

# CONNECTION

**Museum honors  
heroes' sacrifices**

**LIVE FROM  
THE OPRY  
FUNKY  
FESTIVALS**





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Training broadband professionals

New NTCA partnership will make a difference

**A**s rural communities like yours experience the life-changing benefits of fast, reliable internet service, the NTCA is proud to expand its support of the professionals making these innovations possible.

We are partnering with Northwood Technical College, which will offer remote workforce training opportunities exclusively for NTCA members. This agreement is one example of how we are pulling out the stops to help providers like yours bridge the digital divide.

Building a robust internet network requires a range of skills, but the work doesn't end after the first connections are installed. Maintaining the systems that power work-from-home jobs, telehealth and so much more demands highly skilled workers.

This new initiative with Wisconsin-based Northwood Tech will help NTCA members secure the expertise needed to not only accelerate broadband deployment but also sustain future-proof technologies.

Northwood Tech has several decades of innovative telecommunications and broadband training experience, but its Broadband Academy's focus extends beyond network systems, hardware and software. The consumer experience, and how communications professionals can better serve their customers, is also a priority.

Northwood Tech President John Will says the partnership with NTCA allows the school to reach and train more students and upskill employees who will gain industry-recognized digital badging credentials.

Also, the remote classes mean NTCA members and Northwood Tech will use broadband technology for broadband training. It's just one more example showing how fast internet service can make a difference in the nation's rural communities. 📶

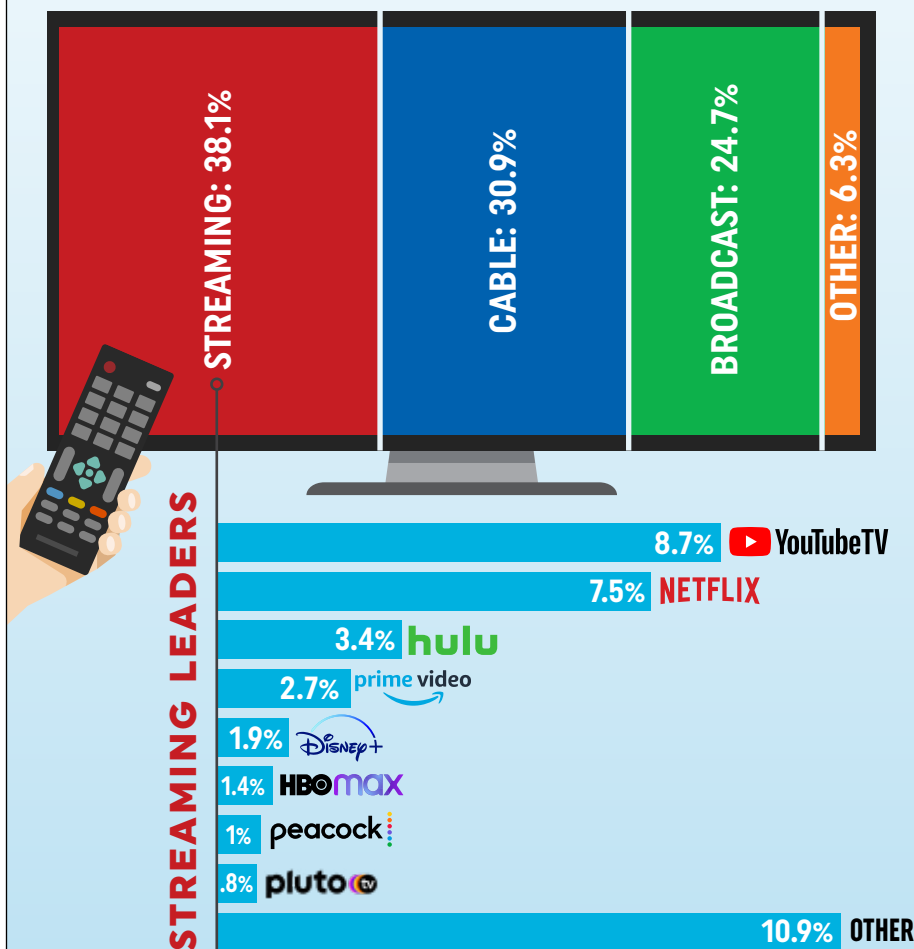
## Entertainment riches

Viewers match their interest to the service

**W**hether you enjoy the predictable pace of a baseball game, catching a 30-minute comedy viewed when your schedule allows, watching a movie from your favorite genre — or just about any other entertainment choice — there's a wealth of options.

And today, you can design the viewing experience you want.

Nielsen, a company that measures audiences to provide important research to advertisers, released a report earlier this year that gives a peek into our viewing habits:



## GAMING FAVORITES

For many people, a little screen time means something more interactive than a show or movie — they play video games. Nielsen identified some of the top games from recent months, so here are a few to consider if you're looking for fresh options.

