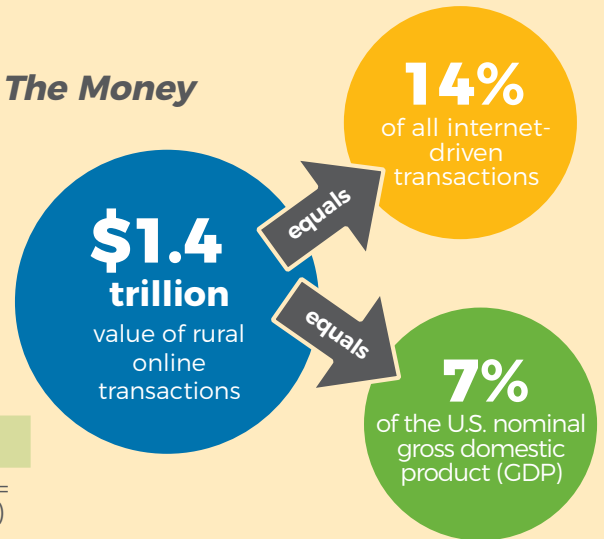
10.8 billion Rural transactions per year

The Future

TODAY **50% GDP**
Internet-driven transactions = 50% of U.S. GDP (\$9.6 trillion)

2022 **65% GDP**
Internet-driven transactions = 65% of U.S. GDP (\$14 trillion)

The Money



Rural Broadband Investment

Rural consumers depend on their broadband connection for online transactions, which drive the U.S. economy. This highlights the value of continued investment in rural broadband for the good of all Americans.



FOUNDATION FOR
RURAL SERVICE

Source: Foundation for Rural Service white paper "A Cyber Economy: The Transactional Value of the Internet in Rural America," by iGR

Cooperatives carry a remarkable legacy

Imagine the headlines if this happened today — a group of rural Kentucky residents raises money to build their own internet network because corporate internet providers determined their area didn't deserve coverage.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

Given how essential internet service has become to modern life and recent media trends of emphasizing grassroots efforts to fill in where investor-controlled corporations fall short, such a story would get coverage from coast to coast and go viral on social media.

But that seemingly sensational situation is how Mountain Telephone got started decades ago with the technology of the day. It's tough to get more grassroots than the story of our founding, and we're proud to have built on that legacy to continue serving you today.

October is National Cooperative Month, supported by the National Cooperative Business Association and recognized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That designation always leads me to reflect on our remarkable story. When this company was founded, the farmers, merchants, teachers, miners and other community members knew this area needed a telephone network capable of keeping up with the rest of the country. For reasons of safety, economic growth and convenience, they wanted phone service, and they took it upon themselves to make it happen. Meanwhile, the big phone companies wouldn't build here because they said it wasn't profitable enough.

Creating a cooperative wasn't easy. Each founding member pledged money up front and then provided continued support in order for the new cooperative to get started. Each individual took a risk — but it was a risk worth taking because they knew they needed a modern communications network.

Today, broadband is the dominant communications need for our area, and Mountain Telephone has evolved to bring that connection to the farmers, merchants and other residents of our community.

Our history and structure as a cooperative business make us different from other companies. Like the more than 40,000 other cooperative businesses in the U.S., we are member-owned. That means the people we serve are more than just customers — they are invested in our company in the same way we are invested in the communities we share. While most other telecom and cable providers exist to enrich their corporate investors or owners, we are fundamentally different. Our purpose is to improve the quality of life in the communities we serve — and to ensure we can do that today and in the future.

We've built our networks in areas so difficult to reach or so sparsely populated that no other provider would think of connecting. We're here because we carry the legacy of our founders and our members. 🗨️

COOPERATIVE FACTS:

- There are 40,000 cooperative businesses with 343 million members in the United States.
- Cooperatives generate \$514 billion in revenue and more than \$25 billion in wages.
- National Cooperative Month has been a nationally recognized celebration since 1964.
- Agricultural cooperatives are the most common type of cooperative in the U.S., but there are also cooperatives specializing in housing, electrical distribution, retail and, of course, telecommunications.

