



Mountain Telephone

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023

CONNECTION



Bravo!

Local actor finds
the limelight

FALL
FESTIVALS

LIGHTS, CAMERA,
ACTION!



RURAL CONNECTIONS

By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A front row seat to history

I recently spent the morning at the White House celebrating the historic announcement of \$42.5 billion allocated to all the states and territories in our union to help bridge the digital divide as part of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program, also known as BEAD.

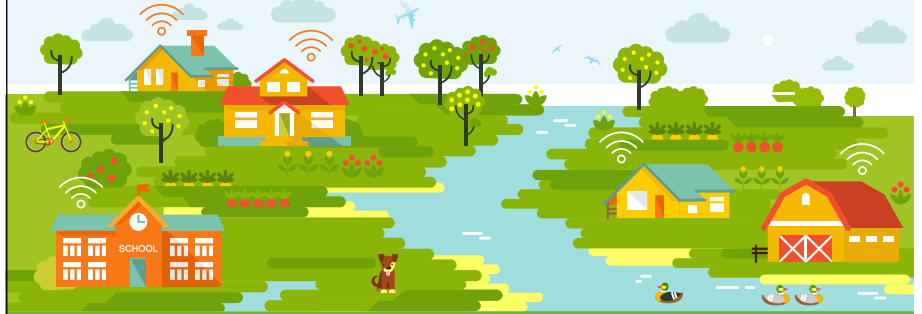
The buzz in the security line was electric as folks lined up early to compare notes on why we are all passionate about broadband deployment, and I enjoyed sharing the activities of community-based broadband providers. I found myself beaming when a few people specifically referenced the fiber networks deployed by NTCA member companies. I love that the hard work of these companies and co-ops like yours is finally getting the credit that is due.

Mitch Landrieu, head of infrastructure initiatives for President Joe Biden, kicked us off and turned the podium to Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, who is leading BEAD and has genuinely put her passion behind her work. President Biden then took the podium and got right into sharing how much this historic investment in broadband means for our country. I was delighted to hear all the administration's folks share a mindset on the importance of reliable, comparable and affordable broadband and even how fiber is really the technology of choice for this historic investment.

As Secretary Raimondo noted, it really was a "happy broadband day." And, with the support of your community-based provider, we are sure to have many more delightful broadband days in the future. 📶

Why is broadband vital?

It strengthens rural America



Life is often lived online, including working, socializing, learning, relaxing and more. Without fast internet access, however, these day-to-day essentials grind to a halt. But for rural communities, the stakes are even higher.

While it's something we might take for granted — at least for those of us who have access to broadband — the power of fast internet to profoundly improve quality of life remains striking.



-1-

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES:

High-speed internet helps rural businesses expand their reach through e-commerce — possibly even connecting globally.



-2-

REMOTE WORK:

Rural workers can tap into a pool of work-from-home jobs, allowing residents to avoid commutes or the possibility of relocating for work.



-3-

HEALTH CARE:

Telemedicine and access to medical resources — such as time-sensitive treatments like stroke care — are critical.



-4-

EDUCATION:

Rural schools, colleges and students can tap vast resources, including virtual classrooms and distance learning programs.



-5-

AGRICULTURE:

Online resources allow farmers in rural areas to optimize crop management, monitor livestock, access weather information and more.

That's just the beginning. New opportunities will continue to appear, and rural internet providers will make the connections to bring those services to you.



©matortin/Adobe Stock

Stream it to win it

DON'T MISS A GAME THIS SEASON

Fall is prime time for sports fans. There's both college and NFL football. The baseball regular season wraps up, followed by the playoffs and World Series. The first NBA games tip off, too. And with such a rich stew of possibilities, the buffet of options for viewing sports is tastier than ever.

Once, a sports fan might be limited to viewing the feats of only regional teams, and the selection of those games was limited to the lineup a TV network offered. Now, however, sports fans can choose streaming services that best suit their interests and budgets. Pricing can change at any time, though, so verify the cost when you're ready to make a game-time decision.

