

CONNECTION



Proud to serve

Behind the scenes of a fiber connection

CZECH FEST

**LIGHTS, CAMERA,
LOCATION**



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A front row seat to history

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

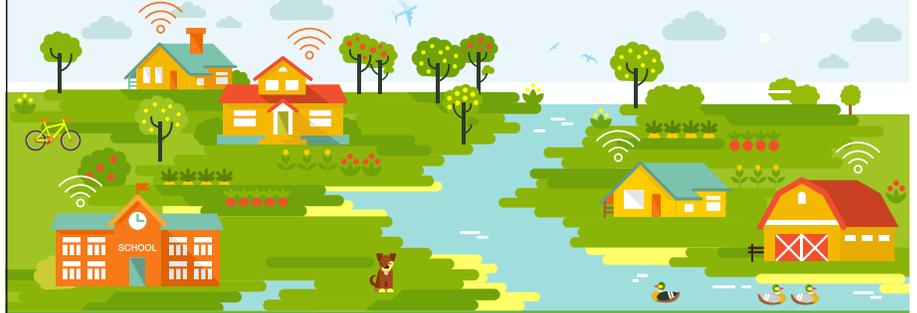
The buzz in the security line was electric as folks lined up early to compare notes on why we are all passionate about broadband deployment, and I enjoyed sharing the activities of community-based broadband providers. I found myself beaming when a few people specifically referenced the fiber networks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

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

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

Why is broadband vital?

It strengthens rural America



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

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



-1-

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES:

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



-2-

REMOTE WORK:

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



-3-

HEALTH CARE:

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



-4-

EDUCATION:

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



-5-

AGRICULTURE:

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

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



©matortin/Adobe Stock

Stream it to win it

DON'T MISS A GAME THIS SEASON

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

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

SOME POTENTIAL WINNERS

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

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

▶ **NBA League Pass:** Do you love professional basketball? Thanks to NBA League Pass, there's a premium service perfect for anyone hooked on the NBA. There's coverage of live games and the opportunity to watch past games on demand. There's plenty of analysis, features, interviews and more. And it also works great on most devices.

▶ **Paramount+, Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV:** These services aren't known primarily as platforms that feature sports. Instead, they established footholds by offering deep libraries of new TV shows and movies, as well as catalogs of longtime favorites. But if you're already subscribing to stream from one of these services, or other

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

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

Stronger together

We lift up our community

Our world changes quickly when it comes not only to technology but also to how we interact with one another. Maybe you use video calls for work or to chat with family. Many of us turn to social media, and the options there almost seem limitless. Similarly, internet-connected devices, such as security systems, allow real-time monitoring of homes or businesses. There are so many examples.



KELLY ALLISON
General Manager

It's hard for me to imagine what it would be like without these resources, which at first blush might seem far removed from the original mission of our company. After all, we were created to bring telephones to an underserved area, a resource that was as crucial then as the internet is today.

While the services offered by Colorado Valley Communications have changed to keep pace with technology, the very human goal at the heart of what we do is the same today as it was when the first telephone lines went on poles. At the time, large national telephone companies didn't want to invest in places with relatively few people. See, some things don't change.

Just as we were during the early years, we are still devoted to helping our community be the best it can be. We've worked

diligently to make sure you have the tools you need to thrive, because when the people we serve succeed, so does CVCTX.

We deeply believe a modern, reliable communications network is essential for individuals, businesses, schools, local governments and more. At times, it can prove challenging to bring cutting-edge technologies to a rural community like ours. In fact, much of rural America struggles to reach the same goals. Just as they did with the telephone, large for-profit companies overlooked places like ours when it came to internet service.

However, I'm proud to say that companies like CVCTX are helping bridge the gap between the communications resources available in rural America and those found in larger cities.

Every day, we work to span this digital divide by bringing you critical resources, including internet at speeds that often beat those found in metropolitan areas. Even better, we do it affordably and reliably. In the past few years, we have invested over \$41 million in new fiber construction and will continue our fiber construction projects to close the digital divide even more.