- ▶ Hogwarts Legacy
- ▶ The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom
- ▶ Resident Evil 4
- ▶ Diablo IV
- ▶ Minecraft



# Home security

KEEP YOUR DATA SAFE  
WHILE WORKING REMOTELY



Story by DREW WOOLLEY

**W**orking from home is no longer uncommon. As access to high-speed internet and tools for remote collaboration become more widespread, employers are increasingly warming to the idea of letting people get out of the office at least a few days a week.

The comfort and accessibility of remote work mean it isn't likely to go away anytime soon. But it can also introduce new challenges like security concerns. Whether you're taking your laptop to the nearby coffee shop or setting up a work station at home, keep these guidelines in mind to make sure your work is secure wherever you are.

## STAY UPDATED

When you see an alert about a new software update, don't wait to install it. Among other things, these updates often close security loopholes that malware can use to get access to your data. It's also important to have an antivirus program installed that can protect your devices from the latest viruses, spyware and phishing scams.

## DON'T TAKE THE BAIT

Speaking of phishing scams, it's important to be extra alert when working remotely. Bogus emails can hit an office just as easily as your home computer, but it's easier to spot a fake when the co-worker supposedly asking for sensitive information is in the same room as you. Always make sure your devices are secure outside the office, and be sure to double check any suspicious requests directly.

## PROTECT WORK DEVICES

Working from home often means exposing your work devices to kids or other family members who may not be as careful about security measures as you are. Take steps to make sure others

aren't using your work devices or accidentally seeing sensitive information. Also, try to avoid doing work on personal devices that may not be as well-secured.

## KEEP YOUR VPN ON

Many companies use virtual private networks, or VPNs, to help employees communicate securely via an encrypted network. If your employer does the same, it's important to stay connected for as long as you're working. Dropping that virtual defense could open the door for someone to steal important information.


## STAY IN THE CLOUD

Not only do cloud applications receive regular security updates, but saving your work to cloud storage creates a shared backup of all your work. That way, even if local files on your device are lost, corrupted or stolen, you'll still have access to everything.

## MAKE VIDEOCONFERENCES PRIVATE

The popularity of videoconferencing apps like Zoom has skyrocketed in recent years as more teams collaborate from afar. But a digital meeting space comes with additional security considerations. To prevent unwanted visitors from listening in or even trying to intimidate people, consider requiring a password for calls or keeping any new arrivals in a waiting room.

## UP YOUR PASSWORD GAME

Strong passwords are always important, but they're even more crucial when you're working remotely. A password manager can help you keep track of numerous strong passwords, which should generally be at least 12 characters and contain letters, numbers and symbols. If that's too much to keep up with, consider using favorite song lyrics, movie quotes or other phrases that are easy to remember but more complex than your dog's name. 

# Ready to serve

There for you when needed most

One of the pleasures of my role at Colorado Valley Communications is the honor of working alongside some of the most dedicated and hardworking professionals in our industry. We are blessed to have an experienced, committed staff devoted to serving you.



**KELLY ALLISON**  
General Manager

Their efforts are most visible — and most critical — when times are the hardest. Sudden storms, fiber optic cable cuts, flooding and so much more can disrupt not only the services we provide, but also the lives of individuals and productivity of businesses. We know you depend on our communications tools, especially in critical moments such as the need to call for emergency help.

So, even in the most trying of conditions, our crews go into the field as our front line in the effort to keep you connected. They work tirelessly for as long as needed to restore service to you.

I'm always appreciative as these crews go out into environments most of us wish to avoid, including in the middle of downpours, high winds or extreme heat. The challenges

change by season and are as unpredictable as the weather itself. While we have designed and implemented multiple redundancies into our network, unfortunately, outages do and will happen. But our commitment to excellence means your service is as consistent and reliable as possible.

If you've ever wondered why someone would work so hard, the answer is simple. Each member of our crews — truly our entire staff — has roots in a rural area. We know we're working to help our friends, our families, our neighbors and our entire community. They genuinely care about those they serve.

When an outage does occur — and no matter the preventive steps we take they sometimes will — we ask for your patience as our crews hit the road to restore service. Also, as you're driving, please keep in mind to take note of repair vehicles on the roadside. Please slow down and give them a little extra space. They're working to help everyone, and in return you can help keep them safe.

While repair crews are some of the most visible members of the CVCTX team, others play equally critical roles. When problems arise, everyone helps. But I'd like to also mention a unique challenge from when the first telephone calls crossed our lines.