SOME POTENTIAL WINNERS

▶ **NFL Game Pass:** For pro football fans, NFL Game Pass is a game-changer. This streaming service provides access to live out-of-market games. It's hard to beat if you're a fan who wants to keep up with a favorite team whose games typically aren't

broadcast in your TV market. NFL Game Pass also offers on-demand replays, condensed games and access to an extensive archive of previous seasons. While Game Pass is just one possibility for streaming NFL games, it's a good one.

- ▶ **NBA League Pass:** Do you love professional basketball? Thanks to NBA League Pass, there's a premium service perfect for anyone hooked on the NBA. There's coverage of live games and the opportunity to watch past games on demand. There's plenty of analysis, features, interviews and more. And it also works great on most devices.
- ▶ **Paramount+, Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV:** These services aren't known primarily as platforms that feature sports. Instead, they established footholds by offering deep libraries of new TV shows and movies, as well as catalogs of longtime favorites. But if you're already subscribing to stream from one of these services, or other

similar ones, take a closer look. You might be surprised by the sports available on a subscription you already have.

- ▶ **YouTube TV:** If you want an experience that's close to traditional TV — all the big networks and smaller ones, too — check out YouTube TV. ABC, CBS, NBC, ESPN and more are all available, and they're streaming in real time. You see the games as they're happening. You can even record events so you can watch them later.
- ▶ **ESPN+:** Are you a fan of sports other than the big leagues? ESPN+ takes a deep dive into soccer, tennis and more. There's coverage of everything from Ultimate Fighting Championship bouts to U.S. Open tennis. Smaller college conferences, such as the Ivy League and Conference USA, are showcased, with baseball, softball, hockey, wrestling and more. There's even access to a library of content from the ESPN documentary series "30 for 30." [📺](#)

Co-op strong

Together we lift up our community

Our world changes quickly when it comes to technology and how we interact with one another. But ever since we built the first telephone lines, we've been devoted to providing the services you need to stay engaged, connected and secure. At times, it can prove challenging to bring cutting-edge technologies to a rural community like ours, but with your support we're succeeding.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

Also, Mountain Telephone is not alone, and neither are you. We're proud to be part of a nationwide co-op family, a supportive group of like-minded companies committed to uplifting areas in rural America that for-profit companies have often ignored.

While larger cities are catching up, Mountain Telephone has been a leader in the industry with a fiber network since 2014. Every day, we work to bridge the digital divide by bringing you resources like internet service at speeds that often beat those found in metropolitan areas. And we do it affordably and reliably.

Each October, during National Cooperative Month, the co-op world honors these efforts that show how neighbors helping neighbors can benefit everyone. You see, as a member of the cooperative, you are very much a part of MRTC.

In the cooperative model, unlike with most for-profit corporations, our primary focus is on the needs of our members. Everyone at MRTC lives nearby, so we understand not only the successes our area achieves, but also the challenges we face.

Just like other companies that are part of the co-op community, we hold fast to a set of shared principles, promoting fairness, democracy and community development. Cooperative Month gives us a chance to amplify our voices and raise awareness about these efforts.

After all, we have seen firsthand the profound difference fast internet and other services can make. They opened the doors to economic development, more educational resources and a greater diversity of health care services thanks to telemedicine.

None of this, however, is possible without you. Our strength lies in your active participation and engagement with MRTC. The needs of our members are crucial in shaping the direction of this cooperative.

Cooperative Month is significant for us, allowing time to reflect on where we've been and where we're going. It's an opportunity to celebrate our achievements, to raise awareness about the power of the cooperative world and to thank you for your help. Together, we'll continue to make our community the best it can possibly be. 🗨️

The Mountain Telephone Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, © 2023. 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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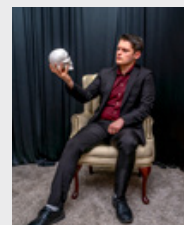
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On the Cover:



Aidan Morgan strikes a pose before leaving for an acting conservatorship in New York.
See story Page 12.

Photo by William LeMaster





MRTC's Customer Appreciation Days are back

And we have so much to celebrate!