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

Because of how each of us uses these communications tools, the resulting benefits are varied and personal. Truthfully, that's the power of what we do — we supply the platform for your creativity, your connections and your needs.

You see, none of this is possible without you. Our strength lies in your active participation and engagement with CVCTX. And together, we'll continue to make our community the best it can possibly be. 

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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.

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:



Colorado Valley Communications technician Jonathan Cook connects Janet Zaozirny's smart TV to a new router during a fiber installation. See story Page 12.

Photo by Matt Ledger



Cybersecurity Month

October is Cybersecurity Month. Since 2004, the National Cybersecurity Alliance has championed the need to make cybersecurity a daily pursuit. Its staysafeonline.org is a rich resource to help you dodge the latest scams.

No matter which devices you're using, the site offers security tips, including:

- Update software often.
- Enable multifactor authentication.
- Use strong passwords and a password manager.
- Recognize and report phishing.

Remember, it's far easier to embrace security strategies than rebuild your identity and credit after you've been targeted.

Consider one scam strategy: An attack can start as a pop-up in a web browser that seems to be a warning from a technician from one of the biggest tech companies requesting you call a toll-free phone number that appears legitimate. Then, during the call a "technician" might use jargon as part of a bogus explanation designed to lure the caller into buying gift cards or sharing credit card information.

These schemes are sophisticated and even target those who are digitally literate. And they've cost victims hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars. But larger, more sophisticated versions have crippled hospitals, local governments and businesses through ransomware hijacking, insurance fraud, false invoices, office supply schemes and more.

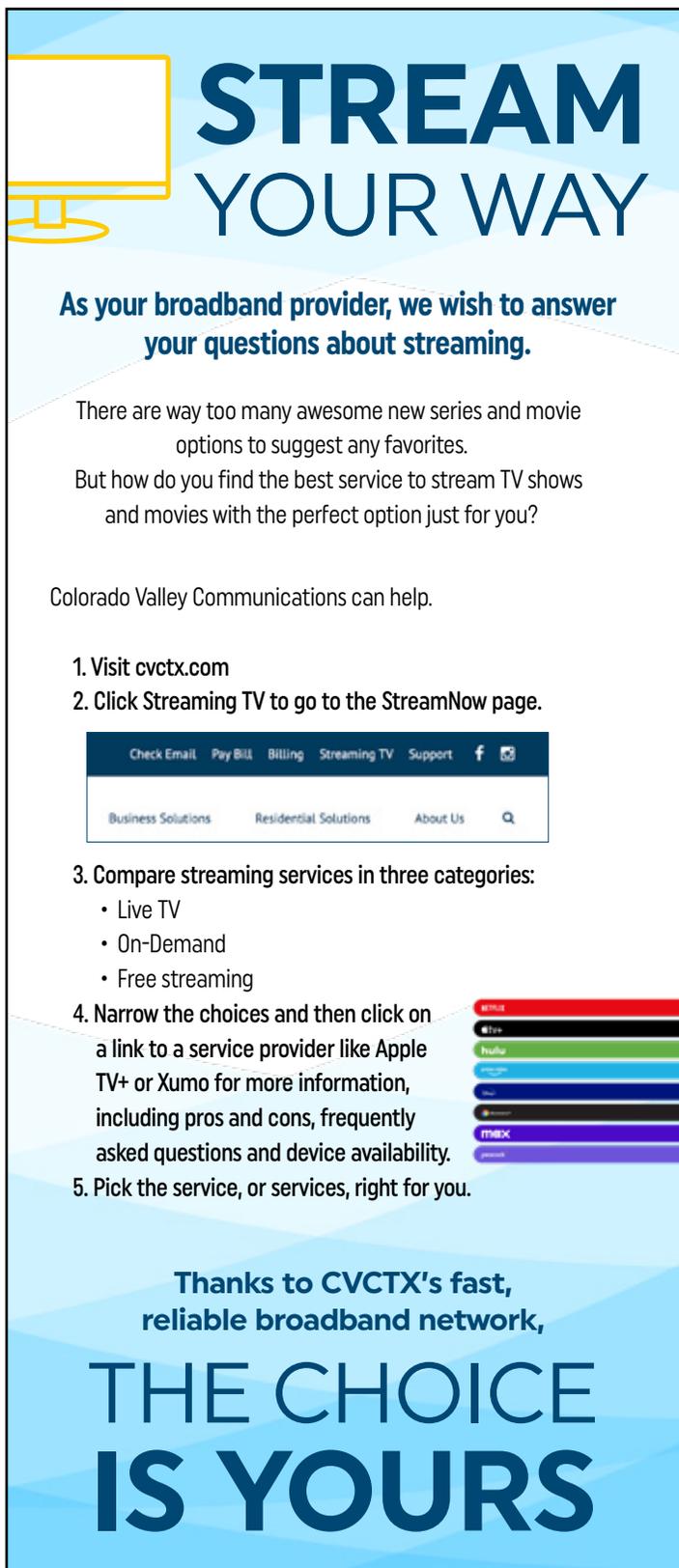
The FBI estimates that more than \$10 billion was lost in 2022 — nearly triple the amount from 2020 — from Americans targeted by these online scams.