The fast internet network we manage requires care, and our professionals work daily to keep it safe and secure. CVCTX is your local hub on the global internet, connecting you to resources needed for health, education, employment, entertainment and far more.

Our teams keep that connection solid, a highly technical, always-evolving role. After all, cyberthreats are real, and we follow industry best practices to secure our network. But the responsibilities extend to the needs of individuals and business users. If you have an internet problem, our customer-support experts and technical staff are committed to helping.

Whether it's the immediate recovery after an event such as a storm or the day-to-day aid to keep critical services like internet access working, everyone at CVCTX makes your needs the priority.

Thank you for letting us serve you and be a part of this wonderful community. 📶

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#### Sign up online

To sign up for service, to increase your bandwidth or to let us know where to build out our fiber network next, visit [cvctx.com](http://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](http://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:



The Texas Heroes Museum gave new life to a historic building with the purpose of preserving tales of heroism by first responders and military personnel.

Photography submitted by Terry Hagerty

See Story on Page 8





# What is a GIG-CERTIFIED provider?

In 2020, Colorado Valley Communications was recognized as a Smart Rural Community by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. CVCTX provides broadband-speed internet to more than 50% of our service area.

Of course, we at CVCTX are not content to rest on our laurels. We aim higher. Last fall we also achieved the NTCA's Gig-Certified Provider status, which recognizes our work to create a fiber optic network capable of cutting-edge speeds.

These efforts show our commitment to driving growth and creating opportunities in our rural communities. CVCTX's multiyear network construction project continues, and our crews are working hard to bring fiber to as many homes and businesses as possible. These certifications show just how important fiber-based broadband is when it comes to connecting communities and empowering our customers.

## What does CVCTX being a Gig-certified provider mean for you?

- Businesses can fulfill orders faster.
- Families can use multiple internet-connected devices seamlessly and simultaneously.
- More people can explore work-from-home careers.
- Opportunities for rural economic development increase.
- Access to state-of-the-art health care expands.
- And so much more!

Find out more at [cvctx.com/about-us](https://cvctx.com/about-us).



## GIG-CERTIFIED PROVIDER

## Mark your Calendar

The offices of Colorado Valley Communications will be closed on **Monday, May 29**, in observance of Memorial Day.

## Annual Meeting

The Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative Annual Meeting will be held on **Thursday, May 11**. Visit [cvctx.com](https://cvctx.com) or our Facebook page for the latest updates and details.



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

# DELIBERATE DETOUR

## EXPLORING TEXAS' FUNKY FESTIVALS AND CURIOUS ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

Story by ANNE BRALY

**T**he state of Texas is full of fun and wonderful people who love putting together festivals that make you scratch your head in wonder.

“Festivals, small towns and big celebrations are a winning combination in Texas,” says Tim Fennell, director for Travel Texas. “The state is known for being big and bold, and our festivals are

no exception. They reflect the diversity of Texas’ history, geography and culture, and travelers embrace that uniqueness.”

Some festivals around the Lone Star State started decades ago, as celebrations of the harvest or just as a way to bring people together. Whatever the reason, Texas has an abundance of festivals, each with its share of delights and many that

are out of the ordinary. “Travelers visiting the state will have no shortage of fun at our quirky annual events,” Tim says.

### HERE ARE JUST A FEW:

Think mermaids are just a myth? Don’t say that to the townsfolk of San Marcos, where the beauties of the sea are celebrated each year at the **Mermaid Capital of Texas Fest**. The town is known for the funky spin it puts on many things, and the festival is no exception. You never know what eclectic floats will appear at the kickoff parade. Then hang around for the street fair. It lasts all day and includes live music, a juried art market and food vendors galore.

- ▶ Where: Around the grounds of the Historic Hayes County Courthouse
- ▶ When: Saturday, Sept. 23
- ▶ Information: [visitsanmarcos.com](http://visitsanmarcos.com)

Prepare your palate for a hot time at the **Dallas ZestFest**. Anyone with a zest for life — and an appreciation of the hotter things on the menu — is invited to indulge

**ABOVE:** Mermaids gather at the Historic Hayes County Courthouse each year for the Mermaid Capital of Texas Fest.

**LEFT:** You never know who you’ll find riding a float in the kickoff parade for the mermaid festival in San Marcos.

Photos courtesy of Visit San Marcos



in a day of hot fun. ZestFest brings together some of the country's spiciest food exhibitors and products. There's also music, food samplings, cooking demonstrations, contests and a full lineup of events to add a little spice to your life.

- When: Sept. 29-Oct. 1
- Where: Dallas Market Hall, 2200 N. Stemmons Parkway
- Information: [zestfest.net](http://zestfest.net)

Always had a hankering to dance the polka? You can! You can also eat Czech food, tap your foot to the sounds of live bands — 17 of them in all — and totally immerse yourself in everything polka at the **National Polka Festival** in Ennis. It's a celebration of a culture that grew from a small hometown event to a nationally recognized one.

