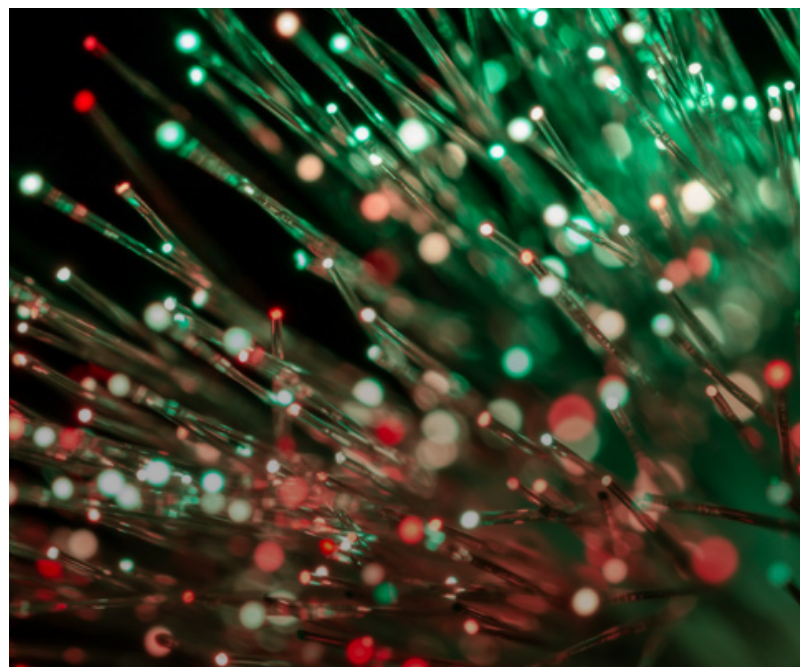




# CONNECTION

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023



**The gift of  
connectivity**

Celebrating 70 years of service





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

## Committed to service and security

I always love hearing stories from the NTCA members who are bringing fast, reliable internet service to communities throughout rural America. It's exciting to see our providers pave the way for new jobs, better health care, fresh educational opportunities and so much more.

But their commitment to serving you goes beyond simply providing an excellent broadband network — they also want to help you navigate that online world safely.

Much of that work happens behind the scenes on their systems before you ever turn on a computer or search for something on your phone. But that's just the first line of defense in a world where your personal data — and, yes, even your money — are targets.

The experts at the National Cybersecurity Alliance, a nonprofit organization devoted to creating a more secure interconnected world, can help you figure out where to begin.

Multifactor authentication is a valuable way to add an extra layer of security to your online accounts but many people are unaware. Password manager software makes using complex and secure passwords easier, while keeping software updated and being aware of phishing attempts are also wise strategies. 🗨️



## Add a layer of protection to your online journeys

The nonprofit National Cybersecurity Alliance is focusing its efforts in four specific areas: multifactor authentication, password management, software updates and phishing awareness.

### HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR TIPS FOR YOUR SECURITY:



**Multifactor authentication:** For your online accounts, you likely have a password. But if there's an option for using multifactor authentication, go for it. Once activated on an account, you'll still need a password. But access will also require a one-time code delivered by text message or email.



**Password management:** Rather than trying to remember long, complex passwords, consider using software designed to not only store passwords but also make them easily accessible. There are several options, and most work in a similar fashion. You only need to remember one master password to unlock the rest.



**Software updates:** Both hardware and software manufacturers prioritize protecting you. Often when there's a potential problem discovered, they roll out software updates. So, it's important to be mindful of those changes and install updates regularly.



**Phishing awareness:** Whether it is a fake website or a bogus email that seems reputable, there is a range of phishing strategies designed to capture your personal information, money or both. They can be convincing, too. So, be cautious when receiving unsolicited messages, and verify requests for sensitive information before responding.

To learn more about online safety visit the National Cybersecurity Alliance at [staysafeonline.org](https://staysafeonline.org). 🗨️

# Capture the season

## Learn to make your photos pop

**W**hether it's Apple or Android, the photo technology in modern smartphones can create stunning images, complete with automatic adjustments for lighting and other effects. You don't have to look hard in the world of social media to see the results.

But give those images a closer look. Are they as good as they can be? While mobile software can clean up many of the more technical trouble spots, a few tried-and-true tips from the world of traditional photography can upgrade your seasonal or holiday photographs from passable to truly memorable.