Visit staysafeonline.org and learn to protect yourself.



CVCTX hopes you enjoy a wonderful Labor Day weekend. In recognition of the holiday, our offices will be closed on **Monday, Sept. 4.**

October is Cooperative Month



STREAM YOUR WAY

As your broadband provider, we wish to answer your questions about streaming.

There are way too many awesome new series and movie options to suggest any favorites. But how do you find the best service to stream TV shows and movies with the perfect option just for you?

Colorado Valley Communications can help.

1. Visit cvctx.com
2. Click Streaming TV to go to the StreamNow page.



3. Compare streaming services in three categories:
 - Live TV
 - On-Demand
 - Free streaming
4. Narrow the choices and then click on a link to a service provider like Apple TV+ or Xumo for more information, including pros and cons, frequently asked questions and device availability.
5. Pick the service, or services, right for you.



Thanks to CVCTX's fast, reliable broadband network,

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative continues our partnering with Fayette Electric Cooperative to help protect your personal information. On Friday, Oct. 13, the co-ops will host a shred day for the proper disposal of sensitive documents. Check our Facebook page for details.



BRILLIANT BACKDROPS

Hollywood loves to make a scene in the Lone Star State

Story by ANNE BRALY

With amazing deserts, forests, the Hill Country and shorelines filled with wildlife and beaches, it's little wonder that Hollywood often turns to the Lone Star State for cinematic backdrops.

"When we watch films, we often find ourselves connecting to the characters, their experiences and the places they've been," says Stephanie Whallon, director of the Texas Film Commission. "When we have the opportunity to visit the actual sites from these films, we deepen that connection. Some of these locations might also simply be beautiful places, and seeing them on the big screen allows us to explore the majesty of Texas' landscapes for ourselves."

There's a rich tapestry of stories that have unfolded within the borders of this vast state. And, if you're someone who enjoys walking in the steps of movie stars and seeing where some of the top movies have been filmed, there are some interesting places to visit.

ALL'S RIGHT AT TOP NOTCH

Grab one of those flame-kissed burgers, take a seat and you can almost hear the echo of the famous line in "Dazed and Confused," that coming-of-age classic with Matthew McConaughey's famous "all right, all right, all right." It's still a phrase that continues to be heard often at Top Notch, says general manager Jordan Lister.

"I hear people saying it when they're at the cash register a lot," he says, adding that though the restaurant's been an Austin favorite for 52 years, it gained even more popularity after "Dazed and Confused" premiered in 1993.

