

CONNECTION



Raise a glass

Local flavor on tap at Round Top Brewing

CRITICAL
MESSAGES

GAME ON



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A partner to support RURAL AMERICA

The Foundation for Rural
Service makes a difference

Our members work hard to serve our nation's rural communities, but they do not do it alone. I'd like to shine a spotlight on an organization whose work I respect, appreciate and support.

The professionals of the Foundation for Rural Service, known as FRS, deserve praise for all the benefits they provide to thousands of people. Established as a nonprofit in 1994, they have made a positive difference for nearly 30 years.

Many of you may know their efforts to help educate young people in rural communities through scholarships and the popular Youth Tour trip to our nation's capital. FRS also annually takes key congressional staff out into our communities to see the challenges faced when deploying broadband.

In particular I want to give a special nod to the annual FRS Community Grant Program designed to benefit communities served by NTCA members. The goal is to support local efforts committed to improving and sustaining rural America. The grants have four areas of concentration: business and economic development, community development, education and telecommunications — the last is a chance to highlight a local plan to support broadband resources for telehealth, education and more. For more information about these programs, visit www.frs.org.

Just like the NTCA member serving you, a remarkable community partner where you live, FRS combines the resources and visibility of all NTCA members to benefit communities like yours across the country. 📞



Get your free annual credit report Spot scammers early

A free credit report is one of the quickest ways to spot identity theft — someone taking your name, date of birth, address, credit card or bank account information, Social Security or medical insurance numbers.

Scammers can quickly drain a bank account, run up charges on a credit card, get a new credit card in your name and more.

What is a credit report?

A credit report is a summary of your personal credit history, including identifying details such as an address, date of birth and information such as whether bills were paid on time or someone has filed for bankruptcy.

Three national credit bureaus — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — collect and update this information.

The credit bureaus must:

- ▶ Make sure the information they collect about you is accurate
- ▶ Give you a free copy of your report once every 12 months
- ▶ Give you a chance to fix any mistakes

How do I order my free annual credit reports? The simplest solution is to visit AnnualCreditReport.com. It's fast and easy.

Cryptocurrency 101

A beginner's guide to the new currency

For many people, the idea of cryptocurrency, or digital money, is downright mysterious. Still, cryptocurrency has been around more than a decade, and a growing number of people are starting to use and invest in the world of virtual coins and tokens.

But what, exactly, is it? How does it work? And how do you get it?

CRYPTO BASICS

Put simply, cryptocurrency is digital money. There are no physical coins or paper dollar bills you can pull out and put in a billfold. But it's also not backed up by any asset. According to [bitstamp.net](https://www.bitstamp.net), cryptocurrencies are a tradable asset in and of themselves. Their price is determined by demand and the supply available.

Like gold, cryptocurrency's value is in its scarcity and its uses — or potential uses in crypto's case, according to an Investopedia article in December 2021. Bitcoin, which is the most valuable of the different cryptocurrencies, is limited to a quantity of 21 million bitcoins. And while gold is often useful for industrial applications and in valuable jewelry, crypto might be of service in a number of retail transactions one day.

HOW TO GET IT

Most people buy it online and store it in a virtual wallet. The easiest way to buy cryptocurrency is through one of many centralized exchanges that come up on an online search. There are several types of cryptocurrencies, including the three top ones: Bitcoin, Ethereum and Tether.

CRYPTO AND TAXES

The banking system and the government do not oversee cryptocurrency transactions. Instead, these transactions are supported by blockchain, a technology that tracks who owns what. But that doesn't mean cryptocurrency isn't taxable. In fact,

the Internal Revenue Service taxes cryptocurrency as either property, investment or earned income. Because of this, crypto dabblers should keep careful records of all their transactions.

UPS AND DOWNS?

Cryptocurrency is known for its volatile market. In one day in 2021, Bitcoin dropped by 30% — a huge fluctuation in any other trading market. As a new currency that's not legal tender and which any government can issue, crypto can move wildly up or down based on just about anything — perceptions, news articles or, most notably, a tweet from tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

RESEARCH AND START SLOW

To find out more about cryptocurrency, make sure to do your research. Seek out sources crypto advertisers or others with vested interests in particular products aren't backing. Those determined to try it out should invest conservatively while learning more about the market along the way. 💬

Crypto lingo

Knowing more about cryptocurrencies requires learning new words and phrases. Here are a few that are sure to pop up frequently:

FUD — FUD is an acronym that stands for "fear, uncertainty, doubt." In the crypto world, FUD is negative information that can deter investors.

