

# CONNECTION

## Success on tap

Local breweries quench thirst

HOMETOWN HEROES

---

TOTAL ECLIPSE



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

## Agriculture thrives with broadband

Every day I hear examples of how the fast, reliable internet service provided by NTCA members brings telemedicine, rich entertainment resources, educational opportunities, jobs and far more to rural communities like yours.

But that's just the beginning. These internet networks also create a vital foundation needed by a range of industries critical to the nation's economy. While agriculture might not immediately come to mind when considering the internet, the \$4.4 billion ag tech market is a showcase for how broadband can bring farms and ranches the internet-connected tools that make agriculture more efficient, productive and sustainable.

Smart irrigation systems, farm management and automation software, drones and sensors that can remotely monitor factors such as soil moisture are just a few of the innovations used in modern agriculture. They make a real difference, too.

For example, consider just one part of the agricultural equation — water. Leveraging these high-tech tools can reduce water use by 4%. When considering the scope of the industry, that's a tangible difference, the equivalent of filling 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Without reliable internet access, these tools wouldn't be possible, nor would the benefits to consumers. When agricultural production is less expensive and yields are higher, we can all enjoy more favorable prices.

So, when you think about all your internet service provider does for you personally, take a moment to appreciate they're making a difference for all of us, nationwide. 📶



Internet-connected technology makes a bottom-line difference in agriculture, responsible for as much as an **8% increase** in the value of corn crops alone. That's an attention-getting result, and it makes it worth a closer look at ag tech.

### THE DETAILS:



Ag tech includes smart irrigation farm management software, drones, remote sensing, biotech, automation and more. Many of these tools rely on the internet to share access and store and share data.

Value of the U.S. ag tech market:  
**\$4.4 billion**

Value of agriculture, food and food-related industries:  
**\$1.26 trillion**

Agriculture supports **43 million jobs**, **\$2 trillion** in wages and generates **\$718 billion** in taxes.

### CURRENT AG TECH OFFERS:



**9% reduction**  
in chemical use



**6% reduction**  
in fossil fuel consumption



**4% reduction**  
in water use — enough to fill 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools



**30-million-pound**  
decrease in herbicide use

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** Ag tech enables farmers to lower costs while increasing yield and productivity.

# Truly personal fitness

Online fitness offerings bring workouts to wherever you are

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

After an exhausting workday, heading to that boring fitness class that's way too expensive to skip sounds like about as much fun as a root canal. What if you could just click an app or website and join a class from home? Think of the time, energy and frustration you could save.

With live and prerecorded classes and a fast and reliable internet connection, it's easy to turn any space into a gym. Thanks to apps and an array of online workout programs, you have the ability to exercise whenever, wherever and with whomever you want.

Some apps create personalized daily workout programs, while others provide a library of on-demand classes. Take a live class and become part of a community where everyone feels the burn.

## PICKING THE PERFECT PLAN

As the popularity of online exercise programs continues to grow, so does the number of available options. Before choosing one, here are some factors worth considering.

**Cost:** Pricing can vary widely, but many apps and programs offer a free trial before requiring a subscription or financial commitment.

**Instructors:** Check their credentials to make sure they're certified in whatever they're teaching.

**Variety:** You'll maximize your results by

finding a program that keeps you interested while increasing the difficulty over time.

**Devices:** Make sure the program you choose works across all your devices. Compatibility is important since one of the biggest benefits of online fitness is the ability to take it with you anywhere.

## FITNESS TO GO

While the at-home workout might seem isolating, it's actually a gateway to a digital community of like-minded fitness enthusiasts. The classes can provide a connection to a new whole world.

**Onepeloton.com:** Most famous for its much-advertised, in-home bike revolution, the Peloton digital app features on-demand and live classes of all kinds — no equipment needed.

**Nike.com/ntc-app:** This free app provides a variety of classes and styles for folks with busy schedules.

**Apple.com/apple-fitness-plus:** These classes, including yoga and Pilates, are personalized and perfected for Apple Watch users.

**DailyBurn.com:** This site offers the opportunity for one-on-one instruction. You can discover a favorite series or search for a specific workout depending on your mood.