Not a lot's changed at Top Notch, including its retro diner decor, car-hop service, hand-battered onion rings and milkshakes made from scratch. But it's a place where you can also see some of the original paddles used by seniors to haze incoming freshmen in the movie.

Top Notch has two locations in the Austin area, but to visit the original one where "Dazed and Confused" was filmed, go to 7425 Burnet Road, Austin.

Austin's Top Notch Diner was used in the filming of "Dazed and Confused."



Photo courtesy of Visit Austin

A 'GIANT' IN THE FILM INDUSTRY

The tiny town of Marfa, population around 1,700 and just a pinprick on the Texas landscape, is big when it comes to movie making. A trio of Oscar-winning films — “Giant,” “No Country for Old Men” and “There Will Be Blood” — were filmed there.

While it’s been nearly 70 years since “Giant,” starring Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson, Dennis

Hopper, James Dean and Earl Holliman, premiered, people continue to visit Marfa in hopes of seeing some of the sites where the movie stars once walked. While most of the structures used in the movie have crumbled over the decades, Hotel Paisano still stands. All the primary actors in the film stayed, ate and drank there for a couple of weeks during filming. There are even rooms named after the actors, including the Rock Hudson room with a second-story terrace for entertaining a crowd, and the James Dean room that appears much as it did in his day.

The movie is ageless, says hotel manager Vicki Barge. “The older generation of movie buffs tell their children and grandchildren about it,” she says.

The rural roads around Marfa and Presidio County were also the backdrop for the Cohen brothers’ film “No Country for Old Men” Just take a ride through the desert lands and it’s not hard to picture some of the scenes, like the salesman driving along the highway and getting pulled over by a police car driven by psychopathic hitman Anton Chigurh.

Or drive past MacGuire Ranch, just southeast of Marfa along Highway 67, where “There Will Be Blood” was shot in 2006. That’s where the majority of the scenes starring Daniel Day-Lewis as an oil man hitting the big time were filmed.



Spend the night at El Paisano Hotel where Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and James Dean slept, ate and drank during the filming of *Giant*.

Photo courtesy of El Paisano Hotel



Photo courtesy of Waxahachie CVB

The first floor of the Rogers Hotel was turned into a bank during filming of “Places in the Heart.”

WAXAHACHIE

Travel to the North Texas town of Waxahachie and you’ll find many familiar locations from “Places in the Heart.” The film’s star, Sally Field, won an Academy Award for playing a widow trying to save the family farm during the Great Depression.

Waxahachie was also used as a location for the filming of “The Trip to Bountiful” and “Tender Mercies,” both Oscar winners as well. “There’s a big interest in seeing the sites where those films were made,” says Laurie Mosley, director of the Waxahachie Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Who says getting a glimpse of movie history requires a trip to Hollywood? There are many locations all across Texas where you can step into a scene from a favorite film and imagine yourself alongside actors. Each location has left a mark on both the silver screen and in the minds of those who have been fortunate enough to visit. For more locations and additional details, visit gov.texas.gov/film/trails. 📍

SAN ANTONIO

Visit the Alamo and you can almost hear the clatter of hooves and echoing gunshots as you imagine battle scenes from the epic movie “The Alamo.” But turn the corner and you’ll find yourself floating the enchanting canals of the celebrated San Antonio River Walk. It’s an avenue that snakes through parts of the city and has been the backdrop for various movies, including “Selena,” a film depicting the life of the much-loved Tejano music star. Both movies are worth watching again before you depart for the historic city.



Photo by Naya Na/Adobe Stock

The San Antonio River Walk has been the backdrop for various movies.

Czech it out!

Cultural center celebrates heritage in La Grange

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

From a rich history of lively music to intricately embroidered costumes, agrarian roots and beyond, Czech culture is at the heart of Fayette and Lavaca counties.