- When: May 26-28
- Where: Various venues around Ennis
- Information: [nationalpolkafestival.com](http://nationalpolkafestival.com)

The Wild West comes alive each year at the **Billy the Kid Festival** in the historic town of San Elizario, right outside El Paso. Grab your partner and watch as some of the West's most notorious outlaws break out of jail under a hail of bullets. It's a chance to step back in time for a day of Western adventure and events surrounding Billy the Kid's visit to this old Texas town in 1876. There'll be live music, plenty of food, cultural dancing and an original play, "Billy the Kid: 1876."

- When: June 2-4
- Where: 1556 San Elizario Road
- Information: [visittelpaso.com](http://visittelpaso.com)

## ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

There's a moment during every great road trip when you're driving along, completely unaware of what lies ahead, and you see something that makes you ask, "What is that doing here?" Here are four attractions along Texas roadsides worth stopping to see.

**Beaumont** has a piece of history from the Disney Corporation — a Dalmatian-spotted fire hydrant. Standing 24 feet high,

the hydrant is outside the entrance to The Fire Museum of Texas with its exhibits of bravery, heroism and the evolution of fire-fighting. Of note: The spots on the oversized hydrant are actually trademarked by Disney.

- Where to see it: 400 Walnut St., Beaumont

Retired Southern Pacific Railroad worker John Milkovich found an inventive siding for his house in **Houston**. He worked 18 years to cover his entire home and fence with flattened beer cans to create what is known as the Beer Can House. It's now open for weekend tours. Of note: "Ripley's Believe It Or Not" estimates it took more than 50,000 beer cans to complete the Beer Can House facade.

- Where to see it: 222 Malone St., Houston
- For tickets: [full.orangeshow.org](http://full.orangeshow.org)

**Rockport** has always been known for great fishing, and now, after four years of construction, it's landed a 6,000-pound blue crab that looks out over the waters of Little Bay. It's the third monstrous crab to grace the shoreline of Rockport, the other two having been destroyed by harsh weather conditions. It's a landmark and a favorite place for photos before heading out to wet a line or enjoy some of the fresh seafood in area restaurants.

- Where to find it: The Big Blue Crab lives at 1522 E. Laurel St.
- To learn more about the history of Big Blue Crabs in Rockport, visit [rockportfun.com](http://rockportfun.com).



Photo courtesy of Cultural Heritage Society



Photo courtesy of National Polka Festival



Photo courtesy of Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau



Photo courtesy of Discover Odessa

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Colorful dresses and traditional dances highlight the Billy the Kid Festival in San Elizario.

The National Polka Festival brings 17 polka bands to Ennis.

A 24-foot fire hydrant, complete with Dalmatian spots, greets visitors to The Fire Museum of Texas. Outside Odessa there is a nearly life-size replica of the ancient Stonehenge.

You don't have to travel to England to see Stonehenge. Just make your way to **Odessa** where you'll find a nearly life-size replica of the ancient structure with the same diameter as the original, and it's astronomically correct. It's an attraction for anyone interested in learning a little more about the beliefs of the ancient Druids.

- Where to find it: Preston Smith Road nestled in between the Home Depot and McDonald's. 🗺️

# SALUTE TO

## Texas Heroes Museum honors all who served

Story by JEREMY WOOD

**M**uch like the building that houses its burgeoning collection, the purpose and intent of the Texas Heroes Museum have undergone more than their share of twists and turns.

The striking Victorian Gothic architecture and intricate stonework that now welcomes tourists and history enthusiasts to downtown La Grange was erected in 1883 to serve as the Fayette County Jail. It served that purpose for the next 102 years. After that, it was used as an office by the chamber of commerce and then as Main Street's visitor center.

In 2013, a group of businessmen met with a private gun collector, intending to display his treasures in the old jail after the visitor center moved to another historic building in town. The deal with the gun collector fell through, and Charles Murray, one of the original organizers, came up with a new plan.

"We moved into the old jail September of 2016 with basically nothing to display because the gun collector backed out," Murray says. "I looked at our mission statement and it didn't say anything about guns. It said 'honoring Texans who had served.' Our purpose was reborn, and our mission became clear."

As the museum manager, Murray has made great strides in preserving the memories of Texans who made — and continue to make — sacrifices in the name of freedom. World War II alone saw more than 3,000 people from Fayette County serve in the military, but the museum's collection encapsulates much more than that.

"We have decided to use 'sacrifice' as our definition of a hero," he says. "We have the stories of people and the stories of the different conflicts from the Texas Revolution to today's military actions."

