

CONNECTION

The trail of lights

Traditional Christmas at
Kreische Brewery

CRAVING
KOLACHES

TRIMMING
THE TREE



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Rural broadband thrives in 2022

The commitment and professionalism of rural broadband providers creates lasting and substantive improvements, bringing essential services that bridge the gap in internet performance between rural and metropolitan areas. In many cases, NTCA members offer even more robust services than those available in larger cities.

In recent years, Congress has passed billions in funding for rural broadband. I was fortunate to attend a White House ceremony last year for the signing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which included over \$60 billion for broadband projects.

NTCA has worked to ensure this funding goes to communities that need it most, as well as to providers, such as yours, with a long history of servicing their neighbors with the highest-quality broadband.

While broadband expansion is a priority, we've continued our focus on advocacy, including working with the Federal Communications Commission to ensure the long-term viability of the Universal Service Fund. It's a program that helps Americans in hard-to-serve areas keep pace with services found in more densely populated communities.

We've also expanded our Smart Rural Community program to highlight the great things robust broadband access brings to rural America — it's not just cities that are "smart!" Over 240 providers are part of the program. Visit smartruralcommunity.org for more information.

As we celebrate our wins from this year, we're looking forward to an even better 2023. 📶

TO ALL WHO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Thank you

FOR ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Fast internet access is essential for rural communities to thrive in a fast-changing, highly connected world.



High-Speed Internet



Voice Communications



Videoconferencing



Telehealth



Business-level Data Tools



Online Education



Streaming Video & Music

Professionals in your community make this possible — working daily to help you lead a better life.

Thank you for all you do!

Business is booming

Apps help small business owners thrive

Running a small business is no easy task. There's a long list of things to keep track of, from inventory and sales to payroll and budgeting. It can get overwhelming staying ahead of the curve.

Thankfully, there's a wide array of apps geared toward making the life of a small business owner easier. Listed below are some of the best apps in 2022 for small businesses.

POINT OF SALE SYSTEMS

These systems allow small businesses to complete sales and ring up customers. According to NerdWallet, restaurants require POS systems that provide coordination and table management, while a retail store requires inventory management features.

Square — The POS offered by the financial tech company Square meets all these requirements and much more. Square is easy to use, offering transparent pricing, live support and compatibility with iPhone, iPad and Android devices. The first magnetic stripe credit card reader is free, and there is even a free plan available for small businesses that don't require advanced functions. While many payment processors have hidden monthly fees, Square doesn't charge by the month. Instead, you pay 2.6% + 10 cents for each credit card transaction for unlimited devices.

ACCOUNTING AND BUDGETING

Accounting software helps small businesses that may not be able to hire a full-time, in-house accountant. With these apps, you can track profit margins, revenues, expenses and budgets to understand the health of your business.

Intuit QuickBooks — Intuit QuickBooks is the industry standard and leader for small business accounting software in 2022, according to NerdWallet. It offers a multitude of service tiers, so it can easily be scaled to the size of the business it serves. It is accessible anywhere from QuickBooks online to the cloud-based version. Some of QuickBooks' best features include a full suite of reports, double-entry accounting, ease of accessibility and sharing with outside accountants, live service bookkeeping support and easy mobile access. Pricing is \$25 a month with other monthly payment tiers (\$50, \$80 and \$180 respectively).

PAYROLL

Paying employees on time is essential to operating a business. Extra help tracking hours and payments can allow small businesses owners to give attention to many other daily aspects of running their companies.



Patriot Payroll — While there are lots of payroll apps on the market, a majority of them are so high-priced that the cost outweighs the benefit of extra help for smaller companies. Patriot Payroll has an affordable price point — \$10 a month, plus \$4 an employee — while offering the same services and benefits as its more expensive counterparts. These services include a one-month free trial, HR support and coverage for up to 100 employees.

INVENTORY

Tracking inventory is a crucial part of staying ahead of the curve for any business. It is no easy task without help, which is why large corporations dedicate entire teams and extensive software programs just for inventory.