MRTC is excited to announce the return of our Customer Appreciation Days in September and October. We'll be setting up shop in the following locations on these days:

- » **Sept. 15** — Wolfe County Extension Office, 20 Washington St., Campton
- » **Sept. 27** — Elliott County Extension Office, 3155 Highway 7, Sandy Hook
- » **Oct. 13** — Mountain Telephone Headquarters Building, 425 Main Street, West Liberty
- » **Oct. 20** — Clark Energy Community Room, 28 Bible Camp Lane, Frenchburg

Notice to MRTC customers about battery backups

The fiber telephone service in your home requires commercial power to operate. Therefore, at no additional cost to you, an eight-hour battery backup power supply was installed with your service to allow for emergency operation during power outages. This means that emergency phone service is expected to function for at least eight hours in an extended power outage.

The ability of the battery to power your phone service can be affected by many factors, including the age of your battery, improper home wire grounding, unprotected power surges, manufacturer defect, improper storage conditions or failure to keep the power pack plugged in.

Our batteries do not power self-owned phone handsets that require separate power. You must have a phone capable of being plugged into a Mountain Telephone jack to use the backup battery.

If a longer backup battery operation is desired, we now have 24-hour battery packs available for an additional fee. Should longer operation be required, we suggest you look for commercially available backup power options, such as a generator, from vendors like UPS, etc. For additional information, please call us at 606-743-3121.



MRTC wishes you a relaxing and safe Labor Day weekend. In honor of the holiday — and in recognition of our own employees — our offices will be closed **Monday, Sept. 4.**



ON LOCATION

Movie productions seek rural Southern settings

Story by ANNE BRALY

Lights, camera, action! Those words, once heard primarily in Hollywood studios, now echo through wooded forests and city streets across the South. And for many, a visit to places they've seen on the silver screen adds some excitement to a vacation.

"Film has always been such a powerful medium, and I think people enjoy being a part of something that meant so much to them," says Dan Rogers, senior project manager for the South Carolina Film Commission.

It's widely known that the Atlanta area is a hot spot for zombies in "The Walking Dead" and the unusual happenings in "Stranger Things." Nashville's been given the nod by directors, too, with films including "The Green Mile," with Tom Hanks, and "Coal Miner's Daughter," starring Sissy Spacek as Loretta Lynn, filming in Music City.

Small towns, too, have seen their share of screen time. Black Mountain and Cedar Mountain, both in western North Carolina, were locations for several scenes in "The Hunger Games." Berry College in Rome, Georgia, was transformed into Carmichael Plantation in scenes from "Sweet Home Alabama." Also, Tidalholm Mansion along the Beaufort River in Beaufort, South Carolina, set the stage for both "The Big Chill" and "The Great Santini."

So, what is it about the South that has turned it into the new Hollywood? Kyle Bucher, production manager for virtual productions at 3rd Realm Creations in Mobile, Alabama, says it all goes back to what helps make the region famous — Southern hospitality.

"It goes a long way," he says. "The local hospitality of people and their willingness to try and help is ideal. Also, the local creativity among artists and the community is a stark comparison from Los Angeles and other filming areas."

ALABAMA

Lower Alabama has seen a lot of interest come its way since "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" was released in 1977. You can still see where the main character, Roy Neary, lived in Mobile, 613 Carlisle Drive, along with the home of character Jillian Guiler at 22250 Alabama Highway 181, in Fairhope.

More movie sites in Alabama include Waverly Lake, where a scene in "Norma Rae" was filmed, and Eufaula, where the historic streets were the backdrop for "Sweet Home Alabama." Huntsville's Space and Rocket Center has also been a location in several movies, including "Space Camp" and "Space Warriors." Most recently, West Mobile's Honduran Kitchen, off Snow Road, was used to shoot Robert de Niro's new comedy "About My Father," released Memorial Day weekend.



Blacksher Hall, a grand mansion in Mobile, was used in filming "USS Indianapolis: Men of Courage."

Photo courtesy of Kyle Bucher



KENTUCKY

The diverse topography in the Bluegrass State makes it ideal territory for scouts looking to film movies, says Tim Bates, manager of the Kentucky Film Office.

“Some might think that a destination is particularly beautiful, or maybe they really enjoyed a film so much that they want to experience more of it,” he says. “It’s a rather easy connection between filmmaking and tourism.”

