

# CONNECTION



**Adventures await**

Bluff Creek Ranch designed for fun

**SAVING  
SANCTUARY**

**GOURMET GADGET**





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Take a BOLD step

### A new toolkit opens doors


Summer is finally here! That means barbecues, days at the pool and, if you have kids, reminding them to tackle their dreaded summer reading list before it is too late.

As they are doing their homework, I have an assignment for you. But don't worry, it's only a dozen pages.

The past few years have shown the world that broadband access is a necessity, not a luxury. As the demand and investment in broadband increases across rural America, so does the need for a skilled workforce to build and maintain these broadband networks.

NTCA's Smart Communities program recently teamed up with the National Rural Education Association to create the Broadband Opportunities and Leadership Development (BOLD) K-12 Career Awareness Toolkit, which is chock-full of new and creative ways to engage students and get them excited about careers in the broadband industry. Whether your student is interested in computer science, engineering and even accounting or marketing, there are opportunities for everyone in the broadband industry.

From guidance on organizing hands-on internships and site visits, to working with schools to develop curricula, or even ways to get involved with local esports and robotics teams, this toolkit is a wonderful resource for parents, educators and community-based broadband providers alike.

Summer may be in full swing, but back-to-school season will be here before you know it. Make sure you add the Smart Rural Community K-12 Career Awareness Toolkit to your summer reading list today! Read it here: [ntca.org/BOLDToolkit](https://ntca.org/BOLDToolkit). 




## Avoid QR mischief

### Scammers co-opt this handy code

QR codes — it stands for Quick Response — pop up frequently. TV ads, restaurant menus and much more rely on these little squares of blocky lines to quickly link a smartphone user to handy information, a download or as a way to digitally send money to someone.

The FBI, however, has warned that cybercriminals may tamper with the codes. The FBI offers a few tips so you can take advantage of QR codes while staying safe and secure:

- After scanning a QR code, check the URL to make sure it is the site you want. A malicious domain name may be similar to the intended URL but with typos or a misplaced letter.
- Be cautious when entering login, personal or financial information.
- If scanning a physical QR code, ensure the code shows no signs of tampering, such as a sticker placed over the original.
- Do not download an app from a QR code.
- If you receive an email asking you to complete a payment through a QR code, call the requesting company to verify. Look up the company's number on a trusted site — don't use a number from the email.
- Do not download a QR code scanner app — the built-in phone camera is a safer option.
- If you receive a QR code you believe to be from someone you know, contact them through a known number or address to verify.
- Avoid making payments through a site navigated to from a QR code. Instead, manually enter a known and trusted URL to complete the payment. 



# Seeding the future

## THE CLOUD UPLIFTS EDUCATION

The arrival of fast, reliable internet service in rural areas sparked innovation across businesses, health care providers and government resources, leading to more options and richer services. When it comes to education, how students interact now with schools and each other has evolved at a similarly blistering pace.

First, there was the growth of cloud-based services — multiple remote networked computers that handle storage and processing of information. Then, since the cloud was doing the heavy computing work, an entire class of low-power, lower-cost devices sprang up.

Together, this combo — low-cost Chromebooks, as well as similar devices, and cloud-based tools — have changed how many students learn.

**Collaboration:** The cloud allows students to work together on group projects after school or other times they're not physically in the same room. Cloud-based storage systems, such as Google Drive, Microsoft's OneDrive and others, allow the creation and sharing of documents, spreadsheets and presentations in real time — you can see the work of other members of your team as they're making changes.

Collaboration and brainstorming are easier than ever.

**Accessibility:** With their Chromebooks or similar devices students can access their work from any location, at any time. All their work is saved on the cloud, making it easily accessible and organized.

**Efficiency:** In many school systems, teachers use the cloud to grade assignments more efficiently and even easily share the results with parents. Students might receive immediate feedback, allowing them to improve their work and better understand the material.

**Personalization:** These cloud-based systems create the option for personalized learning experiences. Students can access online resources and tools that cater to their specific needs and learning styles. For families that home-school, online communities with similar educational interests and other resources also become more accessible.

**Productivity:** Thanks to the cloud and low-cost computing devices, students can be more productive, organized and collaborative. And because the tools are far less expensive than traditional computers, more people can affordably access them. 📱

### Looking ahead to a new school year?

*Make sure you're prepared.*

- **The essential computer:** If your student needs a basic laptop to do homework and access online learning platforms, try the Lenovo Flex 5i Chromebook. "It's comparatively inexpensive, and it offers fast performance plus an excellent keyboard and trackpad. The Flex 5i is also compact and light, and its 1080p touchscreen is vivid and bright," according to a review by Wirecutter, a website operated by The New York Times offering reviews of a range of devices. Prices vary, but expect to pay about \$350.
- **Quality web cam:** From education to work, video calls are common. If your computer isn't already equipped, consider adding a camera. The Logitech C270 HD, often available for less than \$30, is a good choice for students required to attend lessons online. It delivers quality and clarity.