Sortly — With built-in barcode scanning that can track stock across multiple warehouses, Sortly has everything you need to manage inventory on the go. It offers both barcode and QR code scanning, giving you the flexibility to use what works best for your business. It even has an offline mode, so a signal interruption won't slow you down. Keep scanning incoming and outgoing items and seamlessly sync up once you're back online. 📱

Annual reflections

Together, we make our community better

As the final days of 2022 unfold and we enter a season of celebration and remembrance, I enjoy the opportunity to reflect on this place we call home and the role of Colorado Valley Communications.



KELLY ALLISON
General Manager

Many of us lead lives where it seems the accelerator is always pushed to the floor. Between raising families, bustling careers, volunteering and embracing active pastimes, everyone is flying through life. But the holidays — while busy in their own way — are a chance to take solace and find respite in traditions like sharing family tall tales, great meals and a few belly laughs. We might even find quiet moments, if we're lucky.

During these times of reflection, I appreciate a theme that runs through our community — neighbors helping neighbors. In so many ways, these connections are what make rural places like ours special. We rally together in hard times, as we did following Hurricane Harvey. We celebrate good times as a community. We also embrace the teamwork needed to build for the future, which

is at the core of CVCTX's mission.

I will never forget this company's history or the role it plays, because it's far different than that of the for-profit businesses serving our nation's metropolitan areas, as well as some of the larger communities in our area. Rather than focusing on stock prices or maximizing profits, CVCTX was created to support our communities. When larger national companies ignored us, calling our communities too rural and small to be a sound investment, our founders stepped up. It began with telephone lines connecting homes and businesses. But the work did not stop there. Now, we provide a suite of modern communications tools and a fast and dependable internet network that would create envy in many of the largest cities.

This network is not something our leaders and staff did. It's a creation made possible by you and the people you see every day at the grocery store or at school events. An elected board of directors — residents who, just like you, depend on our services — set the standards and long-term goals we strive to achieve. We are a company made up of people devoted to helping their neighbors. Few other communications companies can say the same.

Does that make CVCTX special? Certainly, we're proud of the work we do because it benefits others. However, I fully appreciate that we're far from alone in having a goal of uplifting those around us. Our places of worship, schools, locally owned businesses, first responders and more bring that same spirit to their day-to-day missions.

It's this sentiment that also reminds me to appreciate those who served and sacrificed in the name of our nation. Veterans Day is Nov. 11. Please take a few minutes, at least, to appreciate the sons and daughters of this community who made the choice to serve. Rural areas like ours have a long history of service to the armed forces, something we should never forget. Truly, are there more profound examples of neighbors helping neighbors?

And during this time of celebration, I must thank everyone who is part of the CVCTX family. Every department — every individual — plays a vital part in bringing you the services you need in this fast-paced world. Like our tagline says, "Where Connections Matter", we know how important it is to be connected to each other.

From everyone at CVCTX, have a wonderful Thanksgiving and a merry Christmas. 📺



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To sign up for fiber, view planned construction areas and learn more about the fiber project, visit cvctx.com.

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:



Marsha Hendrix is the site manager for Kreische Brewery and Monument Hill, which hosts the Trail of Lights annually.
See story Page 8.

SALUTING SERVICE

CVCTX thanks all veterans, and their families, for their service and sacrifices they've made for our country.

Our offices will be closed in recognition of **VETERANS DAY** on **FRIDAY, NOV. 11**.



Holiday OFFICE CLOSURES

CVCTX wishes you a holiday season filled with family and friends. In observance of the holidays, our office will be closed on the following dates:

THANKSGIVING: Thursday, Nov. 24, and Friday, Nov. 25

CHRISTMAS: Monday, Dec. 26

NEW YEAR'S DAY: Monday, Jan. 2

A GUIDE FOR SAFE ONLINE SHOPPING

Despite our best intentions, the holiday shopping season often feels like it has snuck up on us. That's one of many reasons — maybe second to Black Friday mall traffic — why an increasing number of shoppers are purchasing more of their gifts online.

Following these tips from Connect Safely, a nonprofit organization working to educate the public about online safety, privacy and security, can help you make sure you don't encounter a Grinch this Christmas.