Soldiers aren't the only heroes honored within the museum's walls. It also pays tribute to the sacrifices of Moses Austin and Texas' "Old 300" settlers, law enforcement, firefighters, first responders and paramedics. "The stories they've got helped bring the museum to life," Murray says. "We've got printed stories about famous people like Audie Murphy and Chris Kyle."

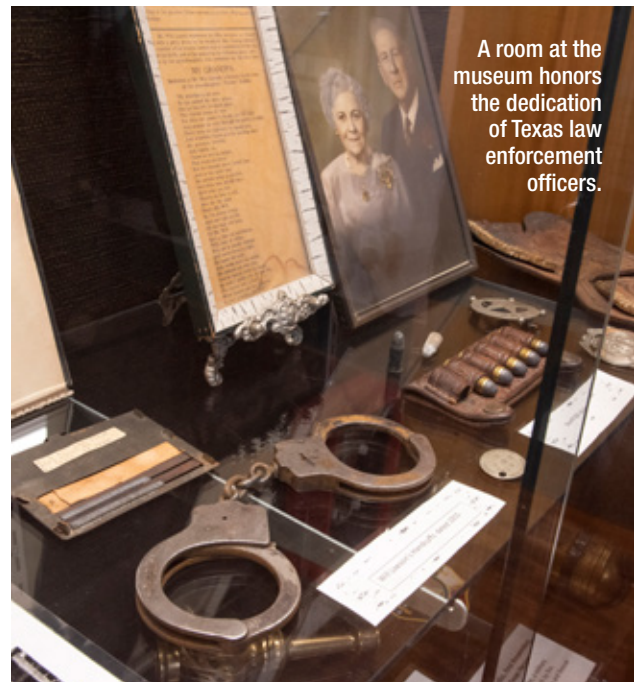
The museum also houses a large military history reference library. And while the original agreement with the gun collector misfired, Murray worked to tell the story of weaponry's role in preserving freedom with a large assortment of replicas — from flintlocks to a .50-caliber machine gun. "I wanted to show how weapons evolved to modern day," he says.

Murray is on the lookout for volunteers to serve as museum docents and guide visitors through the collection. [CVCTX](#)



Retired Army Lt. Col. Glenn Altwein leads a tour of the museum.

Photos by Terry Hagerity





# SACRIFICE



Retired Navy Adm. J. Weldon Koenig commanded a nuclear submarine.

## J. WELDON KOENIG

- Born in western Fayette County, Koenig moved to La Grange as a teenager to continue his education.
- He joined the Naval ROTC program at University of Texas at Austin. His first assignment in the Navy after graduation was on an icebreaker ship, and he decided to apply to submarine school.
- He rose through the ranks in the Navy and was eventually named commander of the nuclear submarine USS Simon Bolivar. "I never in my life thought that I would do something like that," he says, calling the command the highlight of his career.
- Koenig retired in 1989 as a rear admiral after an illustrious 31-year career and returned home to Texas with his wife, Nancy, now deceased. He has three children and two grandchildren and is now the chairman emeritus for the UT Midshipmen's Foundation.



Retired Army Lt. Col. Glenn Altwein displays one of the uniforms he wore during his long career.

## GLENN ALTWEIN

- Altwein joined the Texas Army National Guard at age 17, requiring his mother's permission to enlist.
- After a 14-year career as an enlisted man, he accepted an officer's commission and served an additional 22 years. He served through Operation Desert Storm and retired as a lieutenant colonel.
- As an elementary schooler, Altwein idolized Texas soldier Audie Murphy and got to meet him twice during his military career, a personal highlight.
- Altwein has been extensively involved in the community in retirement, including arranging military funerals in the La Grange area. He is currently a docent and the vice president of the Heroes Museum board.



Retired Air Force Capt. Dick Peck is pictured with his pilot's uniform. Peck flew multiple combat missions during the Vietnam War.

## DICK PECK

- Peck was born in 1940 near Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida.
- He joined the Air Force after serving in ROTC in college and went to flight school in Laredo. "Flight school was probably the most fun year of my life," he says.
- Peck volunteered to fly the F-100 Super-Sabre in Vietnam. "Most tactical fighter bases in the country had F-100s at the time, and many young pilots wanted to fly them," he says. He ended up flying them for almost 300 missions, earning one Silver Star and two Distinguished Flying Crosses, along with 16 air medals.
- After Vietnam and six years in the Air Force, Peck left as a captain and became a commercial pilot. He retired after 32 years with commercial airlines, including National, Pan American and Delta.
- He later became a flight instructor and has been honored with the Federal Aviation Administration's Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award for his more than 60 years and 30,000 hours of flying without an accident or incident.