# Is your Wi-Fi getting walloped?

Your home network might be busier than you think

**W**ould you mind answering a question for me — how many devices connect to your Wi-Fi? It may be more than you realize.



**KELLY ALLISON**  
General Manager

Consider starting in the room where you watch television. Do you have a smart TV or a device like a Roku that lets you stream services such as Netflix? If you're streaming music or podcasts, do you have a smart speaker like the ones from Google, Amazon or Apple? If you enjoy online gaming, please count those devices, too.

Next, let's move to the kitchen. Many appliances — everything from refrigerators to pressure cookers — have the option of using your Wi-Fi to connect to an app. Even some outdoor grills let you check in wirelessly. While you're thinking about the outside, do you have a security system, smart locks or smart devices? They use Wi-Fi, too.

Also, don't forget about the major systems of your home, such as heating and cooling. Smart thermostats can help you customize settings to your needs and schedules while helping you save money. Even some water heaters have smart options so you can monitor and manage usage.

Finally, count the big ones. How many computers connect to your Wi-Fi? What about tablets like iPads? Does your phone use Wi-Fi for calling or as a speed boost over the cellular connection?

The numbers add up, don't they? In fact, there are studies that indicate the typical U.S. household has more than 20 Wi-Fi-connected devices.

Just a few years ago, many of the now-common devices simply didn't exist. I suspect if you do this same exercise a few years from now you'll find more devices, and likely even entirely new classes of technology, using your home network.


This connected world is the reason we've committed to bringing you a fast, reliable internet connection, one not only capable of managing your needs today but also powerful enough to accommodate the demands of tomorrow. It's the type of forward-thinking innovation and investment at the heart of how CVCTX has always operated.

You see, the more connected devices added to your network, the more robust it needs to be. Imagine that instead of cables moving bits, your internet is a large water pipe. Then, each device on your network is a faucet. Every faucet you turn on reduces available volume and water pressure. Also, the bigger the faucet, the more resources that specific pipe uses.

That last point becomes critical when considering your internet service — not all devices are equal. An intense gaming session or uploading large work files requires more speed and bandwidth than someone streaming music on a smartphone or checking in on social media. So, it's important to match your internet service not only to the number of devices connected to your network, but also to how they're used.

Did you count more connections than you anticipated? Well, if this exercise left you with questions about your service or what you need to do to get the most out of your internet connection, our team at CVCTX is always available to help.

Find out exactly how much bandwidth your family needs by using the bandwidth calculator at [cvctx.com/internet](http://cvctx.com/internet).

Thank you for letting us serve you. 

Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by CVCTX, ©2023. It is distributed without charge to all customers of the Cooperative.



Colorado Valley Communications  
P.O. Box 130  
4915 S. U.S. Highway 77  
979-242-5911  
800-242-5911  
La Grange, TX 78945

Office hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Monday through Friday  
24-hour technical support  
1-877-452-9035

Like us on Facebook  
Follow us on Instagram



## 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).

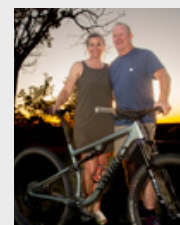
Customers in several parts of our service area can access fiber to the home, while expansion for access is in the works for other locations.

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:



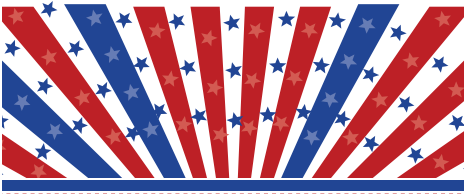
## On the Cover:



Jeannine and Breck Powers invested in Bluff Creek Ranch, continuing the property's mountain biking traditions with a new approach for adventure. See story Page 8.

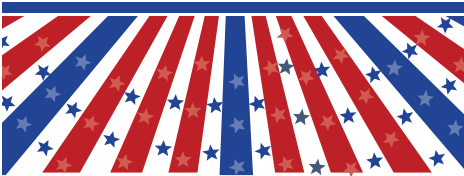
Photo by Matt Ledger





## Happy Independence Day

The CVCTX offices will be closed on Tuesday, July 4, in observance of the holiday.



CVCTX General Manager Kelly Allison and Board President Norman Schultz congratulate the winners of the cooperative's annual scholarships.