- There's no place like home. Always do your online shopping from a safe location with a secure connection, like your CVCTX home Wi-Fi network. Public Wi-Fi sites can be susceptible to security breaches that can put you at risk for identity theft.
- Beware of emails from unfamiliar websites offering massive discounts. If a deal sounds too good to be true, odds are it is. Also, be careful of phishing scams targeting your personal information. Rather than clicking a link you received via email to log in or update your password, manually type the web address into your browser window.
- Monitor your credit card statements carefully and regularly. Immediately report any unauthorized charges.
- Protect yourself from fraud by paying with credit card or a reputable payment service like Google Pay or Apple Pay or PayPal. Laws that limit your liability for fraudulent charges on credit cards may not offer the same level of protection for debit card purchases.
- Have your purchases shipped to a secure location.
- Make sure you're buying from a secure site. Websites that encrypt your information will begin with "https:" instead of "http:" and will feature an icon of a padlock. A closed padlock indicates your data, such as your address and credit card information, is encrypted.
- Use strong and unique passwords for every site you shop. Password managers can help you keep track of them. Whenever possible, it's wise to use multifactor authentication — an extra layer of protection that adds a second step like a one-time password or code sent by text message or email to the login process.

For more tips, visit connectsafely.org or visit the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency's website at cisa.gov.



Find us on **FACEBOOK** and **INSTAGRAM**.

Don't get your tinsel in a tangle

Story by ANNE BRALY

Decorating the Christmas tree is a beloved holiday tradition, but before you can hang the ornaments, take photos of the grandkids beneath those resplendent boughs or open presents beside it, you've got to find one.

Visiting a Christmas tree farm can put you in the spirit of the season as you make family memories while supporting a local business. And you'll bring home the absolute freshest trees, wreaths and greenery, so everything will last much longer. The fact that Texas isn't overloaded with tree farms makes a trip to a farm to cut down your own tree all the more special for families, says Doug Hingst, owner of Pipe Creek Christmas Trees, who, along with his father, Jim, opened their farm to the public in 1991 after Jim retired. "He was looking for something to do after he retired from the oil business and bought the farm from a friend who had the idea of starting a tree farm. My father took it from there," Doug says.

Now, the father-son duo grow two types of trees: Leyland cypress and Afghan pines, both of which grow well in the hot, Texas climate. Doug opens the gates the Monday before Thanksgiving. "People are getting their trees earlier these days," he says, adding that this practice may be trending because people want to extend the holiday season and enjoy their trees for a longer period of time.

Pipe Creek Christmas Trees is a 10-acre farm. It's a long hike when hunting for the perfect tree. That's why taking a hayride out into the fields is a popular option for families. "We see so many of the same people year after year," Doug says. "And now, we're seeing three generations — people who came as kids are now bringing their own children. People are always happy when they come here. They always come with a smile on their faces."



Photo courtesy of Pipe Creek Tree Farm



Photo courtesy of Pipe Creek Tree Farm



©Serhiy Hipskyi/Adobe Stock

Tree varieties at places like Pipe Creek Christmas Trees may include Afghan pines and Leyland cypress. Precut Fraser firs are also often available.





Tree farms around the Lone Star State

Here are some farms around Texas that provide all you need to cut your own Christmas tree and create or continue a favorite family tradition. A word to the wise: Get your tree early in the season to get your pick of the best.

Evergreen Farms, Elgin — After cutting the perfect tree, visit the concession stand for hot chocolate and snacks. Pick up fixings for s'mores, and then roast your marshmallows by the campfire. Tree varieties include Leyland cypress, Virginia pine and Arizona cypress. Fraser firs and noble firs are precut and brought in from other states. Learn more at evergreen-farms.com.

Seiler Christmas Tree Farm, Seguin — Playground and candy canes for the kids, snacks for all. Take home a live wreath for your front door, too. Tree varieties include Leyland cypress, Carolina Sapphire, Virginia and Loblolly pines. Learn more at seilerschristmastrees.com.