—Source: National Cooperative Business Association

The Mountain Telephone

CONNECTION

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Mountain Telephone

Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc., is a member-owned cooperative dedicated to providing communications technology to the people of Elliott, Menifee, Morgan, Wolfe and a section of Bath counties. The company covers 1,048 square miles and supplies service to nearly 12,000 members.

Send address corrections to:

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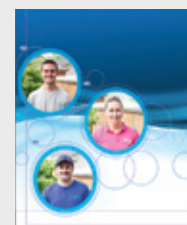
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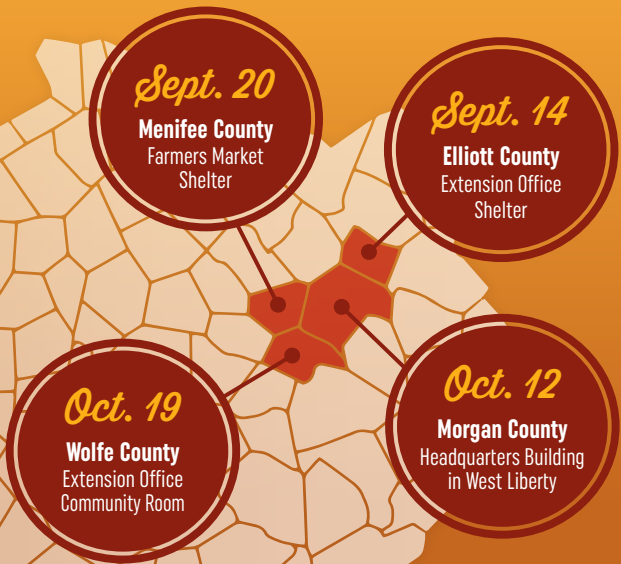


Mountain Telephone's new call center employees have cross-trained in every department to prepare to handle calls. See story Page 12.

We appreciate you!
CUSTOMER

Appreciation DAYS

Mountain Telephone will host Customer Appreciation Days at the following locations in September and October. Come out to your nearest event for food, prizes and lots of great information about what Mountain Telephone is doing to keep you connected! All events will be from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Mountain Telephone

7 Cooperative PRINCIPLES

Mountain Telephone is a cooperative. But what does that mean? There are **SEVEN PRINCIPLES** that make us different from other telecommunications providers.

1 Voluntary and Open Membership

2 Democratic Member Control

3 Members' Economic Participation

4 Autonomy and Independence

5 Education, Training and Information

6 Cooperation Among Cooperatives

7 Concern for Community

October IS NATIONAL COOPERATIVE MONTH

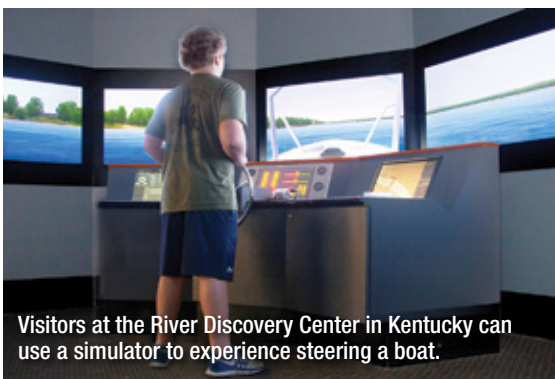
Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum draws visitors to Mount Pleasant, South Carolina.



Take time for Maritime Museums

Photo courtesy of the Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum.

Ahoy, mates! Landlubbers and seafarers alike will enjoy a trip through the South's maritime museums. They're filled with historic tales, ships, waterways to discover and more.



Visitors at the River Discovery Center in Kentucky can use a simulator to experience steering a boat.

Photo courtesy of the River Discovery Center.

Texas Maritime Museum

1202 Navigation Circle, Rockport, Texas

Hurricane Harvey devastated much of the Lone Star State's coastline, including the Texas Maritime Museum. But thanks to the efforts of the museum staff and volunteers, the museum reopened bigger and better than ever in April 2018, less than a year after Harvey. Texas has several museums dedicated to ships and other watercraft from days gone by, but this one is the largest.

There are exhibits focused on exploration of the ocean and waterways, but they are only the beginning. The museum also features information about the settlement of the area and oil and gas exploration in the Gulf of Mexico. And commercial and sports fishing, as well as shipbuilding, all receive attention.