**SEEK THE LIGHT:** For photography, there's a magical time just before sunset or after sunrise — the golden hour. The warm, soft light adds a natural artistic element, whether you're shooting a landscape or a portrait. So, when possible,

avoid the harsh light of the hours around noon and seek the golden rays instead.

**KNOW THIS RULE AND WHEN TO BREAK IT:** The idea of the rule of thirds is an artistic standard. An image is framed using two horizontal and two vertical lines to create nine equal parts. One strategy is to place the subject of the photo at one of the intersections to create a balanced composition. But you can also use the idea to know when to break the rule, shift the frame and take a unique photo.

**GET THE CLOSE-UP:** Don't be shy. Most phone cameras have a zoom feature. But you've got a better choice. Physically get closer to your subject, whether it's a person, flower or delicious dinner dish. Proximity not only makes it easier to frame the image but it also adds a sense of intimacy.

**STEADY AS IT GOES:** The latest phone cameras do well even when light is scarce. But there are limits, and sometimes when you're shooting in a dim room or when the sun is fading the resulting image can turn out blurry. A small tripod — there are plenty of phone-sized options — can help keep your photos sharp.

**GIVE 'EM A BOOST:** There's nothing wrong with a little editing, and most phones have great software built in. There are options for automatic adjustments, but don't be shy about exploring the possibilities. A little creative cropping or adjustments to settings like brightness can make a difference. You can even consider converting a photo to black-and-white for a classic look. 📱



Photos by Jenkoltaman and Mayatnikstudio/Adobe Stock



# As real as it gets

As our community celebrates, Colorado Valley Communications is here for you

We're entering one of my favorite times of the year, when the air becomes crisp and there are gatherings with co-workers, friends, family and the community. Yes, there's even time for reflection, moments to consider the blessings from earlier this year.



**KELLY ALLISON**  
General Manager

It's a busy few months. The hustle and bustle of the holidays all feels so real, and that's welcome. Because we live in a world where reality can, at times, become fuzzy. I'm sure many of you have heard about how artificial intelligence has found a voice, responding to questions or prompts with text responses that seem human. Or close to it.

That's just the beginning, too. There are tools that allow you to describe an image you wish to see and then AI creates it for you — including notoriously adding the occasional extra finger to a person's photo.

You see, AI isn't perfect. Don't misunderstand me, it's amazing technology that's correct a shocking amount of the time. But it's not always right.

The buzz around AI might even make technology seem daunting, an example of online tools whose inner workings only a scientist can understand. Here's what I propose regarding AI — technology changes, and we adapt. With a little care, AI will find its place. More importantly, it will never replace people interacting with one another.

During this season of celebration, keep that in mind as you share your time and experiences. Whether you're shopping, working, searching for a holiday recipe or any of the thousands of other reasons we spend time online, the internet provides invaluable resources. But it doesn't replace the personal connections between the people and businesses of our community.

I imagine your email inboxes have a fair number of messages touting sales, promising savings and can't-miss deals. Some are legitimate and useful. Many are not. Even text messages can be filled with, well, junk. At times, digital communications can start to feel similar to the current AI creations — just a little off.

As your internet provider, everyone at CVCTX considers it a privilege to help you navigate many of these waters, and the pages of this magazine often include great tips for both staying safe online and maximizing your digital experience.

More importantly, there's no doubt we're real, created with the sole purpose of supporting this community. We are not a national company headquartered hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away. Has anyone not been lost in a telephone or email maze trying to find the person at one of those companies who can solve a problem?

At CVCTX, that's not how we operate. Our office is local, and we really do welcome you to stop by any time. We enjoy doing business face-to-face, and you'll be greeted by people whose children go to school here, whose families shop locally and who share the same day-to-day joys of living in this place we call home.

So, let's celebrate not only this season but also our wonderful people and businesses. There's no doubting the very real power of neighbors coming together. And we're proud to serve you, in the most authentic way possible. ☎

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Like us on Facebook  
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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).

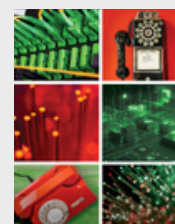
Customers in several parts of our service area can access fiber to the home, while expansion for access is in the works for other locations.