The area has long been home to a huge Czech population with several groups dedicated to the culture's preservation and promotion. Some, particularly Texans of Czech Ancestry, wanted to establish a museum and library to preserve Czech heritage. Their dream evolved into the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center, which has a sprawling campus in La Grange.

Retta Chandler, president of the TCHCC's board of directors, says the center was born in the mid-1990s. "One of the points that was made was that my generation — I'm 86 — was the last one closest to the mother tongue, and that if we didn't do something, our language would be totally lost, our culture would be lost and future generations would not know what we're all about," Retta says.

PRESERVING CZECH HERITAGE

It's fitting that the TCHCC is located in La Grange. Mark Hermes, the center's manager, says the area is known as the

"cradle of Czech immigration" in the U.S. In fact, he says, the TCHCC — sitting on 23 acres — is the official Czech center for the State of Texas with the mission of promoting Texan Czech history, language and culture.

Retta herself was especially interested in preserving the culture, particularly after visiting the Czech Republic a number of times in the 1990s, both before and after the fall of communism. She even visited her father's former home and was welcomed inside by its then-owners.

Retta was elected president of an organization named Texans of Czech Ancestry and formed committees to work on a central museum and library. The TCHCC separated from TOCA, Texans of Czech Ancestry, as its own nonprofit and started operating from a desk in the La Grange Chamber of Commerce in 1996. A lease on the property where the cultural center sits today was signed the following year.

AN EXPANDING CAMPUS

Today, the TCHCC campus is home to multiple buildings, including its main museum and archives building, a 5,500-square-foot amphitheater, several



Photo courtesy of TCHCC

other museums and multiple historic buildings. The center benefited from many donated buildings the organization relocated to the property, including a working sawmill, a printing press from the 1800s, a smokehouse, washhouse and more.

The site is still expanding, too. Work is ongoing on a blacksmith shop, the country store is being remodeled, and two churches are being constructed on the property.

Music is extremely important to Czech culture, Retta says. A number of Czech bands play throughout Texas, and the TCHCC is home to the Czech Music Museum of Texas.

Art is critical, too. Retta says a number of local churches are styled after the works of Czech painter and artist Alphonse Mucha. His work is lauded as some of the best known of the late 1800s.

Colorful costumes are a well-known component of Czech life. Retta says intri-

The Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center main building was completed in 2009.



Photo courtesy of TCHCC



Deborah and Michael Svatek Logue dance in traditional Czech clothing.



Photo courtesy of TCHCC



Photo by Matt Ledger



Photo by Matt Ledger

cate handwork and embroidery are hallmarks of the costumes, known as “kroje.” The TCHCC has a large collection of Czech costumes, and Retta hopes to create a more permanent display in the future.

Czech farmers have a rich agricultural history. The TCHCC is home to the Texas Czech Agricultural Museum, housed in an original, early-1900s barn.

“We’re not trying to go into the past,” Retta says. “We can’t go into the past. We want to move on with the present, but I hope that the generations coming will appreciate what we have.”

HERITAGE FEST THIS FALL

The TCHCC will host its largest festival — Heritage Fest & Muziky — on Oct. 20-21.

The festival will begin with an Oktoberfest on the Deck celebration Friday evening from 4-10 p.m. At 5:30 p.m., the TCHCC will serve its famous chicken and dumplings, and the Dujka Brothers Band will perform from 6-9:30 p.m.

On Saturday, festivities begin in the morning and last all day. Hospoda entertainment — which Mark described as similar to a German beer garden but with a Czech twist — will feature two bands, the Jodie Mikula Orchestra and Al Sulak and the Country Sounds.

The festival also plays host to a car show, an antique farming equipment show, cultural demonstrations, children’s activities and more. The TCHCC’s sawmill and newspaper museum will be operating throughout the day.

The festival itself is free to attend with food and drinks available for purchase. Be sure to buy a ticket to the Bob Wills 55th Anniversary Tour Show on Saturday night from 7-9:30 p.m. in the TCHCC’s amphitheater. A fireworks finale is also planned.