High Star Christmas Tree Farm, Hockley — A barn filled with premade and made-to-order wreaths. Ride on the Merry Tree Express Train, and bring your own marshmallows and hot dogs to cook over the campfire — roasting

sticks provided. There are also hay rides and more fun for the whole family. Tree varieties include Virginia pine, plus precut Fraser and balsam firs. Details at highstarfarm.com.

Elgin Christmas Trees, Elgin — Take a hayride around the farm to pick out the perfect tree. Tag it, cut it and someone else will haul it for you. Kids will enjoy the farm animals. Shop the Christmas Cottage for a wide variety of holiday crafts. Tree varieties include Virginia pine and Leyland cypress. Learn more at elginchristmastreefarm.com.

Pipe Creek Christmas Trees, Pipe Creek — Hayrides on the weekend, and fresh wreaths for sale, too. Tree varieties include Afghan pines and Leyland cypress. Precut Fraser firs are also available. Learn more at pipecreekchristmastrees.com.

Lee County Christmas Trees, Lincoln — Play area for the kids, along with hayrides, hot chocolate and a farm shop filled with ornaments and decorations. Tree varieties include Carolina Sapphire, Virginia pine and Murray cypress. Online at leecountychristmastrees.com. 📞

Keeping your tree fresh

A newly cut Christmas tree is going to be fresher than one that's been sitting on a lot for a while, but it still needs some TLC to last through the holiday season. Here are some tips to make that happen.

- 🌲 Start with a healthy, vibrant tree. Be sure to trim any lower limbs or dead branches.
- 🌲 Give the tree a clean, straight cut across the bottom. Most tree farms will do this for you, as well as drill a hole in the bottom if you have the kind of tree stand that needs one.
- 🌲 It can't be said enough: water, water, water. Get the tree in water as soon as you come home, and continue to water it daily.
- 🌲 Keep the tree cool and away from any heat source that will dry it out.
- 🌲 Use LED lights. They don't get as hot, though they won't give the traditional light you may desire.
- 🌲 When the holidays are over, recycle your Christmas tree in the garden, woods or an area pond. Many towns offer a service to turn Christmas trees into mulch to be used around town.

Living history

History and education meet at Kreische Brewery and Monument Hill sites

Story by ANNE BRALY AND DREW WOOLLEY

Each Christmas since the early '90s, the Kreische Brewery and Monument Hill sites in La Grange have lit up the nights with holiday displays and decorations. It's a tradition for local families to walk the Trail of Lights, visit Santa and enjoy winter refreshments. But they're hardly the first people to gather on this bluff overlooking the Colorado River.

"For 1,000 or more years, this area has been a gathering place for different ethnic groups and cultures," Assistant Site Manager Gavin Miculka says. "The different programs and events we do here continue to pay homage to those historical gatherings by re-creating them in the present day for our community."

Visitors can step back in time and see what life was like in Texas' early days as America's 28th state. Purchased by German immigrant Heinrich Kreische in 1849, the land features the remains of what was once the third-largest commercial brewery in the Lone Star State. The Kreische Brewery neighbors another important landmark, Monument Hill, which pays tribute to men who died during skirmishes between the Republic of Texas and Mexico. Between these two locations, and the living history programs put on by the Texas Historical Commission, it's no wonder the site has become an important reminder of local heritage.

"It has been pretty cool to see families from the community come in and realize, 'That's why my grandma does that' or 'That's why my family does that,'" Miculka says. "It's a tradition that comes from our German heritage."

THE BREWERY IN LIGHTS

The Trail of Lights, scheduled to take place Dec. 9-10 and 16-23, illuminates the brewery and Monument Hill with holiday finery. It's the most popular of all the events on the grounds, says Marsha Hendrix, site manager.



Gavin Miculka, left, and his wife, Lori, and son, Iain, dress as living history interpreters while sharing the Christmas traditions of 19th century German-Texans.

Photos courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission

This year features several new additions to the festivities, such as an "O Tannenbaum" musical display and Candy Lane. Highlights along the half-mile trail include the overlook at the brewery ruins, live music, refreshments, photos with Santa and holiday crafts. Visitors can also look forward to a new tradition in the spring when the popular Bluff Schuetzenfest returns for its second year in May. Inspired by the Bluff Schuetzenverein, a German marksmanship and social club that once called the grounds home, the event features Texas History on Tap. Craft breweries from across Texas are invited to share beers inspired by Texas history alongside familiar favorites and new brews.