In 1953, Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative was formed to help keep our initial rural customers connected by corded telephones and party lines. Much has changed in those 70 years. Serving as your broadband and voice service provider remains our top priority for Fayette, Lavaca, Colorado and Lee counties.

## Congrats!

Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative awarded \$60,000 in scholarships to members of the Class of 2023 from high schools within the cooperative's service area. Each scholarship recipient received \$5,000.

This year's scholarship winners are:

### Fayetteville High School

Mackenzie Poncik

### Flatonia High School

Aidan Miksch

### Hallettsville High School

Morgan Gray

### La Grange High School

Kourtney Burton, Anna Follin, Charles Herbrich, Kylee Kelley, Ellee Sodolak and Campbell Youens

### Round Top-Carmine High School

Charlee Wessels

### Schulenburg High School

Jenna Matura

### Weimar High School

Dakota Ford



## EXTENDED SUMMER HOURS

Friday, June 2 through Thursday, July 27

**Monday to Thursday:** 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

**Fridays:** 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.



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



# SHIVER ME TIMBERS!

Family fun sets sail at pirate-themed attractions



Walk the plank aboard the Red Dragon in Port Aransas for a memorable afternoon spent as a pirate.

Photo courtesy of Port Aransas Tourist Bureau

Story by ANNE BRALY

There's something about spending a day of swashbuckling fun that fascinates kids and brings out the child in many adults. It's a chance to live out the life of Peter Pan aboard the Sea Devil as he battles the dastardly Captain Hook. Or, sail into the world of Blackbeard and imagine yourself swaggering across the deck of a wooden ship beneath billowing sails.

Stepping into the pirate world — even just for an hour or two — “gives people the chance to swagger and growl and be unapologetically bold,” says Ol’ Chumbucket, aka John Baur, a man who lives the pirate life in Tacoma, Washington, where he writes books about the daring and brutish men of the high seas. Some of his tomes include “Sails and Sorcery,” “The Pirate Life” and “Pirattitude: So You Wanna Be A Pirate?”

Why do pirates have us hooked? From Blackbeard to Black

Bart Roberts, Hollywood has helped fuel our interest in their vagabond way of life. John says there's an enduring appeal to the freedom pirates experienced when roaming the high seas. “They went their own way and made their own rules,” he says.

So matey, it's time for you to get your pirate on. And yo-ho-ho, Texas has a bounty of places to do it.

## GALVESTON PIRATE MUSEUM

*Galveston*

Pirates and privateers roamed along the Texas coast for many years. Names pop up throughout history — most notably the notorious Jean Lafitte who found the islands just off the coast to be the perfect hideaway as he plied the waters of the Gulf of Mexico waiting for his next prey.



Today, his story, as well as those of other colorful figures, comes to life at the Galveston Pirate Museum. Spend some time learning about the history of pirates — how they came to be and how they met their fates. Resident pirates roam the museum to take your experience to a new level, and don't forget a trip to the gift shop to take some treasures home.

- ▶ Admission: \$15, children under 5 are free
- ▶ Information: [galvestonpiratemuseum.com](http://galvestonpiratemuseum.com)

## PIRATE ADVENTURE WEEKEND TEXAS RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL

*Todd Mission*

The Golden Age of Piracy spanned approximately 1650-1726, but it comes back to life each year for one exciting weekend of the Texas Renaissance Festival, held for eight weekends every fall since 1974 in the central Texas town of Todd Mission. The festival will run Oct. 7-Nov. 26 this year, with the Pirate Adventure scheduled to set sail Oct. 21-22.

The pirate-themed weekend was inspired by Peter Pan, says festival marketing director Todd Wold. "Then, of course, you have 'Pirates of the Caribbean' that has really helped keep the theme alive and kicking," he says.

Hailed as the biggest pirate party north of the Gulf of Mexico, the weekendlong

event is filled with pirates roaming the festival grounds in traditional garb, along with songs of life on the sea — including a singalong at the Sea Devil Tavern. Visitors can also take part in a fish and chips-eating contest and a costume contest to show off their best buccaneer duds. "People love to dress the part here just because it's fun," Todd says.

It's one of the most popular of all the themed weekends at the Renaissance festival and is sure to bring out the pirate in you.

- ▶ Admission: \$10-\$25
- ▶ Information: [texrenfest.com](http://texrenfest.com)

## RED DRAGON PIRATE CRUISE

*Port Aransas*

On the deck of the Red Dragon, the sound and light show begins when 10 computer-controlled cannons fire, allowing travelers a taste of a 17th century high-seas battle. A cruise aboard this pirate ship offers two hours of swashbuckling fun — everything from faux sword fighting to treasure hunting. You may even learn more about the life of a pirate. If the summer heat gets too hot, cool down and fill up at ye' old Slurp and Burp Pub. During the summer, there are two cruises daily, at noon and again at 3:30 p.m. During the offseason, advance booking is available.