- **Admission:** Adults: \$8. Seniors and active military: \$6. Ages 3-12: \$3. Children under 3: Free.
- **Information:** 361-729-1271 or texasmaritimemuseum.org.
- **Hours:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday.

River Discovery Center

117 South Water St., Paducah, Kentucky

As a new country, America depended on its rivers for transportation, sustenance and communication. Rivers helped build our nation, and you'll learn about the history of America's waterways during a day at the River Discovery Center.

The museum focuses primarily on the Four Rivers Region around Paducah where the Tennessee River meets the Ohio River. It's just upstream from where the Ohio and Mississippi rivers merge, and it's a short distance downstream from where the Cumberland River meets the Ohio River. The area teems with life and history.

The museum houses artifacts and lots of exhibits. One features the workings of a lock and dam, and another lets kids explore the rivers' habitats and delicate ecosystems. Audio stations are located throughout, including one where you'll learn about notable past riverboat captains. Thanks to a live feed from a rooftop camera, the River Spy exhibit lets you see vessels moving past the museum on the river and even what cargo they are transporting.

- **Admission:** Adults: \$8. Seniors: \$7. Children under 12: \$5.
- **Information:** 270-575-9958 or www.riverdiscoverycenter.org.
- **Hours:** 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1-5 p.m. Sundays April through November.

Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum

40 Patriots Point Road

Mount Pleasant, South Carolina

A beacon at the mouth of the Cooper River in Charleston Harbor, the USS Yorktown, a legendary aircraft carrier, stands proudly as the primary exhibit at Patriots Point.

Not to be missed during a tour of the ship is the Engine Room Experience, the latest exhibit to open aboard the Yorktown. The renovated space uses the latest technology to bring the story of the engine room to life, making it easier for guests to understand the duties and



Visitors check out a tugboat model in the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway Exhibit at the Texas Maritime Museum.

Photo courtesy of the Texas Maritime Museum.

purpose of this vitally important room in an aircraft carrier. There are also tours of a submarine that stealthily crept through the oceans during the Cold War, as well as a World War II destroyer and other watercraft that saw action in and on the seas. Be sure to check out the Vietnam Experience while you're there, too.

It's a full day of adventure that, for youth groups of 10 or more, can culminate in a night aboard the USS Yorktown. Overnight visitors sleep where the sailors did and eat in the crew's mess hall. Wear comfortable shoes and get ready for lots of walking.

- **Admission:** Adults: \$22. Seniors and active military: \$17. Children 6 to 11: \$14. Children under 6 and active military in uniform: Free.
- **Information:** 843-884-2727 or www.patriotspoint.org.
- **Hours:** 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily.

Mississippi River Museum

125 North Front St., Memphis, Tennessee

The Mighty Mississippi is a river of lore. Stories have been written about it. Men and women have died paddling its waters. And it marks a divide between the East and West. The Mississippi River Museum will teach you all about it. Located on Mud Island off the Memphis riverbank, the museum is accessible via a sky bridge.

There are 18 galleries with exhibits that tell of the early inhabitants of the Lower

Mississippi River Valley and describe modern-day transportation along the river. There are also two full-size boat replicas to tour.

Pack a picnic and head to the adjacent Mississippi River Greenbelt Park. There are two concession stands open during park hours where you can pick up a drink or snacks.

- **Admission:** Free for general admission and sky bridge access. Museum package includes museum admission, riverwalk access with optional tour and round-trip monorail ride. Adults: \$10. Seniors: \$9. Children 5-11: \$7. Children 4 and under: Free.
- **Information:** 901-576-7241 or www.mudisland.com.
- **Hours:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday.

USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park

2703 Battleship Parkway, Mobile, Alabama

The USS Alabama arrived in Mobile Bay in 1964 and opened for public tours a year later. Now, more than 50 years later, millions have come to visit and pay tribute to a ship that served in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters during World War II. Tour the ship from stem to stern, then visit the USS Drum, a submarine that also saw action in World War II and is the oldest submarine in the nation on display.