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:



For 70 years, Colorado Valley Communications has kept our community connected. In the early days of landline phones, family and neighbors called to stay in touch. Today, digital devices offer messaging, calling, online resources and e-commerce.

See story on Page 8.



# May the Beauty of the holidays warm your spirit

The employees of Colorado Valley Communications are grateful for the support of our customers.  
We hope you enjoy a holiday season filled with family and friends.

**In observance of the upcoming holidays, CVCTX offices will be closed on the following dates:**

Veterans Day: Nov. 10

Thanksgiving: Nov. 23 and 24

Christmas: Dec. 25 and 26

New Year's Day: Jan. 1

## 'Tis the season to simplify

We're all looking for ways to save time as the holidays draw near.

Colorado Valley Communications aims to make paying the monthly bill easier with SmartHub. Sign up for SmartHub text reminders about when the bill is due, or make it even easier with the autopay option.

To learn more and to register for SmartHub, go to [cvctx.smarthub.coop](http://cvctx.smarthub.coop). Smartphone users may download the SmartHub app from your app store. You'll need your account number and most recent billing statement to register.



## Do Not Call Registry

The National Do Not Call Registry gives you a choice about whether to receive telemarketing calls. The registry applies to all telemarketers with the exception of businesses with which you have an existing relationship and certain nonprofit and political organizations. Commercial telemarketers are not allowed to call you if your number is listed on the registry.



Consumers may register their residential telephone numbers, including wireless numbers, on the National Do Not Call Registry at no cost, either by telephone or internet.

To register by phone, call 888-382-1222. For TTY, call 866-290-4236. You must call from the telephone number you wish to register. To obtain additional information, or to register online, please go to [donotcall.gov](http://donotcall.gov).

Inclusion of your telephone number on the National Do Not Call registry becomes effective starting 31 days after registration. You may remove your number from the list at any time.



# Seeking a dose of Christmas cheer?

## These Texas towns embrace the holiday spirit all year

Story by ANNE BRALY

Texas, known for its vast landscapes and rich cultural heritage, has its own way of celebrating the Christmas season.

While most towns around the world put away their Christmas decorations after the holiday season, the Lone Star State boasts a collection of enchanting communities and towns with names that carry the magic of Christmas all year long.

### 'THE CHRISTMAS CAPITAL OF TEXAS'

During the holidays, many of us hang grapevine wreaths decorated with greens and other baubles from our front doors or wrap the limbs of trees made of grapevines in strings of twinkling lights.

The holiday season never really ends in Grapevine, dubbed “The Christmas Capital of Texas,” by the state Senate. The festive spirit kicks into high gear from November through early January when this North Texas town pulls out all the stops.

Grapevine's Carol of Lights is a much-loved holiday tradition.

Photo courtesy of Grapevine CVB





**ABOVE:** Carolers celebrate Christmas in Garland.

**RIGHT:** A visit from Mr. and Mrs. Claus is part of Bells' Christmas celebration.

Grapevine visitors can view the millions of Christmas lights and decorations that make the city sparkle. Even though it hardly ever snows in Grapevine, there are dozens of ice-related events and attractions, including ice sculptures at Gaylord Texan Resort, Great Wolf Lodge's Snowland and Peace Plaza's Ice Rink. There's also the Grapevine Vintage Railroad North Pole Express and a Christmas parade. The festivities kick off with the Carol of Lights and the lighting of the Peace Plaza Christmas tree on Nov. 20.

"There's no shortage of ways families can create lasting Christmas memories in Grapevine," says Elizabeth Schrack, director of communications for Grapevine Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Some people think Christmas has become too commercialized. But we keep the heart of it at the center and think there's nothing better than seeing friends and family stopping to enjoy the Christmas season and make new memories and lasting traditions. And just imagine ice skating in the middle of Texas during Christmas!"

Head to [christmascapitaloftexas.com](http://christmascapitaloftexas.com) to find information on what's happening this year in Grapevine.

## BELLS

The community of Bells was first called Dugansville, perhaps for a local pioneer family. But around 1880, its name changed to Bells, believed to be in reference to the



Photo courtesy of 3M Creative Outlooks

area churches whose bells pealed across the landscape when the Texas and Pacific Railroad came to town in 1873.

At Christmastime these days, Bells pulls out all the stops. The annual parade is back after a year's hiatus. But that's not all — following the Dec. 9 parade will be caroling and a visit from the jolly old elf himself. Also, there will be a tree-lighting event for the first time ever.