**Beachbody.com or BODi:** This platform features '80s-style bootcamp classes, progress-tracking and nutrition hacks. 📱

## Moving and grooving

Some mobile fitness fans are turning to more creative ways to work out at home. Harkening back to the days of Richard Simmons and Jazzercise, online dancing is fast becoming a personal fitness staple.

Online dance classes can be less expensive than in-person sessions and offer more style options. And, many people feel more comfortable staging a dance party in their own living rooms rather than in a studio full of strangers.

**Zumba.com:** The Latin-inspired cardio workout has motivated millions around the world to get moving since dancing into the spotlight in 2001.

**Obefitness.com:** With more than 8,000 classes and 20 different class types to choose from, there's something for everyone. Up to 22 live classes are available, seven days a week, starting at 6 a.m. Eastern time.

**Dancio.com:** Here you'll find hundreds of recorded classes covering various dance styles.

**Steezy.co:** Work out while learning a variety of urban dance moves.



# A formula for success

## Together we make our community stronger

Grocery bills the last few years have hurt more than usual, haven't they? It's the same everywhere. A few years ago, you might have been able to buy a meal for four people, or even six, for what you now pay for two.



**KELLY ALLISON**  
General Manager

The culprit is inflation, and it never really goes away. While we'd all like to see lower prices, manageable inflation can sometimes signal our economy is showing slow, steady growth. Lately, though, things have tilted too far toward rising prices. We've all felt it, and it's not just your home budget taking a hit.

At CVCTX we've experienced the same challenges as you. Fuel and parts for our vehicles, cost of fiber construction and vital technology needed to power the services we provide and so much more have either been harder to get or more expensive.

It's not just about physical items, either. We believe in taking care of the professionals who make our blazing-fast internet and other communications services possible.

Simply put, the nation's economy is broad, complex and touches almost every part of our lives. Hopefully, we'll trend toward a better economic direction, and we can all support that welcome change.

There's something I'd like you to keep in mind, too. CVCTX has an advantage compared to many businesses — we're a cooperative, which makes a profound difference. Our mission is to put our members' needs first, including wisely managing the fiscal foundation of this organization. We want to provide the best services, the latest technology and all the communications resources you need, and do all of that affordably. That's not a hollow goal — our elected board, which consists of your friends and neighbors, is committed to wise financial decisions designed to keep CVCTX strong for the long term.

Meanwhile, people living in other communities, particularly big cities, aren't so lucky. Not only do they often not have access to an internet network as fast as ours, but they must rely on national companies for their service. And those publicly traded, for-profit nationwide providers often use confusing pricing and empty promises to maximize their profits while leaving customers with ever-rising bills.

That's such an important distinction. While co-ops like CVCTX price their services realistically — and yes, sometimes prices do increase — profit is not the be-all and end-all. You see, co-ops operate by a critical principle, which is a commitment to improve the community, not just the bottom line. Those national companies can't say the same.

So, when our community faces economic challenges, we experience them just like you, and we are committed to weathering the trouble right alongside you. And when things are going great, we'll celebrate those times with you, too.

For those of us at CVCTX, we appreciate this shared experience and commitment to making this community all it can be. It inspires us to come to work every day. Thank you for allowing us to serve you. 📶

Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by CVCTX, ©2024. 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:



A handful of local businesses have flavorfully filled the demand for microbreweries with their unique craft creations.

See story on Page 8.

Adobe Stock image  
by David Prah

GRADUATING CLASS OF  
2024

# Attention,

## HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS!



A long-standing Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative tradition will continue in 2024 with the awarding of \$5,000 scholarships to graduating seniors from local high schools.

To be eligible to receive a scholarship, students must live in a household that receives service from the cooperative. For all the details, and to get an application, go to [cvctx.com/scholarships](https://cvctx.com/scholarships).

Applications must be received by April 2.

Colorado Valley is proud to be an active member of the communities it serves and welcomes this opportunity to invest in their future by supporting higher education.

## GOOD FRIDAY



The offices of CVCTX will be closed on **MARCH 29** in observance of Good Friday. We will resume regular business hours on **MONDAY, APRIL 1**. Assistance is available anytime by calling our 24-hour tech support line at 877-452-9035.