Battleship Memorial Park is a voyage through time and will teach children and adults about the maritime happenings during World War II. This is an outdoor "museum" that also includes an extensive aircraft collection, along with tanks and artillery. There's a picnic area as well as a cafe, The Galley, indoors next to the ship's store.

- **Admission:** Adults: \$15. Seniors: \$13. Children 6-11: \$6. Children ages 6-11 of active military: \$5. Active military and Children 5 and under: Free.
- **Information:** 251-433-2703 or www.ussalabama.com.
- **Hours:** 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. April through September and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. October through March. ☏

WORK-FROM-HOME
OPPORTUNITIES ARE

GROWING

Mountain Telephone's
high-speed internet
helps bring jobs

BY JEN CALHOUN

When Amanda Blanton first saw a Facebook ad about working from home, she raised her eyebrows.

"I was skeptical," says Blanton, who lives 25 minutes from West Liberty. "I thought they'd ask me to pay something upfront. But I thought, 'Well, what's it going to hurt to try?'"

That thought changed Blanton's life for the better. She now works for KellyConnect, a virtual call center whose employees provide technical support for computers, smartphones and other devices.

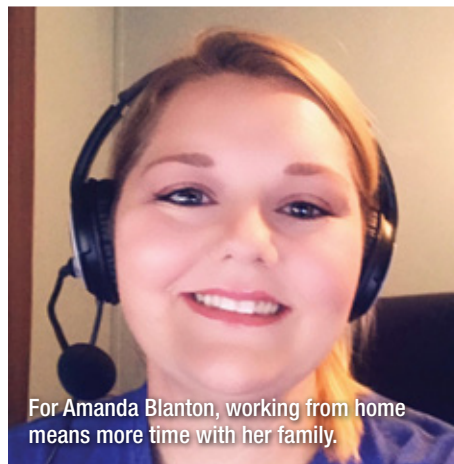
KellyConnect is just one of the companies that offers work-from-home opportunities with national employers through Teleworks USA, a program that provides a variety of telecommuting jobs to workers in rural areas and small towns.

Teleworks started in 2011 through the Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program. It works with local governments, regional and federal agencies, and local utility and internet service providers, such as Mountain Telephone.

The jobs generally start at \$9-\$12 an hour or more, and some offer benefits, says



Tracie Spencer, Teleworks hub manager, helps Adam Cantrell apply for the program.



For Amanda Blanton, working from home means more time with her family.

Wendy Crain-Lawson, workforce services director for Gateway Community Action Services. The agency provides training and help to job seekers.

YES, IT'S FOR REAL

But getting the word out about the program can be difficult, especially with job seekers thinking it's too good to be true, Crain-Lawson says. "Basically, a lot of people look at this and wonder if it's legit," she says. "It is. You're working for companies like U-Haul or TurboTax. Job seekers don't see those names, so they can be skeptical. But you're working for a company just like you would if you clocked in."

Not everyone is right for a telecommuting job, however, Crain-Lawson says. The ideal candidate should have some customer service skills, good typing skills, computer aptitude, a reliable and fast internet connection and no small children at home during working hours.

But for Blanton, who once had to commute an hour and 15 minutes, the KellyConnect position works. As a help desk

employee, she uses on-line chat to help customers fix phones and other devices. Her salary starts at \$12.25 an hour. The company also granted her requested shifts and days off, sent her a new computer and headset, and paid for several weeks of online training. "It saves a lot of money for my family," she says. "I don't worry about the gas, the wear and tear on my car or day-care costs."

Blanton, a longtime Mountain Telephone customer, was told that her internet speed was a good fit for the job because of Mountain Telephone's fast fiber network. In fact, the broadband network has proven vital in bringing telecommuting jobs to the region, Crain-Lawson says. Without the cooperative's forward-thinking actions to create the network, the community would have fewer economic development prospects.

Lisa Fannin, director of marketing and public relations for Mountain Telephone, says it's all part of what the cooperative does. In the future, we want to offer discounted rates for 2-3 months on internet service to trainees who have landed jobs through the Teleworks program.