“It’s our biggest festival that we have here at the Czech Center, and it’s got something going on all day long for everybody,” Mark says. “It’s a family-friendly event. There are not any long times — people will have something to

TOP: Robert Albrecht and his son, Carson, of Goliad, demonstrate the operation of an antique hay press.

ABOVE LEFT: Manager Mark Hermes encourages guests to check out the rotating displays in the main museum, including the Neighbors Helping Neighbors exhibits.

ABOVE: The Czech Newspaper Museum showcases printing techniques from the early 1900s.

do and see the whole day, whether they come at 10 o’clock in the morning or 3 o’clock in the afternoon.”

Festival details are still being finalized. For the most updated information, visit the TCHCC’s website, czechtexas.org, or its Facebook page.

“I would like to invite everyone to come out and to share our heritage,” Retta says. “And I do, of course, want to thank everyone who does come and support us.” 📧

Learning

THROUGH OUR CULTURE

Textile arts have long history in rural America

Story by CHERÉ COEN

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

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

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

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

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



Photos courtesy of National Quilt Museum

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

ADDITIONAL INCOME

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



Photos courtesy of National Quilt Museum

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

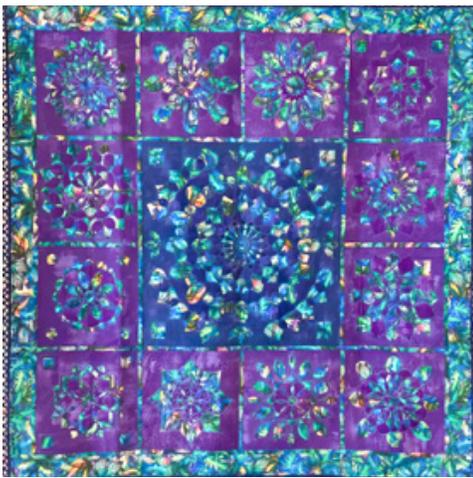
ABOVE: The museum displays a wide variety of contemporary textile arts.

Online Resources

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

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

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



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



Photos courtesy of Texas Quilt Museum

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

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

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

GETTING STARTED

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Photo courtesy of Texas Quilt Museum

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

Where's my fiber?

How Colorado Valley decides where to expand service

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Before coming to Colorado Valley Communications as a senior project manager in 2019, David Jones cut his teeth working on a national broadband provider's fiber-to-the-home service. In the suburbs of Dallas and Houston, that company could place 5 miles of line and connect hundreds of customers to high-speed internet. But expanding a fiber network in rural Texas is an altogether different challenge.

"You get into Fayette, Colorado and Lavaca counties and you might get 30 customers in a mile of cable," he says. "That would be almost a nonstarter for many of the larger companies, because they're used to getting 10 times the number of potential customers for the investment in infrastructure."

With a customer base so spread out, Colorado Valley must be strategic about where it expands fiber service. While no one factor is decisive, the next fiber build is often chosen based on population density, existing infrastructure and customer interest.

Population density: Even within Colorado Valley's service area, the number of customers can vary widely from place to place. While a dense neighborhood for the cooperative might mean connecting 30 customers per mile of fiber, more remote areas might provide only two or three customers per mile.

As a result, areas with a higher population density are likely to receive fiber service sooner. That's due, in part, to simple economics. If the cooperative can sign up more customers in dense areas early on, the resulting revenue can go toward bringing service to areas where there are fewer customers per mile.