HODL — HODL is an acronym for "hold on for dear life," but internet lore jokes that its origins came from a typo for the word "hold." Either way, cryptocurrency investors use it to caution others against selling when the market is volatile.

NFT — NFT stands for non-fungible tokens. NFTs are pieces of digital content linked to the Ethereum blockchain. Non-fungible basically means that the digital content is unique and cannot be replaced. Because of this fact, NFTs make digital works of art and other items into one-of-a-kind assets.

Sats — Short for Satoshi, sats are the smallest fraction of a bitcoin that you can send — 0.00000001 of a bitcoin. Hardcore bitcoin traders look at sats, not the dollar amount of bitcoin. Note: Satoshi Nakamoto is the made-up name of the person or people who created bitcoin.



Congratulations, graduates

A bright future awaits

Throughout our community, young adults are experiencing a milestone — they're about to begin their first post-high school summer. It's a moment that deserves celebration — a cap on 12 years of hard work and accomplishment.



KELLY ALLISON
General Manager

Even if you're like me and the high school years have been in the rearview for a while, the memories can still seem fresh. After all, this is such a vivid time, one often filled with excitement, hope and, quite possibly, trepidation. Each of these young people will soon make choices, many of which have been years in the making. Some of them will go on to higher learning. Others may breathe a sigh of relief to leave school behind and enter the workforce, start families or explore countless other possibilities. All graduates must choose their own paths.

Some of our young people have already faced adult challenges, working jobs or carrying responsibilities that, in an ideal world, would have waited until they were older. Life isn't the same for everyone, and it's often difficult. We appreciate that the circum-

stances for each high school graduate are unique, and we hope we can offer one consistent thread of support to all members of the communities we serve. At Colorado Valley Communications, we often discuss the principles that are the bedrock of what we do, one of which is concern for the community.

Our communications network — our fast, reliable internet service in particular — can open doors that didn't exist just a few years ago. Online learning, work-from-home jobs, support for employers and so much more are now available. We are in a rural area, but we have an immediate connection to resources needed to thrive in a modern world. The playing field is more level than ever between cities and communities like ours.

One example of success is the young people leaving high school today and the link they have, not only to the online world, but also to real-world resources once unheard of in rural communities. Imagine moving away for school or a job and being able to use a video call to connect with family back home. No matter how far our graduates roam, there's a convenient link to the people who have supported them every step of the way.

We believe, however, that helping the community goes beyond the services we provide, and we know many other local businesses feel the same. Scholarships, internships, support for athletic and academic programs and first jobs are just a few ways we work to help students attending our schools and this current group of young graduates about to strike out on their own.

While this is a time of celebration for the Class of 2022 and their families, I believe it's also a time for us to celebrate as a community. Life will bring hurdles and triumphs. Many of these former high school students will go on to become part of the fabric of our communities, and others will venture away, carrying the values and lessons they learned here with them for the rest of their lives.

I wish to congratulate all the graduates and their families. Thanks to you, the future is bright, exciting and filled with possibilities. 📺



CONNECTION

MAY/JUNE 2022

VOL. 4, NO. 3

Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by CVCTX, ©2022. It is distributed without charge to all customers of the Cooperative.



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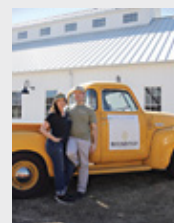
Customers in several parts of our service area can access fiber to the home, while expansion for access is in the works for other locations.

For more information on Colorado Valley's service area, visit cvctx.com/maps. The area served by the Cooperative can be seen in the link for Colorado Valley Exchanges. Fiber availability outside the Cooperative service area can be seen under the Colorado Valley Communications header.

Produced for CVCTX by:



On the Cover:



Round Top Brewing and Kitchen is a dream come true for Brooke and Paul Michie. The couple opened their newest business in 2021. See story Page 12.

WI-FI 6 IS HERE!

Colorado Valley Communications' high-speed internet service is now even better thanks to the latest in Wi-Fi technology. We're rolling out Wi-Fi 6 routers, offering customers the fastest and most secure connection available.

WHAT IS WI-FI 6?

Simply, Wi-Fi 6 is the sixth — and latest — generation of wireless communications. The Wi-Fi Alliance, the organization that names this technology, recently simplified the system so consumers can easily match their devices to compatible Wi-Fi tools.

WHY IS IT BETTER?