"We know we're a vital piece to the puzzle of these telecommuting jobs," Fannin says. "We understand the need for jobs in this area. Not only do we want to provide our customers with an optimum broadband experience, but we also want to give them a little boost to get on their feet. We really want our customers to succeed." 🗨️

ESL TEACHER USES MOUNTAIN BROADBAND TO WORK FROM HOME

BY JEN CALHOUN

Marcy Mitchell uses her Mountain broadband connection to teach English to children halfway around the world.



Marcy Mitchell likes to say she lives in the boonies — a rural area in Menifee County smack dab in the middle of the Daniel Boone National Forest.

But thanks to Mountain Telephone's high-speed fiber network and reliable connection, Mitchell, an English As a Second Language teacher, communicates with students on the other side of the world. "I always feel confident at 5:45 a.m. logging in to my classes that there will be no technical difficulties," Mitchell says. "I am never disappointed, nor are my students."

GROWING NUMBERS

Mitchell is one of a growing number of Americans working from home in at least some capacity. According to a Gallup survey released in early 2017, more than 43 percent of employed Americans say they spent at least some time working remotely. The number represented a 4 percentage point increase since 2012.

The 2017 State of Telecommuting in the U.S. Employee Workforce report shows

even more evidence that working from home is a growing option for many Americans. The study also found telecommuters earned about \$4,000 more than nontelecommuters. They also saved money on gas, public transportation, meals and clothing.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR HER AND HER STUDENTS

It makes Mitchell's life easier, too.

Through the China-based company, Landi English, Mitchell has been teaching English to students ages 3 to 14 since 2016. The job has proved rewarding and fits well into her schedule.

"My workday is through by 11 a.m., and I have the rest of the day to spend with my children."

But she couldn't do it without fast, reliable internet. "I truly do thank Mountain Telephone for enabling me to do this," she says. ☎

GET CONNECTED

To find out more about work-from-home opportunities, go to teleworksusa.com, or contact the Gateway Community Action Agency's Morgan County center at 606-743-3133. You can also find out more at gatewaycaa.org.

PAMPERED

THE BEST DOGGONE ONLINE SERVICES THAT WON'T BREAK THE BANK

BY PATRICK SMITH

From top-shelf food to all-organic goodies and toys galore, we love to spoil our pets. But if you're tired of outdated playthings and boring treats, look into an online subscription for your most cherished friends. Toys and treats help pets focus and develop to improve their mental and physical well-being.

And while online subscription boxes for dogs and cats are the most common, don't fret if you have another type of pet. The internet has thought of everything. Search online and you'll find boxes for horses (SaddleBox), fish (My Aquarium Box), birds (ParrotBox) and more.

More than anything else, online shopping means one thing: convenience.

That's what's great about rural living powered by high-speed internet. You have the benefits of rural, hometown life with the convenience of staying connected. Internet-based subscriptions can bring deliveries of the products you need most.

In the July/August issue, we featured several food subscription services — look back if you missed it. If you're curious about other online subscriptions out there, don't wait on us. Check them out for yourself. Everything from shaving products to jewelry and coffee to mystery boxes is shipping out daily. In the next issue, we'll feature a few popular online fashion subscriptions.



BARKBOX BARKBOX.COM

Put the pep back in Fido's step with BarkBox. It's a fun, dog-themed delivery service with unique toys, treats and more for your four-legged friend. Choose a theme for your box, like New York City. This one comes complete with a miniature fire hydrant and "I Love NY" T-shirt. A Chewrassic Bark box comes with dinosaur-inspired treats and a lava-spewing chew toy.



PUPBOX PUPBOX.COM

Not much is cuter than a young pup learning to navigate life. And with all the work we put into helping our kids succeed, why not help our puppies thrive? Based on your dog's age, PupBox has training guidelines to help them navigate puppyhood with a nonstop wagging tail. PupBox brings training tips, treats, toys, chews and more to your mailbox each month.

BULLYMAKE BULLYMAKE.COM

Is that old toy rope past its prime? Bullymake to the rescue! Billed as the box that's designed for "power chewers," Bullymake gives you durable toys and healthy treats to keep your dog entertained for hours and hours. They also specialize in goods specifically tailored to your dog's weight and allergies.



KITNIPBOX KITNIPBOX.COM

Don't turn your frisky kitty into a grumpy cat. KitNipBox keeps your cat entertained with several quality toys and all-natural treats in each box. It'll leave your friend purring for more. Best of all, KitNipBox helps support several animal welfare organizations with your purchase.