"We're working hard to make it a big celebration," says Natasha Hernandez, secretary of the Bells Area Chamber of Commerce. "It's really going to be something special."

For more information, visit the Bells Area Chamber of Commerce Facebook page.

## GARLAND

Garland is decked out in its finest dress during the holidays, starting with Christmas on the Square on Dec. 7, an event that draws folks from all around to witness the lighting of thousands of twinkling lights on the city's Christmas tree. But before that happens, rejoice with carolers as they stroll through the town square and feast on fare from the town's favorite food trucks.

"We are excited to celebrate the return of our traditional Christmas event to our downtown square," says Dana Lodge, Special Events and Downtown Development Director for the Garland Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Throughout December, Garland's downtown retailers participate in a contest, decorating their storefronts with garlands and other holiday decor. Then, you get to be the judge, casting your vote via social media to see which store puts on the best display.

Learn more about what's on Garland's holiday list at [visitgarlandtx.com](http://visitgarlandtx.com).

## BLESSING

You'll get a warm, fuzzy feeling when you visit Blessing during the holiday season. With a population hovering around 500 people, the 2-square-mile community in the Texas coastal region embraces the holiday spirit. Popular events include the annual Mr. and Mrs. Santa Contest and visits from Santa at the Hotel Blessing, a 100-plus-year-old hotel included on the National Register of Historic Places. Its design was inspired by Spanish missions, and now, fully restored, it's supported by the nonprofit Blessing Historical Foundation. The contest is a fundraiser to help maintain the historic property. Learn more about it at [hotelblessing.com](http://hotelblessing.com).

The hotel's restaurant is open 364 days a year — Christmas Day is the only day the doors are closed. So, say a blessing before your meal and fill up on a plate filled with comfort. The buffet menu includes favorites like fried chicken, liver and onions, roast beef, fried catfish, meatloaf, cornbread, rolls and lots of mouthwatering side dishes.

Blessing is home to two other popular eateries — Six One 6, serving American and Mexican favorites, and Smokin' A's BBQ.

Consider staying the night in one of the hotel's comfortable rooms, then take a pleasant drive down to Bay City — it's an easy 15 miles — to experience Wilderness Trail of Lights happening Dec. 2 through Jan. 1 at Riverside Park. Learn more at [cityofbaycity.org](http://cityofbaycity.org).

# 70 years of service

Colorado Valley Communications celebrates its legacy of connections

Story by DREW WOOLLEY



Photos by Adobe Stock / Quality Stock Arts, Sina Ettmer, Pavel, fotofabrika

In the early 1950s, the people of La Grange, Schulenburg and Weimar gathered with one mission on their minds — bringing telephone service to their rural homes. Their first plan was to contact the major telephone companies. But when they were told farmers would never use phone service enough to justify the investment, they were forced to explore other options.

It took several years, and the help of nearby Fayette Electric Cooperative, but by 1954 Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative had its charter and the 500 members required to apply for a loan from the Rural Electrification Administration. Construction on the telephone system began the following year, but it was only the beginning of the transformative technology Colorado Valley would bring to the region.

**1961** — Colorado Valley's first telephone service arrives in the form of eight-party aerial telephone lines for 550 members across three exchanges. This requires members to share a line with seven other local households.

**1970** — Members no longer have to share phone lines with their neighbors, as all of the cooperative's services are converted to single-party, or private line, service.

**1980** — Colorado Valley's central office converts switching equipment to digital systems, paving the way for services like touch-tone dialing, call waiting, call forwarding and more.

**1990** — The cooperative begins offering cellular telephone service through Colorado Valley Celltel, a

limited partner and agent for what is now AT&T Mobility.

**1993** — Colorado Valley begins providing cablelike TV service through its affiliate, CVTV.

**1995** — Internet service arrives at Colorado Valley with dial-up connections for residents and businesses. While speeds originally ranged from 19 Kbps to 48 Kbps, expanding the system eventually offers customers speeds close to the dial-up maximum of 56 Kbps.


**2003** — The cooperative establishes Colorado Valley Communications to support new services like high-speed broadband internet and advanced voice services. DSL internet service gives customers access to 1.5 Mbps speeds, about 25 times faster than dial-up.