Some of the movies filmed in Kentucky and sites that you can visit include, Pompilio’s Italian Restaurant in Newport, featured in 1988’s “Rain Man” with Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise. Or, visit Fort Knox to see where “Stripes,” starring Bill Murray and John Candy, was filmed. The Pioneer Playhouse in Danville was the backdrop for the film “Raintree County” with Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift. Also, Keeneland in Lexington is always a fun place to visit for tours, a chance to see the horses and, while you’re there, see where much of “Seabiscuit” was filmed.



Danville’s Pioneer Playhouse remains a popular place and is the setting for the Elizabeth Taylor film “Raintree County.”

Photo courtesy of Kentucky Tourism



Photo courtesy of New Line Productions

Walk in the steps of Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams along King Street in Charleston as they filmed “The Notebook.”



SOUTH CAROLINA

“Outer Banks” a hit show on Netflix, has brought many people to the area. As a result, “they’ve discovered the beauty of our Lowcountry,” Dan says.

Some of the best areas to visit locations from “Outer Banks” are along Shem Creek in Mount Pleasant. Also, visit the Gaillard Center in Charleston, aka the UNC Chapel Hill Law Library. If you’re in the Charleston area and want to find out more, visit charlestoncvb.com.

Other South Carolina movie sets include Four Square Gospel Church — actually, Stoney Creek Independent Presbyterian Chapel in McPhersonville — where Forrest Gump went to pray for shrimp, and Lucy Point Creek between Coosaw and Lady’s Island, where most of the water scenes were shot. Movie fans can find more places at southcarolinalowcountry.com.



TENNESSEE

The flatlands and mountains of Tennessee have been the backdrop for many movies, and here are some sites that you can visit and relive the magic of the big screen.

Visit Charleston, Cleveland and the Hiwassee River to see where “Wild River,” the first major motion picture filmed entirely in Tennessee, was made. Tour the town of Charleston with a local researcher, and walk the banks of the river and learn of other nearby places that were used in the film. Email davidswafford@charter.net for details.

Drive by the Tennessee State Prison in Nashville and see where parts of “The Green Mile,” “Last Dance” and “Walk the Line” were filmed.

Visit Knoxville’s Neyland Stadium, Market Square and the historic Tennessee Theatre to check out locations you’ll recognize from “The Last Movie Star.”

The swamp at Reelfoot Lake was a setting for the action film “U.S. Marshals.” Be sure to bring your binoculars, too. The bird-watching here is some of the best in the state.

Visit Fall Creek Falls State Park where you can bring out your Baloo and explore areas where the 1994 live-action adaption of “The Jungle Book” was filmed. Wear your hiking shoes — there are plenty of waterfalls, hiking trails and rocks to climb and a canopy challenge course to experience. 📱



Photo courtesy of Tennessee Tourism

The eerie, spooky swamps in Reelfoot Lake made the perfect backdrop for the thriller “U.S. Marshals.”

That feeling IN THE AIR

Local festivals heat up the fall

Story by JEN CALHOUN

There's something special about the way a spoonful of sorghum syrup drips off a hot biscuit. And for David Bradley, that very thought is enough for a full-blown celebration.

Bradley, who serves as co-chair of the Morgan County Sorghum Festival alongside Belinda Jordan, has spent years honoring the humble and versatile cereal grain. Sorghum can be eaten as is, made into syrup, used as a sweetener for baking or even grown for commercial applications like animal feed and ethanol production.

"For many years, we've had several families that grew the cane," Bradley says. "They make some of the best quality sorghum anywhere around. I would say Kentucky — especially Central to Eastern Kentucky — has the best soil and climate to produce it."

That's why the county celebrates its sorghum-producing tradition with a three-day festival full of live music, regional crafts, food, on-site Wi-Fi from MRTC and a whole slate of new fun-filled activities for children, teens and adults alike. "It really showcases what Morgan County and Eastern Kentucky is all about," Bradley says.

WOUNDED BEARS AND WELCOMES HOME

The Sorghum Festival is just one of several exciting regional celebrations coming this fall. On Labor Day weekend, the Elliott County Tobacco Festival and the Wolfe County Swift Silver Mine Festival will also fill the air with music and lighthearted fun.

"It's the time of year when families come back to the area to visit their family and old friends," says Paula Dean Bailey, president of the Swift Silver Mine Festival. "We actually used to be called the Wolfe County Homecoming Festival, because it's so much of a reunion."