Visit [texasheroesmuseum.com](https://texasheroesmuseum.com) for current hours of operation and additional information.



# HOW DOES YOUR ONLINE GARDEN GROW?

## Digital communities revolutionizing backyard agriculture

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

**S**tarting a garden in your own backyard isn't something you have to do alone. While you're unlikely to find help digging holes, putting in plants or moving mulch on the internet, you can find countless friends online to offer advice and support.

Online communities have revolutionized gardening, according to Adriana Copaceanu, whose 2016 gardening blog grew into the website backyardgardenlover.com. More than 100,000 gardeners also turn to its Facebook page where they can exchange tips and experiences. "By making it easier for people to find information and connect with others online, gardening communities have made gardening more accessible and appealing to a wider audience," Adriana says. "In the last few years, the amount of information online on gardening and resources has absolutely skyrocketed."

More than half the country — 55% of American households — gardens, according to findings by Scotts Miracle-Gro. The average garden measures 600 square feet, and tomatoes are the most common plant grown, appearing in about 85% of U.S. gardens. In addition to providing produce for a healthier diet, gardening has many other positive impacts including stress relief, promoting exercise, fighting dementia and staving off loneliness, to name just a few.

### CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES

While gardening has always offered opportunities for interactions at garden centers and at farmers markets, the online gardening community now presents limitless forums for collaboration. "I get daily emails with questions," Adriana says. "Sometimes, it's a quick answer, and other times I need to do some research because I'm not familiar with their specific location."

More than 5 million gardening enthusiasts have forged connections with other green thumbs through Reddit, a website that's home to thousands of online communities where users can anonymously discuss their interests and hobbies, seek support and share tips. They can also post photos and find immediate answers to questions like "I just pulled this dead squirrel out of my garlic patch, can I still eat the garlic in the summer?" or "Is this snake dangerous?"

"As the size of the gardening community has grown, there are more dumb and wrong answers; unfortunately, that's the nature of a platform that encourages participation," Reddit contributor kirbs2001 says. "The flip side is that more people are gardening and want to share what they know, or think they know, with others, and that's cool."

Still others just want a place to enjoy the outdoors in a community setting. "The gardening season is pretty short where I am, so





## ONLINE RESOURCES ARE IN FULL BLOOM

### Gardening apps

- \* **From Seed to Spoon Gardening** — Created by new gardeners struggling to find all the right information for growing their first gardens, this covers it all.
- \* **SunCalc** — This is a sun-finder for garden placement. Enter an address and the app will tell you where to plant.
- \* **Homegrown with Bonnie Plants** — America's most-trusted vegetable company provides all the answers to questions about what to grow for specific conditions.
- \* **Planty** — Not sure what you've grown? This cute, simple app will identify and offer care tips for plants.
- \* **Garden Answers** — This extensive identification app provides garden and horticulture experts at your fingertips. The app identifies more than 20,000 plants and answers more than 200,000 commonly asked care questions.

### Websites

- \* The National Gardening Association's **garden.com** offers courses, gardening guides, a database and much more.
- \* The Old Farmer's Almanac has tips, daily facts and information, and other tried-and-true suggestions at **almanac.com**.
- \* Through its website **ahsgardening.org**, the American Horticulture Society promotes healthy, sustainable gardening practices and the critical role of plants.

*“In the last few years, the amount of information online on gardening and resources has absolutely skyrocketed.”*

— Adriana Copaceanu, founder of [backyardgardenlover.com](http://backyardgardenlover.com)

I like to live vicariously through other people's gardens to get me through winter, lol,” says Calamity 0o0, another Reddit member who's active in the site's garden community.

Other gardening websites — including [gardening-forums.com](http://gardening-forums.com), [gardenweb.com](http://gardenweb.com) and [gardenstew.com](http://gardenstew.com) — offer all kinds of answers to all kinds of questions. Gardeners can also find like-minded friends on Twitter, and if it's easier to learn from videos, YouTube is for you.

The holy book of gardening and all things outdoors-related, The Old Farmer's Almanac, now offers a comprehensive website, [almanac.com](http://almanac.com), full of valuable tips, along with a daily newsletter. The National Gardening Association formed in 1971 simply to promote gardening, and is now the largest

social media website dedicated exclusively to gardening. The group's [garden.org](http://garden.org) offers online tools “to help gardeners connect, teach, share and trade with each other.”

Websites are great resources, but apps truly can be a gardener's best friend. First-time gardeners will find everything they need to start their plots through the Seed to Spoon app. Based on a home address, the SunCalc app designates the perfect location for plants to thrive, and Homegrown with Bonnie Plants has a “Help Me Choose” section to help gardeners determine which plants to grow, as well as one to help schedule tasks like sowing, watering, weeding and fertilizing.