What's getting in the way of your

Wi-Fi SIGNAL?

Wi-Fi makes internet service available to a wide range of devices without physically connecting them to your router. However, it's important to remember that the strength and quality of your signal can be influenced by several factors:



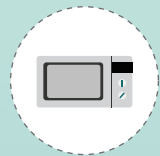
The distance between the router and your device

A computer in a second-floor bedroom, for example, may have a weaker connection than a computer on the first floor where the router is located.



The age of your device and its capabilities

Some computers and gaming consoles may use older technology that can't take advantage of today's higher speeds.



Other electronics in your home

Common, non-connected electronic items can sometimes interfere with your Wi-Fi strength. These include microwave ovens (the major offender), cordless phones, Bluetooth devices and even fluorescent lights.



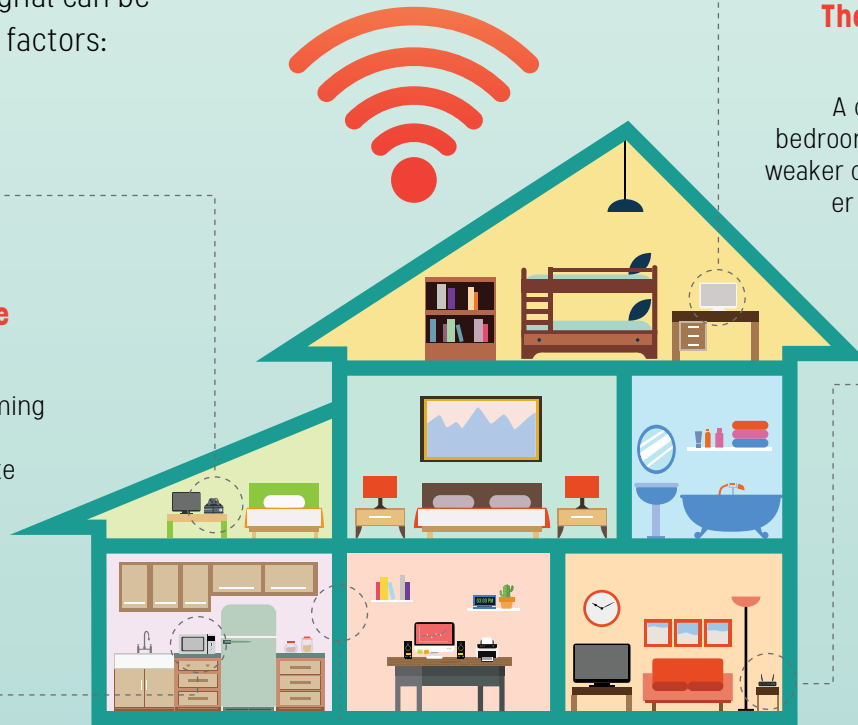
Home construction materials between the router and your device

Some materials used in home construction can weaken your Wi-Fi signal strength. Metal in particular can cause interference because it can reflect and scatter Wi-Fi signals. Culprits include metal framing, ductwork, electrical panels and metal roofs.



The number of devices sharing your Wi-Fi connection

Every device connected to your Wi-Fi is sharing the total bandwidth of your home's internet connection. If people in your home are streaming a movie on a tablet, playing a gaming console, watching a smart TV, sharing photos online and searching the internet all at the same time, some users could notice slower performance compared to times when fewer devices are used.



Not Enough Speed?

If you have a number of devices fighting over your Wi-Fi signal, you may want to consider increasing your internet speed. Give us a call. We'll walk through how you use your broadband internet connection and talk about the right package to meet your needs.

Too Far Away?

If you use Wi-Fi enabled devices in rooms far away from your router, you may want to consider adding one or more network extenders to your home. Give us a call and we can discuss ways to boost your Wi-Fi signal strength to extend better connection speeds to more rooms — or even to a patio or deck.

GOING LOCAL

Mountain Telephone's new help desk offers better, faster service



JESSE CLINGER



ALICIA WALTER



GENE CORNETT

BY JEN CALHOUN

As a 28-year employee of Mountain Telephone, Maintenance Supervisor Reggie Easterling has seen it all.