- ▶ Admission: \$40 for kids 3-12 and \$50 for adults
- ▶ Information: [reddragonpiratecruises.com](http://reddragonpiratecruises.com)



Photo courtesy of Red Dragon Pirate Cruises

A modern-day sword fight aboard the Red Dragon that sets sail from Port Aransas.

## THE PIRATE ADVENTURE: CHAPTER III ESCAPE ROOM

*Arlington*

Band together with friends and family and use your collective wits to escape a dark fate in this pirate-themed escape room. Your group's adventure begins with you tied up, blindfolded and locked inside the brig of a ship by Blackbeard, the one-legged terror of the seas. But you're not alone. There's also a bomb in the brig, and your team has just one hour to devise an escape. It's a fun way to entertain everyone from ages 5 and up.

- ▶ Admission: \$140 for four players, \$35 for each additional player
- ▶ Information: [thesecretchambers.com](http://thesecretchambers.com) and follow the links to The Pirate Adventure: Chapter III

## PIRATES' COVE WATER PARK

*Burleson*

Pirates' Cove makes for an exciting day splashing and sliding from a pirate-themed tower. With 11 waterslides, two waterfalls, a long lazy river and shaded indoor games to escape the sun and heat, it's a place to spend a fun-filled day with the family.

- ▶ Admission: \$22.99 for senior citizens and kids under 42 inches tall, \$28.99 for adults and children under the age of 2 are free
- ▶ Information: [piratescovefunzone.com](http://piratescovefunzone.com)



Festivalgoers dress in their finest pirate attire for the costume contest during Pirate Adventure weekend at the Texas Renaissance Festival.

Photo courtesy of Texas Renaissance Festival



A man wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, dark shorts, a white helmet, and blue sunglasses is riding a bright green mountain bike on a dirt trail. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a lush green forest with tall trees and dense foliage. The trail is a light brown dirt path.

Jose García grins as he takes another lap at Bluff Creek Ranch.

Photos courtesy of Bluff Creek Ranch

# SWITCHING GEARS

Mountain bikes, family and longhorns rule at Warda's Bluff Creek Ranch

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

On 110 acres roughly between Austin and Houston in the foothills of the Hill Country, Bluff Creek Ranch is the mountain bike destination owned by Jeannine and Breck Powers.

Getting outside and staying active has long been a passion of the Powers family, who lives in Houston but regularly escapes to the country. The real estate investors purchased Bluff Creek in June

2020 and have continued its decades-long tradition of offering bikers, hikers and campers of all ages and abilities a natural oasis.

"It's our passion as a family to create that environment," Jeannine says. "Nothing makes us happier than when someone sends me a message like I got earlier this week that said, 'We're so happy we took our family camping there last weekend. We can't wait to come back. Everybody had a great time.' With everybody becoming so urban, it's so nice to be able to offer an outdoorsy experience for people still."

## MOTOCROSS TO MOUNTAIN BIKES

Breck is a self-confessed adrenaline junkie. Originally a motocross rider, he switched to the safer mountain biking when he and Jeannine started their family. In fact, he raced at Bluff Creek in 1998, long before he knew he would own the

ranch. Today, they have three grown children, and Breck is still an avid rider.

About three years ago, Jeannine and Breck had a debate. They wanted to buy a recreational vehicle, but would it transport horses — one of Jeannine's passions — or motorcycles and bicycles?

"This was the discussion," Jeannine says. "What are we going to do now that we're in our 50s? We're self-employed with other businesses. Our kids are adults."

Mountain bikes won out. One day, Breck was headed out to ride at another mountain bike ranch with a friend, who suggested an alternate destination: Bluff Creek in Warda. It was a serendipitous choice.

## THE RIGHT FIT

Bluff Creek's original owners, Paul and Susan Nolan, had decided they were ready to sell the ranch, and Paul was spreading the news via word of mouth to mountain bikers.

Bluff Creek was also a working cattle ranch, with Texas longhorns raised for beef. Paul grilled burgers on Saturdays for anyone who wanted one, including Breck and his friend. Over burgers at a picnic table, Paul told them he wanted to sell.

Bluff Creek first opened in 1992 and it is, to Breck's knowledge, the oldest mountain bike ranch in Texas.

"It was kind of a legacy property for my family, because our businesses are in the city of Houston but we love the country," Breck says. "We have horses and different animals. It's a great place for our family to meet on the weekends, spend quality time together and get out of the city."

Bluff Creek is still home to a herd of longhorns. They freely wander the ranch.