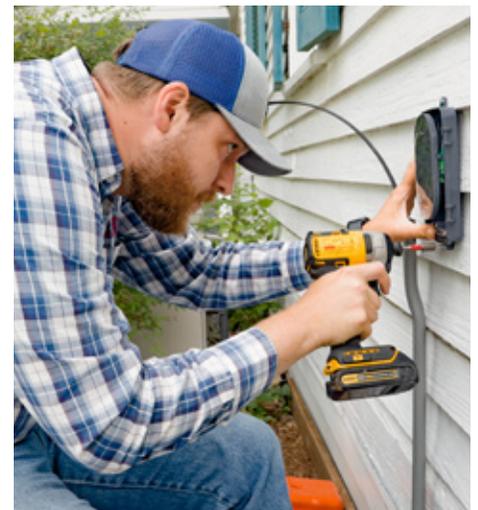


Technician Jonathan Cook helps Janet Zaozirny connect her smart TV to the new router.



ABOVE: CVCTX technicians are proud to help new customers connect to high-speed broadband.

RIGHT: Installer Domonic Sanfilippo mounts the optical network terminal on the outside of the Zaozirny's home, in close proximity to the router location inside.



Photos by Matt Ledger

Existing infrastructure: The cooperative's existing copper network took 45 years to complete and reaches almost every corner of the service area. When Colorado Valley builds new fiber connections, they typically overlap with that older network.

If sections of that copper network show their age more than others, they are prioritized for replacement with fiber. By updating an area that already needs repairs, the cooperative reduces service interruptions and cuts future repair costs.

Customer interest: Colorado Valley customers can visit the company's website to express interest in fiber and request service. While interest in the service is

only one factor guiding expansion plans, knowing there are interested customers can help tip the balance between two otherwise equally suitable areas.

Ultimately, Jones recognizes that every phase of the project must have limits, leaving some customers just out of reach of fiber service for a little bit longer. But as Colorado Valley's fiber expansion reaches its halfway point, he's optimistic and there are fewer gaps to fill.

"We're concentrating on not leaving those holes between coverage areas. So, while there will still be areas where we have customers just beyond the current project, we're trying to eliminate those holes," he says. "We do have plans to get there, so we appreciate their patience while we bring them superior service." 📺

DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

How engineering and regulatory affairs keep the co-op working

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In this issue, we're continuing to take a look at the different teams within Colorado Valley Communications that help us bring customers the quality service they expect and deserve. This month, we're putting the spotlight on the hard work and dedication of those in the engineering and regulatory affairs departments.

ENGINEERING

Between them, Gary Becker and Brian Mueller have nearly 60 years of experience as field engineers for CVCTX. But despite their shared title, their jobs can look very different from one day to the next.

Becker spends most of his time in the field, staking and drawing up where contractors can safely run fiber or copper lines. That involves coordinating with other utilities that manage electric, water and other services to make sure crews don't accidentally cut anything they shouldn't.

"Sometimes people buy a house, and they don't know where the utilities are," Becker says. "I have to look out and see what I can, so hopefully we don't cut anything."

In those situations, Becker is like an investigator, finding whatever records and aerial photographs he can that indicate where lines have already been run. Mueller helps him gather that data from the office, in addition to getting easements for engineers to work on certain properties, working with other customer orders and even collecting mapping data that the regulatory team relies on.

"We're kind of a centralized point of contact," Mueller says. "We're working with our central office guys and our field guys, not just one-on-one but face-to-face. It's not a handoff and run. We're constantly in communication with them."

REGULATORY AFFAIRS

As director of regulatory affairs, Karen Gunkel juggles the many rules agencies like the Federal Communications Commission and the Public Utility Commission of Texas place on internet and phone providers. With three others on the team, the department compiles reports each month, quarter and year to ensure CVCTX stays in compliance with all of those guidelines.

That could include anything from sending out bill inserts informing customers of their rights and changes to regulatory fees to helping the FCC improve broadband maps by reporting the latest data on where service is available. The latter has been especially helpful for putting CVCTX's broadband expansion in perspective.

"That reporting not only helps us measure our progress, but we can see more clearly where we need to go," Gunkel says. "It feels good to know we're actively getting broadband out to more of our subscribers in really remote areas."

While Gunkel knows most customers likely don't think about regulations very often, they help CVCTX provide a better customer experience than providers who don't have similar regulatory obligations.