He was just 20 years old when he started on the cooperative's construction crew in the late '80s. From there, he witnessed the rise of the internet, the fall of dial-up and the push for DSL. As part of a maintenance crew, he helped install, maintain and troubleshoot technical problems for customers. Most recently, he helped as the cooperative took on the massive effort of bringing a fiber-based internet network to the region.

Easterling says that on Oct. 1, he'll get to be part of one of Mountain Telephone's biggest and best changes — the rollout of the cooperative's first-ever, all-local help desk.

FASTER, BETTER SERVICE

The whole point of the new help desk is to provide customers with faster, better service when they have a problem, says Easterling, who oversees the department.

The cooperative hopes to reduce hold times to nearly zero while making sure every problem call is handled quickly and professionally.

"In this day and age of being bounced all over the country for help with anything, we wanted to be able to bring the work home," Easterling says. "We wanted to give our customers the best possible support they can have. That's what we're here to do."

The help desk now fields more than 600 calls per week from its 9,350 broadband customers and 3,005 TV customers.

LISTENING TO YOU

The idea for the new internal help desk came about a little over a year ago as a way to reduce the wait time for customers seeking technical support. For years, Mountain contracted with an outside company to



Mountain Telephone's new help desk is made up of local employees, trained to take your problem calls. Pictured, from left, are Jesse Clinger, Alicia Walter and Gene Cornett.



Photo courtesy of William LeMaster

“We believe that when our customers get off the phone with us, their issue will be taken care of.”

—Reggie Easterling, maintenance supervisor at Mountain Telephone, on the new internal help desk he oversees

Here to help!

provide customer service support. But the cooperative knew there was room to improve, Easterling says.

“It’s always been that if you call us, we’re there,” he says. “That’s what we’ve always been, and that’s what we’re here to do. And most of the time, we’re there today, not in a week.”

In doing research for the new help desk, cooperative leaders found they could not only improve customer service by bringing it in-house, but they could also save money for cooperative members. “We ran the numbers, and we did four weeks of testing,” Easterling says.

HIGHLY TRAINED HELPERS

As Mountain prepared to open the center, three employees took a 17-week training session that included cross-training with every department in the cooperative.

“They’ve worked with customer service, dispatch, repair technicians and the central office,” Easterling says. “They have had more training than anybody I’ve ever seen. They’re working with everybody in the company, and they’ll actually go through dispatch and the central office twice.”

But it will all be worth it.

“We believe that when our customers get off the phone with us, their issue will be taken care of,” he says. ☎

Mountain Telephone’s new help desk offers a faster, better way to assist customers. Just call **606-743-1100** between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Saturdays. The in-house help desk representatives will be ready to lend a helping hand with just about any technical problem.

When should I call?

- If you use a Mountain Telephone router, the help desk can help you with login, IP address, username and password issues and many other problems or changes.
- Gigacenter customers can get help with connecting devices and anything else.
- TV customers can get help on problems with cable boxes, remote controls and many other issues.
- All customers can call for general trouble calls and maintenance requests.

GO LOW

A low-carbohydrate diet can improve overall health

Jon Rector has always been a big guy. Now 48 years old, he can't remember a time when he didn't buy his clothes in the husky department at his local department store. As a preteen and teenager, he was teased about his size, too. "I had a good disposition, though," he says. "I played it off."



Jon Rector's low-carb diet is helping to improve his overall health.

But when he tipped the scales at 300 pounds, shortly before he married his wife, Donna, he knew he needed to make a change. He dropped 80 pounds in three short months.

But, he says, "married life happens." And it didn't take long for those pounds to return to his 6-foot-4-inch frame. Rector is a big man and carries his weight well. He never had medical issues. Physically, he was fine through his 20s, 30s and most of his 40s. But chasing his young grandson was hard on him. "I wanted to be around for him," Rector says. "I knew I had to do something."

Two years ago, he went to his doctor, and tests came back confirming that his A1C count, a test used to diagnose diabetes, was 6.4. Diabetes is indicated when results are 6.5 or higher. "That was when I got more serious about my weight," he says.