## MEANDERING TRAIL

Bluff Creek Ranch is 80 miles from Houston and 60 miles from Austin. While it largely attracts residents of those cities, the ranch has hosted bikers and outdoor enthusiasts from just about every state, Breck says. It's also welcomed international visitors.





Minnie, a Texas longhorn, grazes in a field next to the mountain bike trails.



Bluff Creek Ranch hosts several mountain biking events, including the final race of the season for the National Intercollegiate Cycling Association.

Photos courtesy of Bluff Creek Ranch.



“Papa Squatch” — photo bombing Jeannine and Breck Powers — is the popular trail mascot of Bluff Creek Ranch.

Photo by Matt Ledger

The ranch features 9 miles of a single-track mountain bike trail that meanders through Bluff Creek’s scenic environment.

At the front of the property, it features a wooded section with gravel. It’s mostly flat and has some low creek crossings, Jeannine says. As trailgoers continue, they climb before dropping around 175 feet, where they’ll find themselves riding along tree-covered creeks. They head back up into a loblolly pine grove, populated by the rare trees and petrified wood.

“If you think of Texas, some people think of tumbleweeds and dirt,” Jeannine says. “We’ve got a little bit of everything — wooded pines, hardwoods and those

creek sections. We have one big, open loop that’s in a pasture, which right now is full of wildflowers for the spring. It’s got a lot of diversity within the 9 miles that we have.”

### RACES, RIDING AND MORE

Bluff Creek hosts about eight events each year, many of them mountain bike races. When competitors aren’t on the trails, they are open to any customers who want to ride. Jeannine says even beginners will find manageable gravel roads throughout the property. Runners, hikers and anglers also often visit.

Bluff Creek welcomes other groups — like Scouts troops — and the couple

is open to holding any event they can accommodate. The property even hosted a wedding between two mountain bikers who met at a race.

The Powers family also operates a popular vacation rental property on the ranch, and they are in the process of opening another. Primitive camping and RV hookups are available.

They are always working on improving the property, and it’s a family affair, especially on event days. Everyone pitches in, including their son, Breck Jr., and his wife, Isabel; daughter, McKenna, and her husband, Jose; and daughter, Paige.

Together, Jeannine and Breck hope to continue the Nolans’ legacy of encouraging people to get out and ride.

“Paul really had a passion for getting people on their bikes and getting people outside, and that’s something that we, as a family, have always promoted with our kids,” Jeannine says. “Being outside and being active.” 📱

*“With everybody becoming so urban, it’s so nice to be able to offer an outdoorsy experience for people still.”*

— Jeannine Powers, Bluff Creek Ranch co-owner





# FELLOW TRAVELERS

Digital communities keep travelers connected on the go

Story by DREW WOOLLEY



The internet was a much different place when Peter Daams started Travellerspoint.com with his brother, Samuel, in 2002. Back then, they were looking at sites like FriendsReunited and classmates.com for inspiration — places for people who had lost touch to reconnect.

“We wanted to make something similar for travelers who had lost track of people they met on trips,” Peter says. “Our tagline was ‘Travel Friends Reunited.’ Our initial launch included a service to help with that, as well as a very basic trip log and a basic travel diary feature.”

The site attracted some attention, but it soon became apparent that Travellerspoint wasn’t giving visitors many reasons to hang around after they had searched for or found their missing travel buddies. The next year, the brothers added travel forums to the site, with a little extra help from a Geocities project that was about to be shuttered.

“That really kick-started the community side of the site and has set the tone for how it’s grown since then,” Peter says. “The owner of that project agreed to let us take it over, so we instantly were able to kick-start our forums with a great group of users who were experts on many travel destinations.”

Today, the site has grown into one of the largest and most active travel communities on the internet with more than 1 million users sharing photos, blog posts and mapping trips. Travellerspoint and other online travel communities like it are also the perfect hubs for the growing number of travelers looking to share their adventures with other enthusiasts.



## NEW DESTINATIONS

Since the end of travel restrictions around the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans have been eager to get out and see more than their backyards. Data from the U.S. Travel Association showed that travel spending in March 2023 was up nearly 10% over the previous year and 5% over spending in 2019.

That enthusiasm shows no sign of slowing down as more than half of Americans say they plan to make travel a priority this year. But how they travel is starting to change. More travelers are putting an emphasis on finding destinations that are off the beaten path, family-friendly and environmentally responsible.

Online communities provide the perfect place for travelers to research these new adventures and get recommendations from others who have tried them. Many of these communities have migrated to social media platforms like Facebook, where they can cater to the specific needs of different groups.