**2004** — The cooperative begins offering fixed wireless internet service.

**2009** — Work begins on a high-speed fiber loop that improves the stability of Colorado Valley's network and lays the foundation for lightning-fast residential fiber service.

**2016** — The multiyear project to bring fiber directly to residential and business customers begins. Work on this project is ongoing.

**2018** — Colorado Valley launches hosted phone service that uses its cutting-edge internet system to offer private branch exchange phone systems without clunky on-site equipment.

**2023** — The cooperative's fiber network now supports internet speeds up to 10 Gigs and is set up to easily integrate future technology. 



# BUILDING THE FUTURE

When Central Office Technician Patrick Kalina joined Colorado Valley 30 years ago, the cooperative was a much different place. His current job didn't exist, and the underlying technology that created the position didn't either.

"When I first started we were a phone company. There was no talk about internet or anything," he says. "When we first started doing dial-up internet people loved it. So it's just amazing for a little rural cooperative to make it so far in that short a time."

From the early days of dial-up internet to modern fiber connections, the pace of technology has only increased. Central Office Technician Dustin Herzik recalls when Colorado Valley began moving from copper wire-based DSL service to high-speed fiber. When they finished installing some new piece of equipment, it was typically only a year or two before something new came along. The change for customers was just as fast.

"I remember going to Grandma and Grandpa's house to hook up new DSL so they would be able to email or get pictures," he says. "It started off with AOL messaging and email, then before you know it, it was video calls and FaceTime. And that all happened with upgrading their speed."

Fortunately, the fiber network Colorado Valley Communications uses today is capable of upgrading to additional bandwidth quickly and easily as technology

continues to evolve. "What we have in place for a small cooperative is really remarkable, especially because we can provide just about any type of technology you might want," says Senior Network Operations Technician Brian Varner.

That network laid the groundwork to keep CVCTX customers on the cutting edge of internet technology for years to come. But Kalina says he and the rest of the cooperative's team didn't think about it in those terms as they were building the network. "At the time, we were just doing our job day to day, putting in new equipment without realizing at the time that we were putting in the latest and greatest technology in the world here at little old Colorado Valley," he says. "But looking back on what we did now, there's a personal sense of accomplishment. What we've done is pretty cool."



For seven decades, Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative has followed the cooperative principles to serve its membership.



CVCTX uses bucket trucks for some installations and to restore service outages caused by weather.



Technicians Greg Janda, left, and Mike Hensel work on connecting a customer.



Technician Rick Knappe completes an installation.



CVCTX shared cake with our members at the Annual Meeting in celebration of the cooperative's 70th anniversary.



The carrier-grade routers from CVCTX have excellent Wi-Fi coverage.



# Passion project

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program  
inspires a lifetime love of learning



Story by JEN CALHOUN

Every time Madeline Moss gets a new book in the mail, she practically dances with joy. “As soon as she opens it, she instantly wants us to read it to her,” says her father, Ty Moss, a Quitman resident.

But that’s not the only time the 3-year-old gets excited about reading. “Every night when she gets ready for bed, she goes and gets a book,” Ty says. “We read every night before bed, and we also read when she brings us a book and asks us to read. So, really, anytime.”

Some of Madeline’s books come from Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, a program that sends free books to children from birth to 5 years old no matter the family’s income. “We love the program, because it brings a new book every month,” Ty says. “It gives the opportunity for kids and parents to bond over reading. It also gives a sense of excitement for kids to receive something in the mail every month.”

## FOR THE LOVE OF LEARNING

Madeline is one of more than 2 million children worldwide enrolled in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. The programs are available in all 50 states. Most often, they are established and maintained by local organizations, although about 15 states currently offer statewide programs.

Madeline’s family registered through the Pilot Club of Quitman, which sponsors the program for children within the Alba-Golden, Quitman and Yantis ZIP codes in Wood County. The club ultimately hopes to sponsor about 552 children every year.

“Receiving an age-appropriate book every single month builds a child’s anticipation and excitement around reading and learning,” says Susan Ukleja, chairwoman of the Quitman Pilot Club and chair of the club’s Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library project. “It is such a fun way for them to build confidence and a firm educational foundation to lean on as they enter school.”

In addition, the establishment of reading routines has been found to bring about increased stability, emotional well-being and an improved family atmosphere, according to research distributed by the Imagination Library.