- **SPEED** — A single device connected to a Wi-Fi 6 network should be about 40% faster than if it were running on a Wi-Fi 5 router. Latency — the time it takes for information to travel from Point A to Point B — is also lower on Wi-Fi 6 networks, a huge upside for gaming and virtual reality applications.
- **BACKWARD COMPATIBILITY** — Don't worry, all your family's devices haven't suddenly become obsolete. Wi-Fi 6 routers will work with Wi-Fi 5 devices, as well as many older devices.

- **MORE DEVICES** — Wi-Fi 6 networks can support more devices at once than previous generations. Rather than waiting their turn while other devices access the internet, Wi-Fi 6 networks serve multiple devices simultaneously.
- **SECURITY** — All Wi-Fi 6 devices require the most secure encryption standard, known as WPA3. Some earlier devices offered WPA3. However, by making it mandatory, Wi-Fi 6 networks are harder to infiltrate.
- **BATTERY LIFE** — Using a process called Target Wake Time, Wi-Fi 6 networks better control how often devices wake up to send or receive data, significantly reducing battery drain on mobile devices.

New fiber internet customers who sign up for either the 20/10 Mbps or the 50/10 Mbps bundles will receive a Wi-Fi 6 wireless router at no additional charge. New customers signing up for any other fiber or fixed wireless speed package can get a Wi-Fi 6 router for a small monthly fee.

For more information on Wi-Fi 6 routers, call Colorado Valley Communications at 979-242-5911.

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ANNUAL MEETING

For all the details on the **2022 ANNUAL MEETING**, go to cvctx.com or follow Colorado Valley Communications on Facebook.

Memorial DAY

Colorado Valley Communications' office will be closed on **MONDAY, MAY 30**, in observance of **MEMORIAL DAY**.

THE JOY OF SUMMERTIME

Whether you're looking for thrill rides or family time, there are theme parks that dot the Texas coast and deliver a day — or even more — of fun.

Going to an amusement park is an adventure for the whole family. Some may go for the thrills of dropping down from the sky while others may enjoy the chills of a haunted house. Still others might go for the food. There's an assortment of fun and fare to be had, and Texas offers a boatload of it.

"The waterfront along Texas' coast offers amusement parks with picturesque views, engaging midway games, live entertainment, fantastic food and seaside thrills on roller coasters stretching over the Gulf of Mexico," says Tim Fennell, director of Travel Texas, an office responsible for promoting Texas as a premier travel destination. "These family-friendly parks are a fun, nostalgic way to enjoy the scenic Texas coast and make a captivating addition to any itinerary."

Here are some parks that offer thrilling rides, good food and family fun, so head to the coast and prepare yourselves for the action. 🌞

PLEASURE PIER, GALVESTON

Pleasure Pier is an iconic piece of Galveston's history that has entertained Texans since it opened in the 1940s. At that time, admission was free, and there was a ballroom for dancing, along with carnival rides, a movie theater and more that drew thousands to the Gulf shore annually. Hurricane Carla destroyed much of the pier in 1961, but it reopened for a few decades until it met the wrath of Hurricane Ike in 2008. Today, though, it has reopened with a new look that has retained the charm it had when it opened almost a century ago.

Now parkgoers can experience thrilling roller coaster rides, an aerial high-swing, carnival games, shops and food, giving it the nickname: "Coney Island of the South." Swing your way up 220 feet on the Texas Star Flyer, loop your way around the park on the Iron Coast Roller Coaster with a magnificent, death-defying vertical drop or take a slower approach to Pleasure Pier on the carousel. The 5-D Theater Ride will blow your mind as it takes you on a heart-pounding ride deep down a mine shaft or puts you face-to-face with a prehistoric Megalodon. There are 17 rides at Pleasure Pier, plus an area where you can test your gaming skills at ring toss and other games.

All-day ticket prices are \$19.99-\$26.99. Family packs start at \$89.99 for two adults and two children. For more information, log onto pleasurepier.com or visit the park's Facebook page.

History meets fun at Pleasure Pier in Galveston, where there's a little adventure for everyone. Rides, games, food and more create a classic destination on the Gulf of Mexico.



KEMAH BOARDWALK, KEMAH, TEXAS

Race across Galveston Bay in a giant speedboat or test your bravado on the Boardwalk Bullet, a one-of-a-kind wooden coaster, as it loops and plunges its way around its track. Or try the Drop Zone with its 140-foot drop that will make your heart race. It's all part of a day spent at Kemah Boardwalk just 20 miles south of Houston.

Many consider the boardwalk, lying along the shores of Galveston Bay and Cedar Lake, one of the best in the country. Spread over 60 acres, it has everything you'd want for an exciting getaway to the coast. Not only does it boast incredible rides, it's a megaplex filled with restaurants and shopping venues.