Communities like Wanderful and Girls Love Travel, for example, provide a network of women who can support and even join other women in their travels. The TravelAwaits community offers stories, deals and advice geared toward travelers ages 50 and up. Digital Nomads Around the World, on the other hand, offers inspiration and advice for younger travelers living and working on the go.

While many of these groups rely on social media to maintain their communities, Peter still sees sites like his playing an important role for dedicated travelers. The rise of Facebook initially saw some of the more off-topic banter on Travellerspoint forums shift to the social media channel. But as other communities have shut down, Travellerspoint has become a haven for hardcore travelers looking for a place to discuss their passion.

“Many of those members are now very active on Travellerspoint,” Peter says. “We became something of a refuge for the people who lost their previous online communities.” 🗨️



# TRAVEL TROUPES

Whether you never stop traveling or you're planning each course for your next foodcation, you can find a community that has the same passions.

**Digital Nomads Around the World** — Digital nomads are people who travel freely while using the internet to work remotely. They tend to travel light and live out of temporary housing while they're on the move. It isn't a lifestyle for everyone, but if it piques your interest this group can answer your questions.

**TravelAwaits** — Traveling in your 50s and beyond often comes with the benefit of more time and resources to explore your interests. But it can also present unique challenges. TravelAwaits is a community by and for older travelers, so you can trust that every deal, recommendation and discussion keeps your needs in mind.

**Wanderful** — Whether you're a woman eager to explore solo or looking for a supportive group of fellow travelers, Wanderful has everything you need. Learn about safe travel practices, pick up inspiration for your next excursion or connect with other adventurous women at online and offline events.

**Food Travelist** — Everyone loves a great meal on vacation. But for some travelers, the food is the point. If that's you, Food Travelist has your back with tasty recommendations and mouth-watering photos. When your wanderlust kicks in back home, you can even find recipe ideas to take your taste buds on a trip instead.



The Cathedral Oaks Chapel is an outdoor worship space that was the first project built on the property.

# Divine intervention

## Growing the congregation and mission at Cathedral Oaks

Story by LUIS CARRASCO

A group of Methodists and Catholics got together to form a non-profit in Colorado County. No, this isn't the setup for a joke you might overhear at an accountants' convention, it's the start of an organization created from a recognition of shared values and adjacent properties.

"It's very ecumenical," says Deacon Andy Nunmaker, "which means that it's getting the Christian faith groups working together for a common cause. It was a conversation I had with Bishop Cahill when I presented the idea of the partnership, and he is the one that said it would be very ecumenical. This has been our guiding light from the beginning."

That common cause is the improvement of the Cathedral Oaks Worship and Retreat Center and the construction of the Oaks at St. Francis, a retirement home for priests. The center, which sits on 101 acres near Weimar, has served as host for retreat activities for Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Catholic and other Christian organizations for more than 35 years.

### A COMBINED EFFORT

About three years ago, Methodist-owned Cathedral Oaks approached Catholic nonprofit Perpetual Help

Ministries with a proposal for partnership. Everyone agreed it was a good idea, and the land and buildings were conveyed to the new nonprofit, which was formed under the Cathedral Oaks Worship and Retreat Center banner.

As part of the organization's bylaws, and in the spirit of cooperation on how the nonprofit is run, its board is split evenly between Catholic and Protestant members. "People say, 'What happens if you have a tie?' Well, if we have a tie, that means we have to go back and rethink the whole thing," Nunmaker says. "We usually talk it out and we get to a consensus."

Although there have been some differences between the members of both denominations, the fundamental reason why they came together holds fast.

"We're all here to praise God, and that's what we try to do. That's where our focus is," Nunmaker says.

Fundraising efforts are underway, with a goal of around \$12 million, about \$3 million of which has already been raised.

As far as the center goes, while the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down activities, people are back enjoying what makes the retreat special, including the center's amenities, the beautiful Texas landscape and serene atmosphere. "It's a way to just kind of disconnect from the outside world to get in touch with your own spirituality," Nunmaker says. "Some come there to strengthen it, some come there to find it. We make it very conducive for spiritual development. The food's pretty good, too!" 🗨️

### ABOUT THE CENTER

Cathedral Oaks Worship and Retreat Center, located at 1225 County Road 248 in Weimar, offers spiritual retreat facilities for weekend and day retreats, weddings and receptions, funerals, family gatherings and group activities. Phone: 979-263-5937. Email: cathedraloakswrc@gmail.com.

To donate, contact Deacon Andy Nunmaker via email at andynunmak@yahoo.com or call 713-504-6744, or Deacon Rusty Theut at rtheut@theutglass.com or 979-481-3306.



Cathedral Oaks Board President Clarence Littlefield accepts a donation from Kim Wescott.