## Set it up!

If your city or county does not offer an Imagination Library program, there are ways to set one up. Visit [imaginationlibrary.com](http://imaginationlibrary.com) to learn more or to find a program in your area.







Dolly Parton's Imagination Library sends children like Madeline Moss, left, free books monthly. A program for children 5 years old and younger, it's supported by many local organizations in Texas.

“Simply getting books into the home changes the trajectory of children, families and communities,” says Nora Briggs, executive director of the Dollywood Foundation, which launched the first program nearly 30 years ago. “Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is an accomplished, simple and effective way to make communities better places to live by supporting and nurturing a love of books, shared family time and early learning.”

### ON A MISSION

Dolly started the book-gifting program in Sevier County, Tennessee, in 1995, as a tribute to her father, the late Robert Lee Parton Sr., who worked as a sharecropper and went on to farm his own acreage. Despite his lack of education, he had a knack for turning a profit. “He was the smartest man I have ever known, but I know in my heart his inability to read probably kept him from fulfilling all of his dreams,” Dolly says.

Now, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library has given nearly 200 million books to children in the U.S., Canada,

the United Kingdom, Australia and the Republic of Ireland. More than 24 million books were gifted in 2022 — a nearly 12% increase over 2021.

And while the program started small, Dolly’s ambitions for it grew as other organizations and volunteer groups implemented the Imagination Library concept in their own communities. “Inspiring kids to love to read became my mission,” she says.

### POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Since the Pilot Club of Quitman introduced its Imagination Library program, local families have been thrilled to participate.

The 43-member, all-volunteer non-profit worked to involve businesses and other organizations in the community, as well. The club bought a life-sized Dolly Parton cardboard cutout and took it to local events and businesses. “She’s making the rounds,” says Paige Eaton, a member of the club and its DPIL Committee. “One of those, Peoples Telephone Cooperative, was highly receptive to the idea and even promoted

her arrival to their facility on their social media pages.”

Other local groups have also thrown their support to the program. “We’ve had community members and other civic organizations direct financial gifts to help fund the project,” Paige says. “Because of this, we expect to be able to provide this program to our local children long term. Texas Electric Cooperatives even funded half of our first-year costs, the Yantis Lions Club is helping and we’ve had individuals donate via the [imaginationlibrary.com](http://imaginationlibrary.com) website.”

The importance of communities coming together to make life better for children is a big part of what the Imagination Library is all about. But for Dolly Parton, the most important part is giving children a love for learning.

“Our place in all of this is pretty simple,” Dolly says. “We want to inspire a love of books. Kids are pretty simple in that they will do what they love to do, and we want to inspire children to love books and reading!” 📖





AlgEternal has formulated microalgae into a line of skin care products.



Deokie Ramlochan-Ramjohn performs microscopic analysis of a sample of marine red microalgae.

Photos courtesy of AlgEternal

# Circle of life

La Grange company finds new uses for an old resource

Story by LUIS CARRASCO

David Ramjohn was an undergraduate student in botany when a professor walked in the first day of class and drew a circle on the board. The instructor talked about that circle for the rest of the semester. David didn't know it then, but that circle would become his life's work.

"That was the teacher's interpretation of an algal cell. He drummed into us how important they were. We didn't really understand it, or at least I didn't, until several years later," David says. "When I was looking at opportunities to wean ourselves from oil, I went back to the idea of microalgae."

## BUILDING BLOCKS

Microalgae, the green film that forms atop stagnant water, can be used as a building block to make everything from bioplastics and chemicals to producing energy and biofuels — basically anything that can be made with oil, but in a way that is more environmentally sound.

"Petroleum is nothing more than algae that lived and died over the course of hundreds of millions of years," David says. "They sank to the bottom of the ocean or lakes and, through the process of time, temperature and pressure, were transformed into crude oil and natural gas."

The microalgae industry has enormous growth potential, but it has been hampered by a focus on producing biofuels, which is currently not economically

value products that can help the industry make money and develop more fully.

La Grange-based AlgEternal Technologies, the company David leads as its CEO, uses microalgae to produce a skin care collection under the AlgAllure brand, as well as a soil treatment sold as ElixEarth Soil Amendment. The products have been produced at pilot scale and their effectiveness backed by research from Texas A&M and the University of Texas. Both have received excellent user reviews.