"While the Schuetzenverein held shooting competitions, it was a lot more than that," Miculka says. "The point was to get the community together to celebrate the holidays, German heritage, drink beer and just have a good, old time."



The Kreische House is decorated for the season.



HISTORY MEETS BROADBAND

Plans are in the works to implement a more connected experience that brings the physical presence of the sites onto a technological platform that will allow visitors to interpret the monument, the Kreische house, the brewery and trails. “Ultimately, our goal with any sort of online presence is to provide more accessibility for all our visitors, whether they utilize these tools at home or on-site,” says Jennifer Townzen, an educator and interpreter at the site.

The hope is that by bringing local history to life in new ways, the Kreische Brewery and Monument Hill sites can help people forge new connections between the past and present. “A lot of us have this idea that history happened in the past, but the ways we approach and understand the world are very much rooted in the experiences of our ancestors,” Miculka says. “Being able to invite families to sites like this helps make that connection to how we got where we are today.” 🗨️



A monument to the brave

- On Sept. 11, 1842, a Mexican army of 1,600 men took control of San Antonio despite the Republic of Texas winning its independence from Mexico years earlier.
- Believing the main Texan force to be in danger, on Sept. 18, Capt. Nicholas Dawson arrived at nearby Salado Creek. The company of 53 Texans lured out a column of 500 Mexican cavalry.
- Despite overwhelming odds, Dawson's force held its own until the Mexican cavalry fell back out of rifle range, opening fire with artillery. Thirty-six Texans died on the field.
- In February 1843, a group of captured Texans being marched to Mexico City attempted to escape. As punishment, Col. Domingo Huerta was ordered to execute one out of every 10 men.
- The victims were chosen by lottery, drawing from a jar of beans containing 17 black beans that signified death. The bodies of the executed were returned and buried at Monument Hill in 1848.

The business of beer

Heinrich Kreische purchased 172 acres of land, including the Monument Hill site, in 1849. A German immigrant and stone mason, he built the house and barn from native wood and stone.

Recognizing the natural spring on his property would be ideal for a brewery, he began operations in the 1860s. The Kreische Brewery is believed to be one of the first in the area and operated until 1884.

His obituary, written in German, noted Heinrich “understood how to produce such a good brew, that his beer made a name for itself all over Texas.”



Your connected gift guide

6 gift ideas that make the most of your high-speed internet

The holiday shopping season is here, and there has never been a better time to find the perfect gadget that takes advantage of your high-speed internet connection. From tools that make working from home look good to devices to unwind with, high-speed service will help these gifts shine for the techie in your life.

1. Google Nest Hub, \$50

Give the gift of better mornings with the Google

Nest Hub. Designed for the bedside, it can track sleep quality, update you on the weather and your calendar, stream music and video and control any smart home appliances you might have. It even has a built-in light sensor to make sure the screen is never too bright. Let's see an alarm clock do that.



2. Sonos Roam, \$180

The Roam is the perfect portable speaker for anyone on the move. Stream music, podcasts and more with great audio quality and take them from one room to the next with ease. Roam's Wi-Fi support automatically joins any other Sonos speakers around the house and also works as a smart speaker, connecting to Amazon's Alexa or Google Assistant.



3. Kindle Paperwhite, \$140

For the bookworm in the family, the Kindle Paperwhite is still the best e-reader around. The glare-free display is just like reading on real paper, while the 2021 model adds a warm light option to make reading at night easier on the eyes. Purchase new books or download old favorites in seconds without ever leaving your



favorite reading chair.

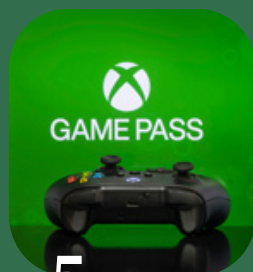
4. Logitech C920S Webcam, \$74

More people are working from home than ever before, so help the remote workers in your life look good while being productive. This Logitech webcam will offer a big upgrade over any built-in camera. It's also ideal for the livestreamers, offering great video quality at an affordable price.