So, while you may be on your own physically, you'll never lack for company along your gardening journey. 🌱



# A grand ole time

## Fayette County Opry keeps country music alive in La Grange

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Photos by Terry Hagerly



Fayette County Country Music Opry house band includes, from left Jimmy Rohde on drums, Duane Wavra on bass, John Dujka on keyboard, Mark Lehmann on lead guitar, sound engineer Chip Wied and Craig Schmidt on steel guitar.



Fayette County Country Music Opry volunteers, from left, Gloria Heinrich, Donella Dopslauf Cernosek, Cathy Walla and Patsy Zbranek help keep the music playing.

The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville may be several hundred miles to the east, but local residents have their own haven for classic country music at the Fayette County Country Music Opry. Started in 2001 by a group of dedicated music fans, the event puts on live country music acts each month at the Knights of Columbus Hall in La Grange.

Patsy Zbranek traces the Opry's origins back to the Post Oak Inn, where she remembers listening to her favorite country songs with friends like Sonny Mazoch, Bert Blaha and Jack Dopslauf Cernosek and his wife, Donella. They all agreed classic country music was worth preserving. "In my opinion, what you hear at the country music awards isn't the real country music," Zbranek says. "It's not what most of us grew up with. I guess that's why we've continued to do the Opry. Most of our clientele is older people, and as they leave, they always thank us."

### AFFORDABLE FUN

At first, the organizers tried hosting a couple of country music dances. But it wasn't until they traveled to Nashville and

convinced Jett Williams, the daughter of Hank Williams Sr., to play a show then the Fayette County Country Music Opry took off. That was in 2001, and the music hasn't stopped since. While the ticket price has risen slightly over the years from \$3 to \$8, the Opry still offers people a cheap night out with quality entertainment and a chance to be part of their community.

"I've had people tell us that we could go up to \$10 and they would still come. But we try to keep it so that we just make enough to survive," says Zbranek. "For elderly people, there isn't a lot to do. But they'll be at the door here at 5:30, then talk and mingle until the Opry starts at 7. It's just a night out for people."

While most of the performers play for free, all proceeds from the monthly Opry, less expenses, are used to put on a special show. Patsy and other Opry volunteers like Cathy Walla, Donella Dopslauf Cernosek and Gloria Heinrich save up proceeds from the monthly shows to put on a special anniversary concert each February.

This year, the show featured George Strait tribute artist Derek Spence. "If you went to see Derek Spence somewhere else,



The Fayette County Country Music Opry invited George Strait impersonator Derek Spencer for a fun-filled evening earlier this year.

it would probably cost you \$25 per person to get in," says Zbranek. "So it's a special thing and just an awesome show."

The Opry also puts on a special tribute to Hank Williams Sr. each September and a Christmas show in December. The Opry takes place on the third Monday of each month with visiting artists playing alongside the house band. 📺



# DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

# Making connections

## Outside Plant Department brings fiber to the customer's door

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

When he first arrived at Colorado Valley in 1998, Greg Janda was busy installing a very different kind of internet service for the cooperative's customers. At the time, people were impressed with what were then blazing-fast speeds of 56 Kbps.

"Everyone was happy with dial-up," Greg says. "You'd have the modem where you heard that tone on the back side of your computer and that was like, 'Wow!' Now, we're installing Gig fiber. It's come a long way."

Now, in his role as team lead for the Outside Plant Department, Greg is responsible for installing service that is over 600 times faster than that dial-up connection. On any given day, he and his team of five other technicians might be called on to install high-speed fiber, DSL service or wireless internet at a customer's home. "A lot of customers these days work from home, so we want to make sure Colorado Valley gives them a good experience," Greg says. "A lot of us guys strive for perfection.

We treat the house like it's our own. We tell customers we don't want to have to come back. We want to make sure everything's in good working condition when we leave."

Having a strong understanding of the hardware is essential for OSP technicians. But often, it's just as important that they're able to help customers better understand the service they are providing. That process can include walking them through how a virtual private network, or VPN, operates or explaining the difference between a wired internet connection and Wi-Fi.

"Our network has changed, and so has the world. We're so internet-dependent now it's like the world stops if the internet stops," Greg says. "So, if we have a customer and all they want to do is get on Facebook to keep up with their family, we'll show them there's more out there but that they also need to be conscious about their security."

The OSP team also handles troubleshooting, which is often as

simple as helping customers understand what can compromise their internet speed. In some cases, slow internet may be the result of a spotty Wi-Fi router or too many devices drawing on the same connection. "We have customers who say their internet is slow, but they have 20 devices connected to it," Greg says. "So, it can be about just getting them the right info to understand how the internet works and what they need to use it correctly throughout the day."