While ramping up production is the next step, AlgEternal is ultimately not a skin care company nor a soil amendment company, David says. Because its technology can grow microalgae in large amounts — in a way that is faster, cleaner, cheaper and more reliable than the competition — they see themselves as algae farmers.

"Our goal is to get to the point where we're supplying everybody else that needs algae," he says.

Microalgae's potential is unlimited. Not only can companies use it to replace plastic and chemicals in many consumer products, but they can also contribute to phasing out fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But first things first.

"Every industry has its teething pains, this is not going to be any different," David says. "It's going to require some very patient capital investment to support the industry to the point where it can be as revenue rich, with superior regenerative environmental benefits, as we know it can be." 🗨️



AlgEternal CEO David Ramjohn is passionate about the growth potential of algae products.

feasible, David says. "Nature has already been making biofuel from microalgae, for hundreds of millions of years, at planetary scale," David says. "It's called oil, and that's something we can't compete with."

## FINDING A NICHE

Where microalgae can compete, at least with current technology, is in other high-



# DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

## How HR, executive administration and marketing serve our customers

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Throughout the year, we've taken a look at the different teams within Colorado Valley Communications who help us bring customers the quality service they expect and deserve. This issue, we're shining the spotlight on the hard work and dedication of those in the human resources, executive administration and marketing departments.

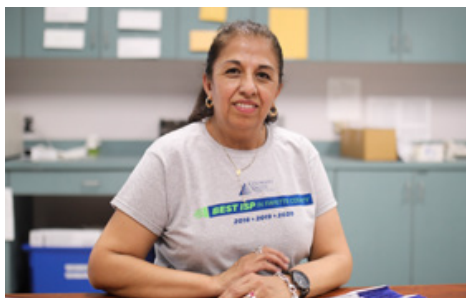
### HR AND CUSTODIAL

Even after 26 years with the cooperative, serving as Director of Human Resources still keeps Carolyn Bertsch on her toes. The job requires her to juggle a variety of human resource activities including recruitment, interviewing, hiring and orientation, along with developing policies and procedures to guide the cooperative in many areas.

"In the HR department there really isn't a typical day," she says. "One minute you may be helping an employee resolve a benefits issue, and the next minute you may be researching one of the many employment regulations to ensure the company stays compliant."

The HR department also includes the custodial department. Whether it's keeping cooperative facilities clean and organized or filling a key position on the Colorado Valley team, Bertsch takes pride in being able to support employees across the entire cooperative.

"We strive to hire and support our employees so they can focus on providing superior customer service to our customers and support our community," she says.



Custodian Maria Barron



Director of Human Resources Carolyn Bertsch, left, and Human Resources Supervisor Angela Taylor

### EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATION

Executive Administrative Assistant Laurie Boehm is involved in everything from board meetings to member events. When she isn't helping executive staff and the board with other tasks, she might be preparing for board meetings or typing minutes from those meetings.



Executive Administrative Assistant Laurie Boehm

When the Annual Meeting comes around, Boehm coordinates member documents, door prizes, giveaways and venue arrangements. She also works with accounting to manage donation requests and payments, HR to order uniforms and ID cards, employee training registration and much more.

But her favorite part of the job is getting to work with recipients of Colorado Valley's scholarship program. Boehm coordinates the program, which awards local students \$5,000 from the cooperative's Rural Scholarship Fund.

### MARKETING

When Director of Regulatory Affairs and Marketing Karen Gunkel returned to the cooperative seven years ago, marketing was one of the new responsibilities she took on. While she doesn't write or design marketing materials herself, she always enjoys working with creatives to bring life to her ideas.

"I usually start with a dry concept like 'let's educate people now about why this router is better than another one.' And they come up with fun ways to explain it using visuals, so it doesn't have to be 500 words on the page," she says. "It's exciting to see the way they can translate the dry concept into a fun, relatable story."

Those materials might cover subjects like which Wi-Fi router is best, why connecting more devices impacts your internet speed or explaining the difference between a 10 Mbps connection and a Gig. But, she says what makes CVCTX different from other providers is its willingness to go beyond the services it offers.