"In general, it holds us accountable as a company," she says. "If there's an issue, we have certain things we need to do to address it with our customers. There are a lot of rules around when we can or can't disconnect service, how we respond to customer complaints and different things we do to protect the rights of the customers." 



Colorado Valley Telephone's engineering department includes, from left, Brian Mueller, David Jones, Gary Becker, Hunter Hengst, Mike Hensel, Matt Woods and John Slaughter.



The regulatory affairs department of Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative includes, from left, Annette McCormick, Karen Gunkel, Susie Polasek and Landon Hatfield.

Layers of flavors

Perfect the sandwich

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

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

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

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



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Food Styling by **Rhonda Gilliland**



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

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

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

Working on a parchment paper-lined

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

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

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

Easy Reuben

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

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

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



ZIPPY BEEF BARBECUE SANDWICH

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

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

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

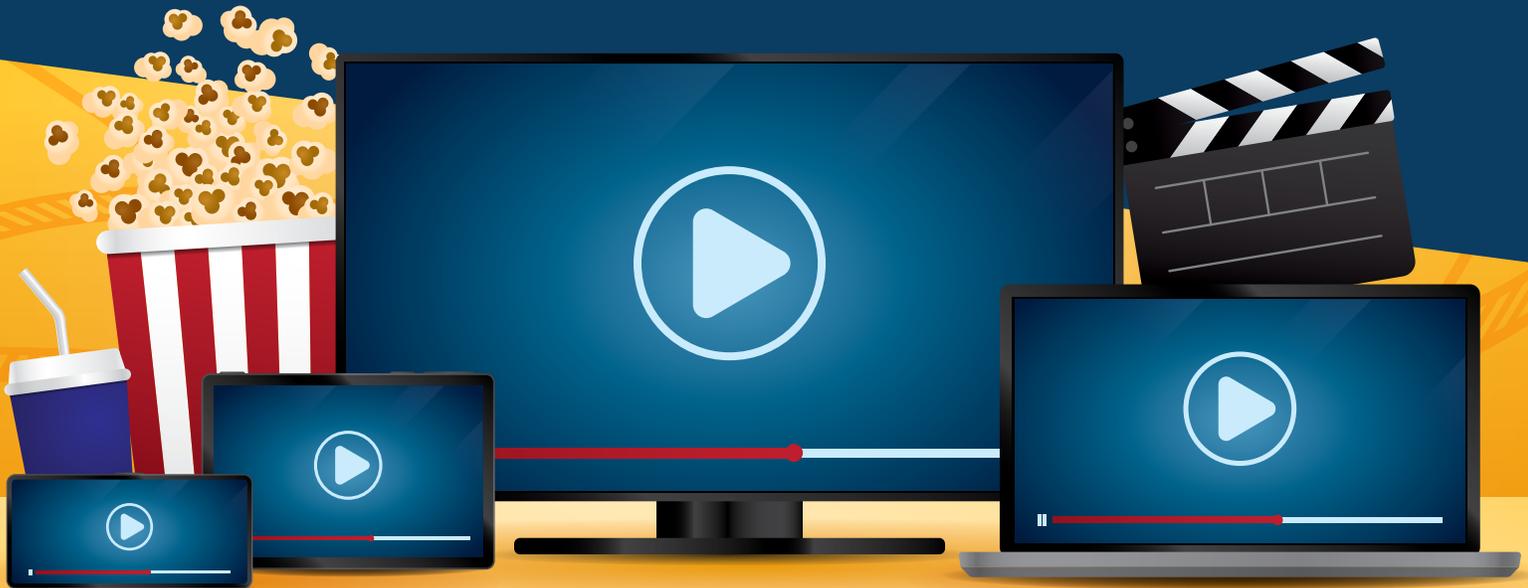
Remove beef. Skim fat from cooking liquid. Shred meat with two forks; return to slow cooker and heat thoroughly. Serve on rolls with coleslaw. 



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