5. Xbox Game Pass, \$9.99/month

If you're giving or receiving an Xbox Series X, Game Pass is a no-brainer. Essentially Netflix for games, the service offers hundreds of games on demand, from the biggest Xbox exclusives available on launch day to creative indies from your favorite developers. Download games in minutes with a fiber connection and discover something new.



6. Apple AirTag, \$30

Know someone who's always losing their keys? These tiny Bluetooth trackers are here to help. Attach them to your keys or anything else you're prone to misplacing, and the AirTag will leverage the network of nearby Apple devices to locate it — in some cases, within inches. For the Android user, the Tile Mate is just as handy.



Tasty app-etizers

6 digital tools to level up your kitchen skills

Even the most experienced home cooks can use a little inspiration now and then. Fortunately, it's never been easier to find. The wide variety of cooking apps and websites available today make it easy to plan meals and even eat healthier. Whether you're looking to ditch the stacks of faded recipes, make something new or find video instructions to walk you through every step, these tools will bring a little extra flavor to your kitchen.



SideChef — If you're just starting out in the kitchen, SideChef is great for learning the basics. A cooking novice created the app for beginners, and it does away with fancy culinary terminology and instead offers dynamic guidance through recipes, providing step-by-step photos, hands-free voice commands and built-in timers. There are over 18,000 interactive smart recipes to try out, so pick your favorite and get cooking.



Food Network Kitchen — Craving something you just saw on the Food Network? The Food Network Kitchen features recipes from fan-favorite personalities and food writers, along with prep time, cook time and difficulty level. Any fan of the network will feel right at home in the app, which lets you search more than 80,000 recipes for categories like grilling, baking, kid-friendly and dairy-free.



Cookpad — For those looking for a more social cooking experience, Cookpad offers a community of home chefs around the world. Discover new ideas, share photos, ask questions and exchange advice. You can even take part in cooking challenges or online cooking classes. And since Cookpad's user base is global, there are plenty of international recipes to satisfy an adventurous palate.




Forks — From vegan lifestyle site Forks Over Knives, the Forks app offers over 600 recipes for anyone sticking to a plant-based diet. What the app lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality, convenience and ease of use. There are new recipes each week, and you can export your favorites to have a ready-made shopping list for your next grocery trip.



Mealime — Meal planning can be a headache, but Mealime makes it easy. The app curates recipe suggestions based on your preferences to help you find healthy new favorites. They're all guaranteed to take 30 minutes or less to cook, but you can also import recipes from the web to add more options.



Cook with Amber — Teenage cook Amber Kelley has been encouraging kids to get in the kitchen since 2012. Today, college keeps her pretty busy. But her YouTube channel, Cook with Amber, still features years' worth of videos that walk kids through their own healthy and delicious kitchen adventures so you can make dinner and memories together. 



FRESH FROM THE OVEN

Two local bakeries keep traditions alive

Story by ANNE BRALY

Fayette County's communities are all within reach of bakeries that appreciate the many tasty traditions that have migrated into the foothills of the Texas Hill Country.

Weikel's in La Grange and Hruska's in Ellinger have something in common — kolaches. The Czechoslovakian treat brings folks from around the area to indulge in the mouthwatering confections and sensory experiences that you can only get when taking in the sights and smells of an Old World bakery. "You smell the fresh bread baking as soon as you get out of your car and walk through the parking lot in the early morning," says Angela Solis, Hruska's manager.

Inside Hruska's, there's a dining area and bakery cases filled with breads and confections made daily. Go past that, and Hruska's returns to its roots as a general store with a craft and home decor section.

You'll experience much the same at Weikel's. The first thing you'll find are tables displaying kolaches ready to take home. Look past those, and you'll find 27 feet of bakery cases with confections of your dreams. A deli offers breakfast sandwiches, along with tacos, specialty sandwiches and hamburgers in the afternoon. Third-generation owner Philip Weikel believes the most popular feature is the build-your-own cold or grilled sandwiches. Patrons pick meats, cheeses and veggies, piled high on Weikel's fresh-baked breads.