"We have a tool on our website called StreamNow, and it's a guide to help people understand the different streaming options," Gunkel says. "We don't offer a streaming service. It's just a tool we're providing our customers because we know they use our internet connection to stream. I don't think a big brand would help with education for something they didn't provide. That makes us special." [🔗](#)



From left, Customer Relations Specialist Faith Stork, Sales and Marketing Coordinator Kenn Kasperek and Director of Regulatory Affairs and Marketing Karen Gunkel



# A tasty tradition

Whether in your PJs or your Sunday best, holiday brunch hits the sweet spot



A holiday brunch has two musts: The time served — just a bit later than the usual morning rush hour. Then, there's the menu with dishes that put a little flair into the typical breakfast fare.

A brunch can be quiet and cozy or a grand seated affair that shows off all your culinary talents and best china. You can make it whatever you want it to be. After all, there's a special connection between brunch and the holidays — a wonderful combination that satisfies the stomach and the soul. Whether you're hosting or joining friends for brunch, the magic of this midmorning meal will weave its spell.



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

## STUFFED FRENCH TOAST

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1 tablespoon plus 1/2 teaspoon vanilla, divided
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans or walnuts
- 1 (16-ounce) loaf French bread
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- Butter for frying
- 1 (12-ounce) jar apricot preserves
- 1/2 cup orange juice

Beat together cream cheese and 1 tablespoon vanilla until fluffy. Stir in nuts. Cut bread into thick, 1 1/2-inch slices. You should get 10-12 slices per loaf. Cut a pocket in the top of each slice and fill with 1 1/2 teaspoons of cream cheese mixture.

Beat together eggs, heavy cream, 1/2 teaspoon vanilla and nutmeg. Dip stuffed slices into egg mixture.

Melt butter in frying pan and fry slices until golden brown on both sides.

Heat together preserves and orange juice and serve alongside the hot toast. Makes 5-6 servings.





## EGG BRUNCH

- 4 slices bacon, diced
- 2 packages (4 1/2 ounces each) sliced dried beef, cut into thin strips
- 2 small cans sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1/2 cup butter, divided
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 4 cups whole milk
- 16 large eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

In a large skillet, cook bacon until almost done, then add dried beef, mushrooms and 1/4 cup butter. While hot, add flour, then stir in milk. Simmer sauce, stirring constantly, until thick and smooth.



In a large bowl, whisk eggs, evaporated milk and salt. In another large skillet, heat remaining butter until melted. Add egg mixture. Cook and stir over medium heat until eggs are completely set, but not dry.

Add all ingredients to a casserole dish and bake, covered, at 275 F for 1 hour.

**Note:** May be made a day ahead and refrigerated, covered, then baked as directed. Very good served with baked curried fruit.

## MAMA'S CINNAMON ROLLS

*Easy and delicious, these cinnamon rolls make a mouthwatering addition to your holiday table and are perfect for brunch or any meal.*

- 5 tablespoons butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 2 (8-ounce) cans crescent rolls
- 3 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon

Heat oven to 375 F. In a 9-by-13-inch baking pan, melt the 5 tablespoons of butter. Stir in brown sugar, water and pecans.

Separate each can of crescent roll dough into four rectangles; seal perforations. Spread the rectangles with the 3 tablespoons of softened butter. Combine granulated sugar and cinnamon; sprinkle over butter dough rectangles. Roll up each rectangle from the short side. Cut each roll in four slices and place in prepared pan over butter-pecan mixture cut side down.

Bake for 20-25 minutes. Invert immediately onto rectangular serving platter or sheet of aluminum foil. Spoon any remaining sauce on top of rolls. Makes 32 small cinnamon rolls.



## CURRIED FRUIT

*Rich, buttery, sweet and savory, this baked fruit dish is a delicious change of pace as a side dish for brunch.*

*Maraschino cherries in green and red add a holiday touch.*

- 1 can peach halves (see tip)
- 1 can apricot halves
- 1 can pear halves
- 1 can pineapple chunks
- 10-12 maraschino cherries (red or green or a combination of both)
- 1/2 cup pecan halves
- 1/3 cup butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons curry powder

Drain fruits and arrange in baking dish. Add nuts. Melt butter and stir in brown sugar and curry powder. Bake, uncovered, at 325 F for 1 hour, basting every so often with drippings in dish. Makes 8-10 servings.

**Tip:** Whole fruit makes a lovely presentation, but cutting the fruit into bite-sized pieces makes it easier to serve and eat. 🍷





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# Season's Greetings

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