There are rides appropriate for the little ones, such as a double-decker carousel; a ride aboard a replica of the famous 1863 C.P. Huntington train; or the Wonder Wheel, a pint-size version of a Ferris wheel. Pack bathing suits and let the kids frolic in dancing water fountains. There's also an arcade and playground on-site.

Dining options range from seafood at Landry's to Tex-Mex at Cadillac Bar and steaks at Saltgrass, among a dozen other eateries. Individual ride tickets are \$5-\$20 while all-day passes are \$18.99-\$24.99 and are available for unlimited excitement on every ride except for Boardwalk Beast, Iron Eagle and Stingray Reef. Want to make a weekend of it? Book a room at the only hotel on the boardwalk, Boardwalk Inn, with 58 rooms overlooking Galveston Bay.

For more information, visit kemahboardwalk.com or search Facebook.

The Kemah Boardwalk, only 20 miles south of Houston, creates a unique experience. It extends across 60 acres with rides and experiences perfect for visitors of any age.



GRAVITY PARK, SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

Defy gravity at Gravity Park on The Rocket, the tallest reverse bungee jump in the world, or take a nerve-wracking ride on the Skycoaster, a giant swing that'll hoist you 110 feet into the air. But the real thrill comes when you pull the ripcord and plummet back to terra firma. There are go-kart tracks for both kids and adults, a 60-foot Ferris wheel, a trampoline ride, an arcade, mini golf and a climbing wall. What the park may lack in size it makes up for in family fun.

Individual ride tickets for kids' rides are \$8. Prices for adult rides, golf and go-karts are \$10-\$25 with senior discounts for golf available.

For more information, jump on over to gravitypark.squarespace.com or visit the park on Facebook.





A taste of tradition

Ellinger Tomato Festival celebrates 85 years of small-town fun

Story by ANDREA AGARDY

Many things have changed in Ellinger over the past 85 years, but the city's appreciation for a good party isn't one of them. The festivities will continue this spring when the chamber of commerce hosts the Ellinger Tomato Festival May 27-29.

The event started in 1936, when tomatoes were king. Using the Texas climate and their own ingenuity, Ellinger farmers maximized the fruits of their labor. They planted early, harvested the still-green tomatoes in May and immediately shipped them, beating Northern growers to market. The festival became their way of celebrating a job well done.

Over the decades, tomato farming fell by the wayside. The celebration has evolved, too — changing its name to the Ellinger Festival and later to the Ellinger Feast and then Mayfeast before re-embracing its original moniker. “Right now, the only tomatoes grown here are in people's gardens, but this used to be an epicenter,” says Chamber President Michael Schlabach. “Just because something is no longer abundant, you still need to look back on your history.”

NOBODY GOES HOME HUNGRY

Today's Ellinger Tomato Festival blends honoring history with modern tastes. For example, Fayette County's German and Czech heritage will get a shoutout on Friday when Isaak Klaus and the Lederhosen Junkies, a polka band from New Braunfels, take the stage.

The following day, local cooks will showcase their skills in Ellinger's take on a current Food Network hit. In the two-round Chopped Challenge, contestants use a basket of secret ingredients to create a dish to wow a panel of local celebrity judges. “It could be Vienna wieners, it could be Spam,

it could be chicken or fish,” Michael says. “Last year, one of the secret ingredients was wagyu beef. It's a lot of fun to see those people hustling. It gets interesting.”

From the barbecue cook-off and margarita contest to the drive-thru fried chicken lunch that wraps up the festival on Sunday, there's always something new to taste. And, of course, the festival's namesake also gets its due. Contestants come from as far as 50 miles away to determine who makes the best bloody marys and salsa. There's even an old-fashioned tomato eating contest, and a new competition will select the best breakfast dish featuring tomatoes.

IT'S ALL ABOUT COMMUNITY

The festival's lineup includes a performance by the rock and country band The Bandits, a live auction, awards ceremony and the Tomato Trot 5K. Admission is free, although each contest has its own entry fee. Proceeds benefit the chamber, which uses the proceeds to maintain its hall and pavilion, as well as to give back to the community through scholarships and supporting local nonprofit organizations.

The event has a devoted following with people who first came when they were children now returning with their own kids and grandkids. That weekend, the population of Ellinger, which usually hovers around 200, swells to over 1,000.

The tomato festival is part of the fabric of the community. “It's a sense of pride. It takes you back to the old days when all the community would get together to celebrate, and everybody goes and has a good time,” Michael says. “It's just small-town America — strangers treating you like they're friends, people just having a good time and cheering for others. It's just good, small-town fun!” 🍅

TOP: Chamber President Michael Schlabach.