Bailey can't remember exactly when the festival started, but it's been a tradition for the county for more than 40 years at least. It was renamed at some point after the legend of a silver mine that may or may not exist somewhere in the hills of Wolfe County or Appalachia. The mine is named after Jonathan Swift, an Englishman not to be confused with the 18th century author of "Gulliver's Travels."



Fall festivals light up Eastern Kentucky, transforming the region's downtowns into shopping destinations.



Each of the region's festivals will offer food and craft vendors, including the annual Morgan County Sorghum Festival in West Liberty.

CLOCKWISE: Tractors lead the Sorghum Festival parade.

A bird's-eye festival view.



In his journal, Swift said he came to the region in 1760 on a series of mining expeditions. He claimed to have been led by a wounded bear to a vein of silver ore in a cave. He said he mined the cave several times over the next few years, then walled it up. He is thought to have buried some of the silver in various parts of the Appalachians.

But the Swift Silver Mine legend is just one example of the rich heritage of the region, which includes folklore, music and crafts. Bailey says more and more people are finding out about it, too. "We've definitely seen new faces in the last few years," she says. "They come from everywhere. I had a lady that came from California once not too long ago."

They come for live music, the carnival rides, the car and truck shows and the crafts. "They can shop and eat, and there's always something to do or see," Bailey says.

HONORING HERITAGE

Dewey Smith remembers helping with the tobacco harvest when he was growing up in Elliott County. It wasn't too long ago that families depended on the cash crop to put food on the table and keep the money flowing.

"There's very, very little tobacco farming going on now, if any, here," Smith says. "So, for a little while, we changed the name of the festival and took out the tobacco part. But there was a big backlash to that. People said, 'This has been our heritage for centuries!' So, we changed it back. Besides, it's unique anymore."

Today, the long-running festival sets up a giant tent on Main Street in Sandy Hook where dozens of arts and crafts vendors sell their wares. The event also features live music, inflatables for children and much more. The weekend before, a car show and a 5K event kick off the festivities.

"I've been going to this festival all my life," Smith says. "People always look out for each other here." 🗨️



Photos contributed by Morgan County Sorghum Festival

Finding the fun

Festival time is here, and we've listed a few you'll want to attend. They're all free, and they're all local. Here's where to find out more about the live music lineups and more:



Elliott County Tobacco Festival

When: Friday, Sept. 1, and Saturday, Sept. 2

Where: Sandy Hook, in and around the Elliott County Courthouse

Find out more: Elliott County Tobacco Festival Facebook page



Morgan County Sorghum Festival

When: Friday, Sept. 22, to Sunday, Sept. 24

Where: Downtown West Liberty

Find out more: morgancountysorghumfestival.com and the Morgan County Sorghum Festival Facebook page



Wolfe County Swift Silver Mine Festival

When: Friday, Sept. 1, to Sunday, Sept. 3

Where: Downtown Campton

Find out more: Wolfe County Swift Silver Mine Festival Facebook page

Learning

The word "Learning" is written in a large, cursive, dashed font. The letters are colored in a gradient from light blue to orange. A black needle with a white thread is positioned horizontally across the middle of the word, with the thread looping through the eye of the needle and forming a large orange loop that extends above the letter 'n'.

THROUGH OUR CULTURE

Textile arts have long history in rural America

Story by CHERÉ COEN

For centuries, quilts, pieced together from fabric swatches, warmed sleeping families. Woven blankets also provided warmth and offered an opportunity for creativity in a time when women were busy working at home and had little time for the arts.

Today, quilts and blankets still cover beds around the world, but the historic art form has reached exceptional heights through the use of 3D techniques, photography, natural elements and more. “It’s not just a pretty quilt on a bed,” says Deborah Blanchette Bradley, managing director of the nonprofit Texas Quilt Museum. “This is fine art.”

The La Grange, Texas, museum began when quilters Karey Bresnenhan and Nancy O’Bryant Puentes, producers of Houston’s International Quilt Festival, wanted to share art quilts year-round and not just during the November festival. They restored an 1892 building to 95% of its original architecture and opened the museum in 2011 to exhibit quilts and educate the public on the art of textiles.