With all those responsibilities, along with helping out wherever the central office and engineering department need their help, Greg and his team keep plenty busy. But no matter how packed his schedule gets, Greg is always proud to be able to bring such an important service to his neighbors. "I just like knowing that at the end of the day, we provide them with good, reliable service," he says. "I'm proud to put my name on that ticket, turn it in and know that customer will be satisfied with the work that we've done."



Above: CVCTX installer Chris Janacek connects an aerial service from his bucket truck.

Left: Outside Plant Team Lead Greg Janda, from left, and the broadband deployment installer/repairer team of Domonic Sanfilippo, Jonathan Cook, Rick Knape, Mike Hensel and Chris Janacek.

# Bite-size brilliance

## A not-so-spicy meatball!

**F**ew foods have the versatility that meatballs offer. They're perfect for parties served with toothpicks, but they can also be your dinner tonight served over pasta or mashed potatoes.

What makes a good meatball? Some recipes call for chicken or veal while others rely solely on ground beef. Some recipes call for frying them in a skillet while others send them straight to the oven.

No matter the approach to the finished product, most everyone can agree on one thing: Meatballs are a blessing in the culinary world all wrapped up in a ball of meat.



### SWEET-AND-SOUR MEATBALLS

#### Sauce:

- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1/3 cup pineapple juice
- 1/4 teaspoon Chinese five-spice
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch

Place the brown sugar, vinegar, ketchup, soy sauce, pineapple juice and Chinese five spice in a saucepan over medium heat. Simmer for 5 minutes or until the sugar has dissolved. Stir in cornstarch and simmer for 2 minutes more to thicken. Remove from heat and set aside.

#### Meatballs:

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 (1-pound) bag frozen meatballs
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 red or green bell pepper, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 cup diced pineapple
- 4 green onions, cut into 1-inch pieces

Place a wok or large frying pan over high heat. Add the oil and the meatballs and cook, turning every minute or so, for 4-5 minutes or until almost cooked through. Add the onion and stir-fry for another 2 minutes. Add the bell pepper and stir-fry for another minute, then add the pineapple and the sweet-and-sour sauce. Stir-fry until well combined. Remove from heat and toss in the green onion.



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## SALISBURY STEAK MEATBALLS

- 1/4 cup grated onion
- 2/3 cup panko bread crumbs
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons ground mustard
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 1/4 pounds ground beef
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (plus more, if needed)

### Gravy:

- 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 6-8 medium mushrooms, chopped
- 1/2 cup onion, sliced 1/4-inch thick
- 4-6 cloves garlic, minced

- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups beef stock
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce

In a medium bowl, combine grated onions, breadcrumbs, salt and all the remaining ingredients except the ground beef and oil. Allow the mixture to stand for 5 minutes, then add the meat and mix until just combined and divide the mixture into about 20 meatballs.

Add oil in a large skillet and heat to medium-high. Add the meatballs in a single layer and cook for about 10 minutes, flipping halfway through, until all sides brown evenly. Remove to a plate. If needed, add additional oil and cook any

remaining meatballs the same way.

For the gravy, add 1 tablespoon of butter to the skillet. When melted, add mushrooms and cook 3-4 minutes. Add the onions and saute for 3 minutes, add the garlic and let cook for 30 seconds or until fragrant. Add the remaining butter to the skillet. When melted, add the flour and stir to combine and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Gradually pour in the beef stock, still stirring constantly. Stir in Worcestershire sauce, Dijon and soy sauce and simmer for 3 minutes or until it thickens slightly. Add the meatballs to the skillet along with any juices that may have collected on the plate and cook for 4 minutes. If the gravy thickens too much, add a splash of water. Taste and adjust seasonings as desired.

## BUTTERY CHICKEN MEATBALLS

- 1/2 medium onion, grated
- 1/2 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 1/2 pounds ground chicken
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- 2 tablespoons freshly chopped parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

### Butter sauce:

- 1/2 cup butter
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon freshly chopped parsley

Mix the onion and bread-crumbs together in a large

mixing bowl. Let the mixture sit for 2-3 minutes. Add the rest of the meatball ingredients, excluding the oil, to the bowl. Mix everything together well. Form the mixture into meatballs.

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the meatballs, working in batches if needed. Cook for 2-3 minutes per side until well browned. Transfer the cooked meatballs to a plate and set aside.

For the sauce, add the butter to the skillet, then stir in garlic and ginger and cook for 1 minute. Add the tomato sauce, tomato paste, garam masala, smoked paprika, turmeric, cumin, coriander and chicken broth. Bring the sauce to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes or until slightly thickens. Stir in the cream. Return meatballs to skillet and let them simmer in the sauce until heated through. Garnish with parsley and serve. 🍴





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