MIDDLE AND BOTTOM: Contest winners are honored at the awards ceremony.

Photography contributed by Ellinger Chamber of Commerce



For more information on the Ellinger Tomato Festival, go to ellingertexas.com.

Stay connected

Secrets to Bluetooth success

When you're shopping for a speaker, earbuds, headphones or even game controllers, if they have wireless connectivity, the odds are it will be through Bluetooth. But what is Bluetooth, and how can you get the most out of the technology?

BLUE RADIO

Put simply, Bluetooth is a short-range wireless technology standard that transmits data using radio waves.

Whether it's taking a call from your iPhone on your AirPods, pairing your Amazon Echo to a Windows PC or sending a document from your Android device to a waiting printer, Bluetooth is a generally secure way to send data or voice over short distances. Connections are encrypted, and the devices periodically switch radio frequencies to prevent easy interception.

The name for this pervasive technology comes from King Harald "Bluetooth" Gormsson, who, according to the official Bluetooth website, was known for two things: uniting Denmark and Norway in 958 and having a dead tooth, which was the dark, blue-gray color that gave him his nickname.

Bluetooth developed to allow products from different manufacturers to connect. Just as the Danish king united competing factions, so, too, did his namesake technology. In 1998, Ericsson, Intel, Nokia, Toshiba and IBM were the original Bluetooth adopters.

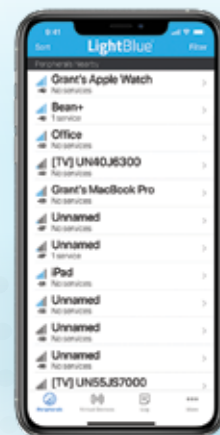
King Harald not only inspired the standard's name, but his initials — in runic form — also became the distinctive Bluetooth logo.

BLUE TIPS

While Bluetooth is an inexpensive, highly compatible wireless standard, it has some limitations. Follow these tips if you're having trouble with your connections or want to improve their quality.

- **Keep a clear signal:** While its low-power signals and frequency hopping abilities generally allow Bluetooth devices to avoid interference, it can still run into trouble from a host of devices, including baby monitors, cordless phones and microwaves.
- **Stay within range:** The Bluetooth range for most consumer devices is about 30 feet. Make sure you stay within range for uninterrupted transmission.
- **Expand that range:** If staying within 30 feet is not practical, Bluetooth routers can extend the range up to 1,000 feet in open air. With a router, you can leave your phone charging inside and still have a Bluetooth speaker going in the backyard.
- **Charge up:** This may seem obvious, but a device's charge impacts its ability to transmit wireless signals. Keep your device properly charged to help keep a steady connection.

APP OF THE MONTH



LightBlue

For those, hopefully, rare occasions when you can't find your Fitbit, earbuds or other Bluetooth-enabled devices, the LightBlue app can help. As long as your device has some charge left and was on when you lost it, the app can scan for Bluetooth devices and even tell you the signal strength, allowing you to pinpoint a more exact location. The app is available for free for Apple and Android devices.

GAMING on the GO

Sure, mobile games may be a distraction many of us turn to while waiting in line or during a slow episode of our favorite TV binge. But that doesn't mean they have to be bad. As our mobile devices have evolved into tiny computers in our pockets, the visuals and clever design of mobile games have grown right along with them. If you're burned out on Angry Birds and Candy Crush, try one of these games to keep your idle thumbs busy.

Good Sudoku

There are plenty of sudoku apps available but only one that puts goodness right in the name. The game's designers set out with the goal of helping players fall in love with the familiar Japanese logic puzzles. Clear difficulty levels, helpful hints and coaching for new techniques at each level make it the perfect entry for the sudoku-curious out there. If you're already a logic master, it also has more than 70,000 puzzles to be conquered and a global leaderboard to chase.

THREES

You'd be hard-pressed to find a better puzzle game than Threes. It's easy to pick up since there are only four directions a player can swipe. But the task of pairing numbers into ever greater multiples of three can quickly become a challenge requiring players to think at least three moves ahead. Whether you're looking to pass 5 minutes or chase high scores on the leaderboard, Threes is worth checking out.

Among Us

Among Us became wildly popular in 2020 in part because it's easy to understand. A group of players attempts to prep their spaceship for takeoff while one imposter tries to pick the others off while no one is looking. It's a simple premise that can lead to chaotic hijinks as players try to smoke out the saboteur. Lying to your friends has never been so fun.