“Our purpose is to help people see and understand the world of quilting,” Deborah says. “Women were the heart of the home. Our mission is to offer and share the legacy and history — mostly women’s history — through quilting.”

The museum weaves together American textile history and modern art in its exhibits, including the recent “A Tribute



Photos courtesy of National Quilt Museum

to Mary Ann Vaca-Lambert,” whose quilts have been displayed internationally. The museum also hosted an “All Creatures” juried show with 50 quilts based on James Herriot’s novels and the popular PBS series “All Creatures Great and Small.”

ADDITIONAL INCOME

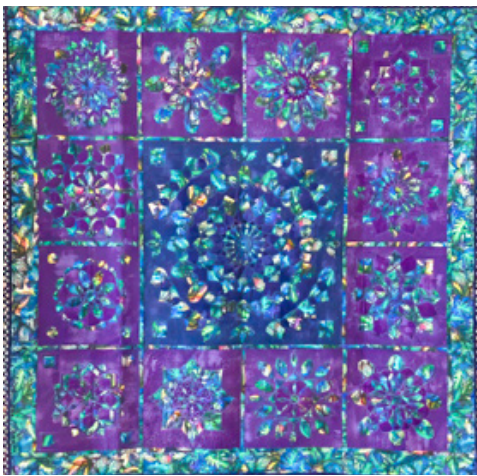
Textiles evolved from utilitarian items to high art, but they also provide many people with additional income. Many members of the McCreary Mountain Craft Center in Parkers Lake, Kentucky, sell their textiles, in addition to other works. The center started as a 4-H organization designed to preserve the craft traditions of Southeast Kentucky.



Photos courtesy of National Quilt Museum

TOP: The National Quilt Museum is in Paducah, Kentucky, one of only a handful of UNESCO Creative Cities in the United States.

ABOVE: The museum displays a wide variety of contemporary textile arts.



A display this year at the Texas Quilt Museum included artwork created by Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo blue ribbon prizewinners.



Photos courtesy of Texas Quilt Museum

“The center was started by an extension agent,” says President Terri Cash. “He wanted to help people in the area make money by selling their crafts.”

The center celebrates 60 years in 2023 and is completely run by volunteers. Artists join for \$10 a year and keep 75% of their earnings. It’s a labor of love, Terri insists. “We’re definitely not out to make money because of the amount of time we put into it.”

Most members are middle-aged and above, but Terri sees young people crafting as well, so weaving and quilting continue to be American art forms. “And we’re happy to pass it down,” she says.

GETTING STARTED

Deborah sees museum visitors looking at professional quilts and other textile artwork and forlornly musing that they could never create such masterpieces. She encourages people to view these showpieces as inspiration to create. “There’s so many ways of being inspired in quilting,”

Deborah says. “You can find inspiration in everything.”

It’s the reason the museum includes education in its programming. It works with Arts for Rural Texas for after-school programs and two summer camps. Children learn skills like needle felting and quilting. “They make a nine-block quilt,” Deborah says. “They learn three patterns and do it all in one week. None of them will look alike.”

The recently opened Discover Exhibit gives children quilt block puzzles and an I Spy adventure through the museum. “It’s meant to inspire kids to learn and take on the art of fabric,” she says. “Art stretches the mind and inspires.”

In addition to the classes and lectures the museum offers, adults looking to get into quilting should find a local guild, Deborah suggests. Quilting guilds exist across the country, and group members are available to mentor and help newcomers. “That’s a great place to start,” she says. “All of these ladies — there’s men in there, too — love to share. It’s like a modern-day quilting bee. If nothing else, it helps you not do it alone.”

Another avenue is sewing classes at extension offices and through 4-H. The University of Minnesota Extension Office, for instance, offers a youth quilting workshop.


Deborah was never a quilter, she was hired to administer the museum, but she’s since taken it up and loves the community she found. “It’s been a wonderful world to become a part of,” she says. 



Photo courtesy of Texas Quilt Museum

Western art created by La Grange High School students is displayed at the Texas Quilt Museum.