Photos courtesy of Cathedral Oaks Worship and Retreat Center



# DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

## The IT crowd

### Keeping the cooperative running behind the scenes

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Colorado Valley Communications Director of Information Technology Luke Smith has always been a problem-solver. So it's no surprise that in his five years with CVCTX he's dedicated himself to fixing the numerous day-to-day problems that affect any business that relies on technology.


"I'm a technical person. I've always enjoyed the troubleshooting aspect of it," Smith says. "Getting a problem, digging into it, fixing it and making things that weren't working work again."

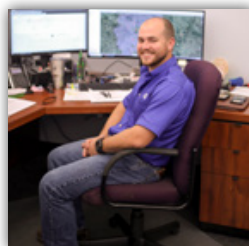
As director of IT/Network, Smith oversees every aspect of the cooperative's technology troubleshooting. That includes nine team members in addition to Smith, spread out across groups focused on wireless issues, network issues, the central office and the network operations center. Every one of those groups is important for keeping the cooperative and its staff going so they can focus on providing the best service to customers.

"It's a critical piece of a communications company — making sure the tools that employees need to make our customers happy are running the best they possibly can," Smith says. "Each day the IT/Network team supports the co-op and the employees of the co-op. Computers, server issues, email — whatever needs they have here at the co-op we'll assist in troubleshooting."

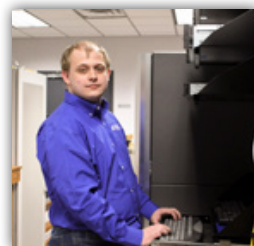
But the IT/Network department's responsibilities don't end with cooperative employees. The network operations center, or NOC, focuses specifically on customer questions. In most cases, common problems with internet or email service can be solved with a quick call to the help desk. But in situations where a more in-depth look is required, the NOC staff steps in. And there are always new obstacles to keep the team members on their toes. "Technology always throws some kind of challenge at you. Either with a new issue or a bug you haven't seen before," Smith says.

In the event that the NOC team can't resolve a problem, the issue will go directly to members of the network, wireless or other teams to deal with directly. Whether it's answering a question for a customer or supporting construction crews as they expand fiber service, Smith and his team know their work is crucial to helping the cooperative accomplish its mission of providing quality service.

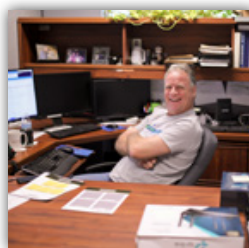
"We keep the day-to-day operations of the cooperative up and running," Smith says. "We've got customer service that needs to be dealing with the public, sales dealing with customers, the NOC team supporting customers, engineering out there trying to lay fiber. They all rely on us to make sure our systems are up and running to be able to do their job." 



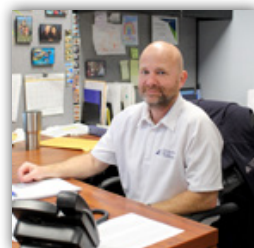
Aaron Janda



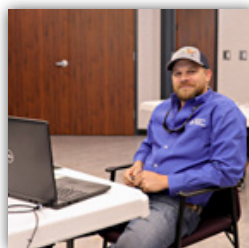
Austin Currington



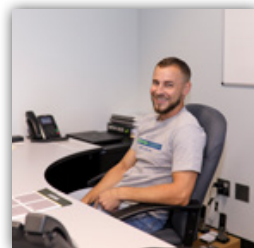
Brian Varner



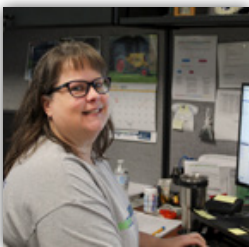
Derek Wied



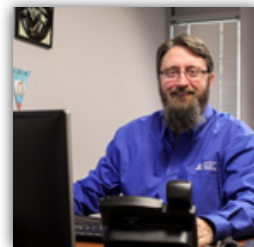
Dustin Herzik



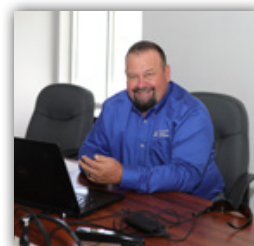
Kyle Marek



Lisa Schlemmer



Luke Smith



Pat Kalina Jr.

# Time-saving devices

Gourmet gadgets can make meals manageable

Instant pots became a “thing” in the 2010s, and people fell instantly in love with them. Combining an electric pressure cooker, slow cooker, rice cooker and yogurt maker in one, multicookers save space and cook meals quickly. What better time to hop on the bandwagon than now, when summer produce is at its height?