DEVICE 6

Who knew your phone could be the perfect platform for a clever noir story? Device 6 puts players in the role of Anna, a woman with amnesia trying to figure out how she woke up on a mysterious island. The game infuses the classic text adventure genre with modern style and engaging visuals as words move around the screen in unexpected ways. If you're looking for something a little different from the typical mobile experience, Device 6 is bound to have a few welcome surprises in store.

NYT CROSSWORD

Sure, you could pull out the newspaper and pen to fill out your crossword the old-school way. Or you could save yourself the ink stains and errors by tackling the daily crossword on your phone. The app offers Mini and Midi puzzles for a challenge you can knock out in minutes. Or take on the full crossword each day, along with the archive of over 10,000 puzzles. Now there's no excuse not to stay sharp.





Make the CONNECTION

The video game industry remains scorching hot, and not just because people turned to a virtual distraction during the pandemic. Certainly, they did. However, the trajectory of the gaming industry continues a yearslong trend of increased popularity.

Nielsen, a company tracking how various audiences use media, provided some insight last year into video game usage.

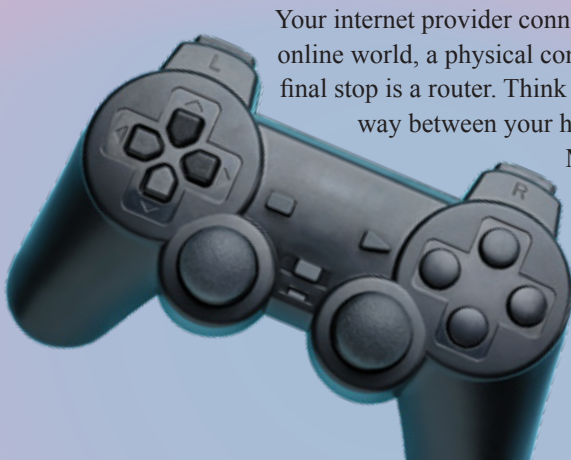
At one point during the pandemic, 55% of U.S. consumers reported playing video games. In fact, people were buying games at a fast clip, with sales rising about 14% during 2020.

There's a twist with modern gaming, too. People use it to connect with each other. The game Fortnite became famous for in-game live events, and more and more people began using services like Twitch to watch others play games, according to Nielsen.

Simply, gaming goes beyond, well, just a game. It's an experience, one made possible by fast, reliable internet.

But are you maximizing your connection for how you experience gaming?

THE CONNECTION



Your internet provider connects your home to the online world, a physical connection where the final stop is a router. Think of this as the gateway between your home and the internet.

Most modern routers allow two types of connections: Wi-Fi and Ethernet.

BENEFITS OF WI-FI

Wi-Fi uses radio waves to connect the router to your devices, eliminating the clutter of cables. Devices ranging from televisions to refrigerators can use this technology to connect online.

Gaming-related benefits of Wi-Fi include:

- Convenient for mobile games on phones and iPads.
- The ability to connect multiple devices without cables.
- Most devices, including computers, set-top boxes and more, have Wi-Fi connectivity. The same can't be said for wired Ethernet connections. Even some laptops lack the option for an Ethernet connection.
- For watching streaming content such as Twitch, Wi-Fi wirelessly takes devices ranging from TVs to tablets online.

BENEFITS OF ETHERNET — WHEN GAMING GETS SERIOUS

An Ethernet connection is a physical link between your device and router. With modern online gaming, success can depend upon how fast the twitch of a finger on a controller can be translated into actions in an online world living on a faraway computer server.

When speed matters, an Ethernet is often the right option.

- Consistency: Unlike Wi-Fi signals, which can be affected by walls or even signals from other devices, the wired connection's speed should remain consistent with that provided by your internet service.
- Lower latency, which is the time it takes a bit of data to leave your device, reach its online destination and then complete the round trip. With gaming, lower latency is critical, and Ethernet is a difference-maker.
- Simple and secure: Connect an Ethernet cable to your device and to your router and get playing. It's that simple. Unlike with Wi-Fi routers, you typically do not need to enter a password to connect.
- The downside is that cable clutter is real. Serious gamers in particular, though, will benefit from devices connected via Ethernet.



Cheers!

Savor the local flavor at ROUND TOP BREWING

Story by ANNE BRALY

Small-scale breweries are sprouting up all across the country. Brooke and Paul Michie have tapped the trend, opening Round Top Brewing and Kitchen, offering the area its first sips of hometown brews, along with made-from-scratch food that's pure Texas comfort with a European flair.