Online Resources

- **Paducah, Kentucky**, is home to both the National Quilting Museum and the American Quilter’s Society, dedicated to spreading the importance of quilt making and helping quilters achieve their goals. Because of its quilting heritage and advancements of quilting worldwide, the city was named a UNESCO Creative City for Crafts & Folk Art. View textile art in Paducah’s Lower Town Arts District and visit for AQS’s QuiltWeek April 24-27, 2024. For more information, visit quiltmuseum.org or americanquilter.com.

- **McCreary Mountain Craft Center** celebrates 60 years of showcasing and selling handmade art and crafts. Located in Parkers Lake, Kentucky, near Cumberland Falls, the center sells a variety of textiles. Visit Facebook and search for the McCreary Mountain Craft Center.

- **Texas Quilt Museum** in La Grange rests between Houston and San Antonio and offers exhibits that change four times a year, youth education and one of the largest quilt research libraries in the country. Learn more at texasquiltmuseum.org.

Getting the Gig

Morgan County native acts out

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Aidan Morgan left West Liberty last month for a two-year acting program in New York City, he took his singing coach along with him.

Aidan, who graduated in May from Bethany College, has been taking online lessons from his Wheeling, West Virginia-based vocal coach since his theater professor recommended her last year. “We were going to do a musical during the spring semester of my final year, so my professor recommended I take some lessons,” Aidan says. “I’d never sung before that, but with her help and the help of others, I ended up getting the lead role in the musical ‘You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown.’”

His online singing classes are short but effective. He starts with a warmup, then he sings through a scale before working on some technique. After that, he’ll work on a song. Knowing how to sing gives him an edge in the acting world, even if he wasn’t drawn to it at first.

“I’d never really sung before, and I’m not really a musical theater guy,” Aidan says. “It’s weird for me that people in these plays will just break out in song. I’m more interested in movie acting and regular plays. But, I’ve kind of fallen in love with the process of doing musicals now, even if I don’t really like watching them.”

GIGGING IT

Over the past 18 months, Aidan has bounced from his college in Bethany, West Virginia, to a summer acting fellowship with Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. After graduation in May 2023, he stayed at his parents’ home before leaving in August for the conservatorship in New York. “I’m like a drifter,” he says with a laugh.

Of all those stops, Aidan found the fastest, most reliable internet service at his home in West Liberty. His parents chose a Gig-speed broadband package from MRTC, which has come in handy in their busy household. “I definitely get a better connection here,” he says. “I didn’t really know what speed my parents had because



Photos by William LeMaster

Aidan Morgan got into acting in high school. Since then, he’s studied theater at Bethany College in West Virginia and worked at Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.

I never really thought about it before. But I think they got the Gig because my dad, brother and I are always on the internet.”

A Gig, short for gigabit-level of service, means the internet speed runs at about 900 megabits per second. With that, a family can game, stream movies and shows, talk and do homework seamlessly on several devices at the same time without lags or other interruptions. MRTC, with its fiber optic network, has offered Gig-speed broadband for a few years. The company also plans to launch a 2-plus-Gig plan in the coming months.

In addition to his virtual singing lessons, Aidan also spends time streaming films and TV shows. Over the summer, he watched “The Mandalorian” on Disney+ while simultaneously chatting about it with his girlfriend, Faith, in Pennsylvania. “I always make it a point to watch films and TV shows,” he says. “I look at it more as, yes, I’m a fan, but I can also learn from this.”

TECH TOOLS

At 21, Aidan’s never really known a world without mobile phones or the internet. Technology has always had a place in his daily life, and it’s made an impression.



Aidan started taking singing lessons online in an effort to win more parts.



Aidan rehearses a scene from “Hamlet” at his family’s home in West Liberty. The 21-year-old theater graduate will spend the next two years working in an acting conservatorship in New York City.

When he was in kindergarten around 2007, he remembers getting inspiration from YouTube. “I think it’s one of the reasons I wanted to be an actor,” he says. “I would see these people making up a character and putting themselves out there for the whole world. I knew I wanted to do something like that.”

He knows technology holds downfalls, too, however, as headlines from media outlets prophesize doom for actors in the wake of artificial intelligence, or AI. Some are predicting that voiceover work, which has long provided a steady living for actors of all kinds, will be AI’s first conquest. Writers are also thought to be under attack when AI-generated scripts can be finished in seconds.