Weikel's also features a convenience store atmosphere in a separate space that carries its own line of jellies, jams, pasta, pickles and more. There's even a gift shop, which Philip's stepsister, Jenna, runs, with high-end lines of apparel and gifts. "It's a great complement to our location," Philip says. "It gives all of our customers something to shop for."

CARRYING ON THE KOLACHE TRADITION

Hruska's originally opened in 1912 on Main Street and moved to its current location on Highway 71 in 1952. Ten years later, kolaches entered the picture when local resident Adolphine Krenek began making them in her home for the Hruskas to sell, using milk, cream and cheese from her own farm. When new food safety laws prohibited commercial stores from selling food prepped off-site, the recipe made its way into the hands of Hruska's store manager, Teresa James, great-granddaughter of the store's founder, Frank J. Hruska.

Teresa began working at the family store when she was 11 years old, and now, as manager, she continues making kolaches on-site. She's also introduced hand-patted burgers on bakery-made buns, along with another favorite you won't find everywhere — klobasnikies, a version of what some Americans may know as pigs in a blanket. They're tasty, little sausages wrapped in pastry, best

dipped in spicy German mustard.

Weikel's, too, offers klobasnikies, but the core of its bakery business is the kolaches, made using a recipe that came over from Czechoslovakia with Philip's mother's side of the family. "When I was a kid, I remember all the family reunions where my grandmother and her many sisters competed for bragging rights on who had the best kolaches," Philip says. "It was all in good fun, but it showed the pride they all had for our Czech heritage."

Weikel's uses the original family recipes and makes the kolaches and other items in house. "My dad taught me the importance of consistency and quality from his 50 years of experience, and that will always be our focus as we grow," Philip says.

Offering products in locations other than its home store is crucial for the future of Weikel's, Philip says. So now, if you're craving a kolache or any of Weikel's other specialties, you can find them in stores outside La Grange in Weikel's-branded bakery sections. Try inside the Village Market in Carmine and Foodie's Corner in Leander. Weikel's also has a second location in Brenham.

BRING SOME HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

There's nothing better than freshly baked breads and other treats to complete your holiday menu, and bakeries work hard to ensure their cases are filled with temptation.



Drop by Weikel's Bakery in La Grange for strudels, muffins, kolaches and a full deli with weekly specials.

"During the holidays, we make a lot of dinner rolls from our kolache dough, and those are really popular," Philip says. "My wife, Becky, also developed a pumpkin spice bread that has become so popular during the holidays we decided to keep it year round." Pumpkin pie, pecan pie and a layered pumpkin-pecan pie are also big sellers.

Hruska's stays with the pumpkin theme adding pumpkin cream cheese kolaches to its menu through January.

BAKERIES AND BROADBAND

CVCTX internet, which serves both businesses, is a necessity that allows interaction between the bakeries and their customers in ways that weren't possible before. Customers can place orders online from the website, weikels.com, and these travel around the country through Gold-Belly, the food industry's equivalent of Amazon.

Weikel's also offers its employees training through custom software Recipeasy, which instructs staff through every step of its recipes. This has become such a popular training

tool that Philip and partner Nick Hensley have formed a new company, recipeasy.io, to get it into the hands of other businesses, as well as schools.

Hruska's counts on social media, specifically Instagram, to spread word of its specials. Its website, hruskas-bakery.com, is the place to view the bakery's complete inventory. Orders are placed by phone. But order early. As the site advises: "The early bird gets the kolache." 📱

Hruska's klobasnikies

Weikel's Turkey Spinach Avocado Wrap

Contributed photos



Hruska's kolaches



Weikel's Habañero Cheddar Burger

A tasty tradition

Celebrate the season with sweet holiday treats

Baking is a time-honored tradition in so many households this time of year. Kids love sprinkles, and holiday hosts appreciate having sweets on hand for unexpected guests and tasty gifts for neighbors and friends.