In a town known as an antiques destination, it's only fitting that the brewpub opened during last fall's Round Top Antiques Show.

Paul is an avid home brewer with 25 years of experience in the restaurant industry, and the new business is a lifelong dream come true. "We both love food, travel, hospitality and beer," Brooke says. "Putting these elements together led to the dream of opening a brewpub. The goal

is to create an inviting atmosphere with delicious food and beer that warm the soul and promote joy."

Round Top Brewing is adjacent to the Michies' flagship enterprise, Lollitop Sweetshop. The brewery occupies a historic wooden structure from the early 1900s. Large brewing tanks, a well-polished bar and natural wood floors make up an interior that seats up to 35 guests. An outside deck and beer garden seats up to 125 more beneath the shade of a massive pecan tree.

With 12 chilled lines that keep the beer at 34 degrees F, the Michies serve tasty brews at the perfect temperature. "So far, our beers have a nice dryness to them that isn't always easy to come by," Brooke says. "We use the very finest ingredients

and make small batches by hand. We truly are a mom-and-pop operation."

BEER AND BEYOND

Beer isn't their only ambition. Both Paul and Brooke appreciate fine wines and offer some good vintages on their menu. Craft ciders — another huge trend — might also be flowing through the taps soon, Brooke says. "The sky's the limit, but right now, we're focusing on beer."

Where once the only beer available was from major breweries — think the big daddies like Coors, Budweiser and Anheuser-Busch — it's now common to see lesser-known brands in the beer case. And before too long, folks around Round Top will be able to visit area grocery stores and pick up a gallon of milk and



Paul and Brooke Michie opened their brewery in 2020.



The menu includes unexpected combinations like this duck confit taco.

a six-pack of Round Top. “We have big plans there,” Brooke says. “That’s a step we are working on with some beloved local friends and entrepreneurs as well as some area venues, B&Bs, bars and restaurants. One of our long-term goals is to do more canning and get some shelf space in H-E-B and other retailers.”

The science behind brewing beer involves experimenting with new types of malts and hops, knowing the right water to use and looking for what’s in season. Beer production typically involves just four ingredients, but craft brewers are also returning to the age-old art of using adjuncts, a practice that employs nonsugar malt sources like oats, maize, maple syrup, honey and other fermentable sugars. “I like the idea of experimenting with specialty one-offs, but our major point of view is to create very approachable classic styles for a modern beer drinker,” Brooke says, adding that she works alongside her brewmaster husband and his father, George Michie, a former engineer.

ON THE MENU

Beer’s not just for drinking at Round Top Brewery. It’s used in several of the dishes on the menu.

Paul, a degreed chef trained in French-style cookery, sees food as an element as important to the business as his beer is. “We absolutely love using beer in cook-

ing, especially sauces and soups and even baked goods,” Brooke says. “I mean, what pairs better with cuisine made with beer than beer?”

The menu features beer pairings, such as a duck confit taco paired with an amber ale from Real Ale Brewing out of Blanco. “We feel that pairing beer and food makes each one even better,” Brooke says. “It’s a labor of love, but it’s worth it to share the joy of flavors that harmonize. It is a widely held opinion that beers pair naturally with more foods than wines do. We love wine, but I have certainly found this to be true.”

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The Michies are proud Colorado Valley Communications’ customers, and they use the fast and reliable high-speed internet service their brewpub receives from CVC to engage with customers and keep the operation running smoothly. “We have a popular social media presence and can post easily from our well-appointed spot,” Brooke says. “Plus, we have a lot of Bluetooth speakers and modular point-of-sale systems that allow us maximum flexibility to move about on-site during big events and antiques shows.”

The couple also reaches out to the community to gauge taste preferences. “As much as we love beer, we will definitely have less-popular styles represented

because we want to share with our fellow beer lovers,” Brooke says. “That said, we have noticed where it is quite hot, people gravitate toward light lagers and pilsners. We absolutely love them and will certainly represent those styles consistently among others. It’s been really helpful to know what our community wants to drink.” 🗨️



Brooke and Paul Michie transporting kitchen items.

Photography by Lydia Ford

Round Top Brewing

101 W. Austin St., Round Top
512-738-7003 | roundtopbrewing.com

So *fresh* and so

A unique technique locks more flavor in your veggies

The profusion of fresh vegetables coming our way this spring means it's time to learn a bit about blanching, a technique that brings out the beautiful flavors that only fresh produce can bring — a taste explosion.