Rector lost about 30 pounds and lowered his A1C some by reducing calories. But after a few months, he went back to his old habits. His nemeses? Sweet tea, ice cream, candy — all sorts of sugary treats. Before he knew it, he put on all the weight he had lost, plus more.

Rector is executive director of Union Gospel Mission, an organization that offers a residential program in Chattanooga to homeless men with life-controlling issues. He does not get much exercise.

In December 2017, he

weighed 470 pounds, and his A1C was at 6.8. That was his wake-up call. "My doctor wanted to put me on medication, but I hate meds," Rector says. "So I told the doctor 'no.' I wanted to lose weight on my own."

His doctor was skeptical, but Rector gave it a try. He'd lost weight before, so he figured he could do it again, and he did.

"It was nothing for me to be eating 6,000 to 8,000 calories a day," he says. "I'm a stress eater, and my go-to places were Taco Bell and McDonald's. We like Mexican food, too. And the waiter at the restaurant we used to go to knew me, and he would automatically bring me a sweet tea in the largest beer mug they had."

Rector knew he was in for a lifestyle change, and he chose to focus on low-carb eating. It's an approach he can live with. He thanks registered dietitian Danielle Townsend, with Primary Healthcare Centers in Chattanooga, for her guidance.

"Low-carb diets can be a sensible way to lose weight," Townsend says. "They have been shown to benefit those with cardiovascular disease and diabetes and also to help diminish food cravings. I think people opt for the low-carb diet because it allows them to lose weight faster, and that is an important motivating factor for them."

Rector lost 30 pounds in his first two months following a low-carb lifestyle and is now

down about 50 pounds since December.

Most people, Townsend says, have difficulty eliminating or reducing items such as pizza, biscuits, hamburger buns, rice, pasta and potatoes. The diet puts emphasis on whole, unprocessed foods, such as vegetables, eggs and lean meats.

Donna Rector, Jon's wife, has had to change her lifestyle, too. No longer does she prepare pasta and rice dishes. "I cook a lot of turkey now," she says.

Rector doesn't miss all the high-carbohydrate foods too much. He's always liked vegetables. "It's the way our grandparents used to eat," he says. "I really like this kind of food. The hard part, for me, is not the pasta and rice. It's the sweets. But the bottom line is that what you take in, you have to take off."

That motto, along with his grandson, keeps Rector going. "I want to take him hiking, take him camping," he says. "A year ago, I couldn't have done that. Now that I've lost some weight, I think I might be able to. In another year, I know I'll be able to. It's just like the same thing I teach the guys at the mission. It's all about making the right decisions."



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



Low-carb recipes

BREAKFAST SCRAMBLE

- 1/2 pound ground turkey
- 1/2 pound ground pork sausage
- 1 zucchini (large dice)
- 1 yellow squash (large dice)
- 1 medium onion (chopped)
- 1 bell pepper (large dice)
- 6 eggs
- 1/4 cup of cheese (your choice)

In a skillet, brown the turkey and pork, add vegetables and cook about 5-7 minutes. Scramble in eggs and cook completely. Add cheese to top and serve warm.



TURKEY SLOPPY JOES

- 1 pound ground turkey
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 medium bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon Frank's Red Hot Sauce
- 3 cups crushed tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon honey

Salt and pepper, to taste
Low-carb buns

Brown turkey in skillet. Remove from skillet and add onions, bell peppers and garlic, sauteing until soft. Return meat to skillet and add tomato paste, mustard, hot sauce, tomatoes and honey. Taste and season with salt and pepper if needed. Simmer mixture till warmed through and thickened slightly. Spoon onto low-carb buns.

LOW-CARB VEGETABLE BEEF SOUP

- 1/2 teaspoon olive oil
- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 1/2 large onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 (15-ounce) can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 3 (15-ounce) cans beef or vegetable broth
- 6 ounces fresh green beans, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1/4 head cabbage, chopped
- 4 ounces fresh mushrooms, chopped
- 1/2 medium zucchini, peeled and roughly diced
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and pepper, to taste

In a medium to large pot, heat olive oil; brown ground beef, onion and garlic. Add remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil; simmer, cover and cook on low for 15-30 minutes. Discard bay leaf before serving.



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