There are a few important tips that can make your holiday baking a stress-free experience and perhaps a little more rewarding for those who will be enjoying the results of your efforts. Many of us have had baking disasters that weren't funny at the time but made for entertaining stories later. That doesn't need to be the case, though, if you:

► **Organize** — Make lists of all the things

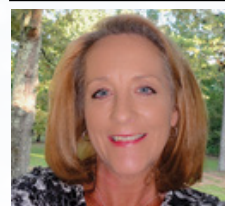
you want to bake and the ingredients you'll need. Do this a couple of days ahead of time so you can decide what will need to be frozen and used in coming weeks, such as cookie dough.

► **Check your pantry for the essentials** — Make sure you have plenty of sugar, flour, butter, eggs and the all-important extracts of the holiday season: vanilla, almond and, oh, yes, peppermint. There's nothing more aggravating than getting halfway through a recipe only to open the sugar bag and discover it's nearly empty. Don't forget cooking spray and parchment paper, too. You'll be needing them.

► **Make sure you have plenty of room in your refrigerator** — Some baked goods need to be chilled. This is a good time to throw out what's been in the fridge a little too long or to use up any leftovers.

► **Ponder presentation** — Check your closets and cabinets for decorative cookie tins. You'll need them for more than just cookies, they're also great for caramel corn, fudge, brownies and bars. A colorful holiday tin is so much more festive than a zip-top bag with a stick-on bow.

Now, get baking. It's almost Christmas!



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HOLIDAY CARAMEL CORN

One word of caution: be sure to weed out all of the unpopped kernels so there are no unexpectedly hard bites in this delicious, sweet-salty snack.

- 3 quarts popped popcorn (about 2 bags microwave popcorn, popped)
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter (no substitute)
- 1 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1/4 cup dark corn syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups mixed nuts

Heat oven to 250 F.

Place popped popcorn into a large, 4-inch-deep buttered baking pan, and place it in the oven to keep warm. In a large saucepan, melt the butter over

low heat. Stir in brown sugar, corn syrup and salt. Bring to a soft boil, stirring constantly. Boil without stirring for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and quickly stir in the baking soda and vanilla.

Remove popcorn from the oven. Slowly pour syrup mixture over popcorn, and add nuts, mixing well. This may prove a bit difficult at first, as the caramel mixture hardens quickly once removed from the heat. But as you stir it while it's baking in the oven, it will soften and get much easier to stir.

Butter a large cookie sheet, and turn the popcorn mixture into the pan. Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. You don't want the popcorn to get overly browned. Remove from the oven and cool completely. Break apart. Store in tightly covered tins.



CRANBERRY ORANGE HOLIDAY NUT BREAD

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 cup butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel
- 3/4 cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- 6 ounces chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease the bottom of a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan and set aside.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Stir in the butter until the mixture is crumbly. Stir

in the orange peel, orange juice, vanilla and eggs, just until the batter comes together. Be careful not to overmix. Fold in the fresh cranberries and nuts.

Transfer the batter to the prepared baking pan. Bake until a wooden toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean: about 50 minutes to 1 hour. Cool in the pan for 5 minutes before loosening the sides of the loaf from the pan. Transfer the loaf to a rack to cool completely before slicing. Let cool completely and wrap with plastic wrap.



PEANUT BUTTER STARS

A classic holiday cookie. These freeze well, so make plenty to enjoy throughout the season.

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup peanut butter
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar

- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- Chocolate kisses or stars

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

In a large mixing bowl, beat shortening and peanut butter with an electric mixer on medium-high speed for 30 seconds. Add 1/2 cup of the granulated sugar, along with the brown sugar, baking powder and baking soda. Beat until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in egg, milk and vanilla until combined. Beat in as much of the flour as you can with the mixer. Stir in any remaining flour.

Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll balls in 1/4 cup granulated sugar. Place 2 inches apart on an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake for 10-12 minutes or until edges are firm and bottoms are lightly browned.

Immediately press a chocolate star or kiss into the center of each cookie. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool. Store in airtight containers. Makes 54 cookies. 📺

IT'S THE HOLIDAY SEASON

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