Blanching can be a cook's best friend. It destroys enzymes that make green veggies turn brown and mushy, so it's ideal when you want to add green vegetables, such as peas and asparagus, to your risotto. Blanching also removes bitterness from some of our more bitter vegetables, like broccoli rabe. It's also a great way to skin tomatoes, as blanching loosens the skins without cooking the fruit, something that also works for peaches and plums. And if you're planning to prepare and serve a veggie platter, blanch the carrots, broccoli, pea pods and cauliflower. The veggies will retain their color, but your guests will find them much easier to chew.

Blanching is nothing more than boiling vegetables until they're just crisp-tender, then plunging them in an icy bath. It sounds like a simple process, and it is, but there are just a few steps to follow to bring out the best of spring and summer's bounties.

If you're a vegetable gardener, think ahead for the cold days of winter when the flavor of fresh vegetables is just a memory, that is, unless you've blanched in advance of freezing them. Not only does blanching preserve the color and texture of your vegetables, it will also preserve their nutrient content.

Now that you know why you should blanch, here's how:

In order to stop the enzyme action that breaks vegetables down, the food must reach 180 degrees.

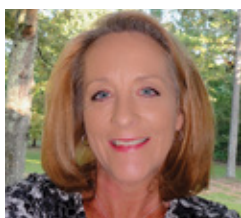
The time spent in boiling water and time spent in ice water should be roughly equal. If you're not able to prepare a cold immersion for your vegetables, putting them in a colander under cold running water will work.

Adding salt to your boiling water will help make green vegetables even greener. Steer clear of lemon juice or other acids, though; these will react with the

chlorophyll and turn your greens brown. And don't use baking soda — it will damage the nutrients found in vegetables.

Use 1 gallon of water for each pound of food to be blanched. If you overload the water with vegetables, it will lower the water's temperature and slow the cooking process, defeating the purpose.

Once the vegetables are crisp-tender, move them from the boiling water and into a large container of ice water. This will stop the cooking process. Then you're ready to bag them for freezing or use them right away in your spring and summer meals. 🍷



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

clean

SALAD NICOISE

- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- 1/2 pound of small potatoes
- 1/2 pound of green beans, blanched
- 1/2 head of green lettuce, washed and torn into bite-sized pieces
- 1 (7-ounce) can of tuna fish
- 4 ounces of tomatoes, diced, or cherry tomatoes
- 10 black olives
- 2 tablespoons of capers
- 1/2 cup of vinaigrette dressing (your favorite)

Cook the potatoes until tender and let cool.

Build each salad starting with a layer of lettuce, then add half the vegetables, including potatoes, tuna, eggs and olives to each plate. Sprinkle with capers. Serve with vinaigrette dressing. Makes 2 servings.



RISOTTO WITH BLANCHED ASPARAGUS

- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed, cut into 2-inch lengths
- 5 cups canned or homemade chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1 1/2 cups arborio rice
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 3/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (about 3 ounces)

Blanch asparagus pieces in a large pot of boiling, salted water for 2 minutes. Drain. Rinse asparagus under cold water. Drain asparagus well.

Bring chicken broth to a simmer in a small saucepan. Reduce heat to low and keep broth hot. Heat olive oil in a heavy large saucepan over medium heat. Add chopped onion and saute until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add rice and stir for 3 minutes. Add dry white wine and cook until liquid evaporates. Continue cooking until rice is tender but still slightly firm in center and mixture is creamy, adding chicken broth 1 cup at a time and stirring almost constantly, about 20 minutes. Add blanched asparagus pieces and stir until heated through, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Add 6 tablespoons butter and stir until incorporated. Stir in grated Parmesan cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Makes 4-6 servings.

WALNUT BROCCOLI SALAD

- 2 pounds broccoli florets
- 1/2 cup toasted walnuts
- 1/2 cup jumbo mixed raisins
- 8 strips bacon cooked and crumbled
- 1/2 red onion thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Bring a big pot of water to a boil and season it liberally with salt. It should taste like the ocean. Add the broccoli florets to the water and cook for 60 seconds, until they're bright green in color. Immediately drain the broccoli florets, then rinse with cold water for 2 minutes or place in an ice-water bath until the broccoli has cooled down.

Transfer the broccoli to a salad spinner, and spin the broccoli dry or drain well if you don't have a spinner. Then blot dry further with a kitchen towel to prevent any excess water from diluting the dressing.

Combine the broccoli with the toasted walnuts, raisins, bacon, onion, mayonnaise, vinegar and salt and black pepper, to taste. Stir well. Chill for at least 30 minutes, preferably an hour, before serving to allow the flavors to marry. Makes 6 servings.



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