But Aidan believes technology is best used when forming connections between human beings. “I think, as a tool, AI is great, but I don’t think it can replace the writing and acting that humans do,” he says. “A good actor can make you feel something on your own, without manipulating you. Acting is about the human condition, and the whole point is to show what it is to be human.” 🗨️

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Layers of flavors

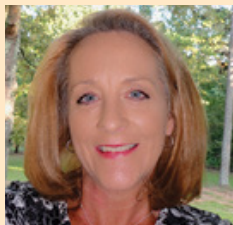
Perfect the sandwich

What makes a sandwich? We posed that question to Bridget Lancaster, host of the popular cooking show “America’s Test Kitchen.”

“A classic sandwich will have a filling between two slices of bread,” she says. “It’s portable, self-contained, and you probably won’t need a knife and fork to eat it. But then you get something like an open-faced sandwich, which is often very saucy or hot and is eaten with a knife and fork.”

Really, a sandwich is what you make it — one slice, two slices, baked, broiled, grilled in butter or served cold. Here are some sandwich tips from “America’s Test Kitchen.”

- Add a tangy sauce such as tzatziki, horseradish or a creamy salad dressing rather than mayonnaise or mustard.
- Consider other breads, such as a sturdy ciabatta or even a nut bread for extra flavor. To keep the sandwich from becoming too much to handle, use just 3–4 ounces of meat and an ounce of cheese. Toast the bread to boost the flavor and keep the sandwich from becoming soggy.
- Instead of a pickle, try chutney or a tangy relish. Instead of iceberg lettuce, try arugula, watercress or spinach. And don’t forget veggies. Consider cucumber, shredded carrots and sprouts.



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Food Styling by **Rhonda Gilliland**



‘America’s Test Kitchen’ **GROWN-UP GRILLED CHEESE**

- 7 ounces aged cheddar cheese, cut into 24 equal pieces, room temperature
- 2 ounces brie, rind removed
- 2 tablespoons dry white wine or vermouth
- 4 teaspoons minced shallot
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 8 slices hearty white sandwich or rosemary bread

Process cheddar, brie and wine in a food processor until smooth paste is formed, 20 to 30 seconds. Add shallot and pulse to combine, 3 to 5 pulses. Combine butter and mustard in small bowl.

Working on a parchment paper-lined

counter, spread mustard-butter evenly over one side of slices of bread. Flip four slices of bread over and spread cheese mixture evenly over slices. Top with remaining four slices of bread, buttered sides up.

Preheat a nonstick skillet over medium heat for 2 minutes. Place two sandwiches in skillet; reduce heat to medium-low; and cook until both sides are crispy and golden brown, 6 to 9 minutes per side, moving sandwiches to ensure even browning. Remove sandwiches from skillet and let stand for 2 minutes before serving. Repeat with remaining two sandwiches.

Note: Hold sandwiches on a wire rack on a baking sheet in the oven at 250 F while the second round cooks.

Easy Reuben

- 8 slices rye bread
- 4 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1/4 cup Russian or Thousand Island dressing
- 8 slices Swiss cheese
- 1 pound corned beef
- 1 1/2 cups sauerkraut, well-drained

Butter one side of each slice of bread. On the nonbuttered side, spread Russian dressing on each slice. Top half of the slices with cheese, corned beef and sauerkraut. Top each sandwich with remaining slices, dressing side down.

Heat a medium skillet over medium heat. Place a sandwich in the skillet and cook until golden and cheese is melted, 3 minutes per side. Serve immediately.




ZIPPY BEEF BARBECUE SANDWICH

Make the barbecue the day before and assemble the sandwiches right before your hike or tailgate or wherever you spend your beautiful autumn weekend.

- 1 1/2 cups ketchup
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup picante sauce
- 1/2 cup dry red wine
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 beef sirloin tip roast (4 pounds)
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced
- 16 kaiser rolls, split and toasted
- 2 cups deli coleslaw

Mix first nine ingredients. Cut roast in half; cut slits in roast and insert garlic. Place in a 5-quart slow cooker. Pour sauce over top. Cook, covered, on low until tender, 8-10 hours.

Remove beef. Skim fat from cooking liquid. Shred meat with two forks; return to slow cooker and heat through. Serve on rolls with coleslaw. 





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