If you’re old enough to remember your grandmother’s pressure cooker, you may know horror stories of it blowing up and causing injuries. But don’t worry! Today’s electric pressure cookers have a slew of safety features, including sensors to monitor temperature and pressure.

The price of multicookers has come



down from north of \$500 to under \$65, an excellent price for beginners. If you want more functions or higher wattage, expect to spend upward of \$100. Here are some recipes to get you started.



## SUMMER VEGETABLE SOUP

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 3 medium ears fresh corn, kernels removed (or 2 1/4 cups frozen corn)
- 2 pounds tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 sweet bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 2 medium zucchini, diced
- 1 cup fresh or frozen lima beans
- 8 ounces sliced mushrooms
- 1 small eggplant, peeled and diced
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon vinegar (red wine, balsamic or white)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- Ground black pepper, to taste

Press the saute button. Add olive oil to the stainless steel insert. Wait 2 minutes for it to preheat.

Add onion and garlic. Saute, stirring frequently, just until onion is tender (about 5 minutes). Press off/stop button. Add remaining ingredients. Place lid on the cooker and make sure the valve is set to sealing. Press soup and set the timer for 12 minutes.

The cooker will beep and start cooking. It may take about 20 minutes for it to come to pressure before the timer starts. When the cooking is done, allow the pressure to naturally release for about 5 minutes, then quick release any remaining pressure by switching the valve to venting. Carefully remove the lid, away from your face, and set aside. Stir and season with salt and pepper. Let cool a bit before serving.



**Food Editor, Anne P. Braly**  
is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Photography by **Mark Gilliland**  
Food Styling by **Rhonda Gilliland**



## VEGGIE TOMATO SAUCE

Using canned tomatoes rather than fresh in this recipe from Instant Pot makes this recipe a breeze.

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 small to medium carrots, diced
- 2 celery sticks, diced
- 3 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon thyme leaves
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 small beets (canned or fresh), diced
- 1 cup diced red bell pepper
- 5 mushrooms, diced
- 1/2 of a medium zucchini, diced
- 2 cups fresh spinach leaves
- 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 jalapeno red chili (Use half or less if you don't like some heat.)
- 3 cans whole tomatoes in juice
- 1/2 cup water

Turn the multicooker on and press the saute key. Once hot, add the olive oil, onions, carrots and celery and cook for 5 minutes, stirring a few times.

Add the rest of the ingredients. Press cancel to stop the saute process. Stir the contents and pop the lid on top.

Lock the lid, making sure the top valve points to sealing. Set to manual/pressure cook on high pressure for 10 minutes. The cooker will take 5-10 minutes to build up the pressure and the timer will begin.

Once finished, allow the pressure to release naturally for 10 minutes and then move the top valve to venting to quickly release of the remaining pressure.



Open the lid and stir. Using an immersion blender, puree into a thick sauce. You can also do this in a blender or a food processor, but make sure to cool the sauce down slightly and do this in batches. Pour the sauce into containers or mason jars for storage or use right away as a sauce for pasta, pizza, enchiladas, meatballs and more.

## INSTANT POT ROAST

This recipe from Instapot is a cooker full of comfort.

- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1 (4-4 1/2-pound) boneless chuck roast, excess fat trimmed and cut into 6 pieces
- 1 cup beef stock
- 6-8 jarred pepperoncini salad peppers, plus 1/4 cup liquid from jar
- 1 (1-ounce) package dry onion soup mix
- 2 tablespoons dried parsley flakes
- 1 tablespoon dried chives
- 2 teaspoons dried dill
- 1 1/2 teaspoons onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch

Set a 6-quart cooker to the high saute setting. Heat oil then add beef and cook until evenly browned, about 2-3 minutes per side. Set aside.

Stir in beef stock, scraping any browned bits from the bottom. Stir in pepperoncini and liquid, onion soup mix, parsley flakes, chives, dill, onion powder, garlic powder and pepper. Return beef to the pot.

Select manual setting, adjust pressure to high, and set timer for 45 minutes. When finished cooking, naturally release pressure according to manufacturer's directions, 20-30 minutes.

Remove beef from the pot, then shred, using two forks.

In a small bowl, whisk together cornstarch and 3 tablespoons cold water and set aside.

Select high saute setting. Bring to a boil, stir in cornstarch mixture and cook, stirring frequently until slightly thickened, about 3-5 minutes. If the mixture is too thick, add more beef stock as needed until desired consistency is reached. Serve immediately. 🍴





1953  
CELEBRATING  
70  
YEARS  
2023



**GIG-CERTIFIED  
PROVIDER**



Colorado Valley Communications (CVCTX) is extremely proud and humbled to have connected so many lives and communities over the past seven decades. Thank you for allowing us to serve you.