## \$ign up and save!

CVCTX customers will get a one-time \$5 credit when they sign up for paperless billing.

Faster than a trip to the mailbox, SmartHub lets you make payments from anywhere, anytime. Learn more at: [cvctx.com/billing](https://cvctx.com/billing).

## A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

### The difference between fiber broadband and copper cables

A cable connects your home to the internet, and the type of cable can make a significant difference.

A fiber optic network offers the best performance. While the glass fibers are thinner than a human hair, they can transmit data at blinding speeds. In fact, bursts of light move information through the network. In addition to speed, a fiber connection means your bandwidth isn't shared with anyone.

Meanwhile, digital subscriber lines, or DSL, connect through copper cables. While performance is solid, there are more variables. For example, performance may decline the farther a home is from a network hub. The maximum available download speeds are 25 Mbps with an average upload of 3 Mbps. For those with fewer devices, this should suffice.

Colorado Valley Communications continues to upgrade and expand networks in our communities to provide the best experience to our customers.





# TOTALLY AWESOME

## APRIL ECLIPSE WILL WOW!

Story by KATHY DENES

**T**exas boasts beautiful scenery, but it also has plenty of stunning options for those who like to keep an eye on the sky. The heavens chose the Texas Hill Country as the epicenter for viewing two of its most spectacular events in a span of less than six months.

The “ring of fire” annular eclipse passed through on Oct. 14, its path curving from the northwest border with New Mexico to the southeast directly over San Antonio, among other places. Now, a total eclipse, coming this spring, will travel up from Mexico and split San Antonio in half as it paves a dark

road up through the Hill Country to the Piney Woods and beyond.

### **PATH OF TOTALITY**

The eclipse will enter Texas on April 8 a few seconds after 1:27 p.m. CDT over Eagle Pass, bringing nearly four minutes and 30 seconds of totality there before moving up through the northwest edges of San Antonio and then to Kerrville just after 1:32 p.m. About four minutes later, parts of Austin will go dark, then Temple and Waco.

The largest metropolitan area lying completely within the path is Dallas,

where eclipse totality will start about 1:40 p.m. Continuing northeast, Sulphur Springs, Bogata and Clarksville are on the centerline of total darkness. Paris will see almost four minutes of totality, beginning just before 1:44 p.m.

The shadow leaves Texas a few seconds before 1:52 p.m., having traveled 480 miles through the state in just a bit more than 25 minutes. For a view of how the eclipse will look in any given city and for much more information, go to [eclipse2024.org](http://eclipse2024.org) and [greatamericaneclipse.com/april-8-2024](http://greatamericaneclipse.com/april-8-2024).



*“And the moon  
in haste eclipsed  
her, and the sun in  
anger swore.”*

— Aristophanes, Greek writer, 450-385 B.C.,  
after observing an eclipse

## EVENTFUL OPTIONS

Events for viewing and celebrating the April 8 total eclipse are happening all across the Hill Country, some spanning multiple days. Festival sites along the totality path include Uvalde, Junction, Bandera, Tarpley, Kerrville, Burnet and Waco. Some of these offer campsite packages, as do many area wineries and attractions, such as Boerne’s Cave Without a Name, Cascade Caverns and Ingram’s Stonehenge II. With so many planned viewing activities, be sure to do some research and find an outing that will eclipse all expectations.

## ECLIPSE 101

**TOTAL ECLIPSE:** When the moon passes between the Earth and the sun and the moon briefly covers the sun’s disk completely, areas within the narrow path of the moon’s shadow will experience total darkness. Such an eclipse won’t be seen again in the U.S. until August 2044.

**VIEWING AN ECLIPSE:** The only time it is safe to look at the sun with the naked eye is during the brief totality phase of a total solar eclipse. At all other times, eclipse phases and locations, direct viewing of the sun is only safe through special solar filters and viewers. Look for the ISO 12312-2 standard, and make sure they are free of scratches or flaws. No. 13 or 14 welder’s glass also provides protection.

For other eye-safe options, check for events at one of Texas’ 17 permanent planetariums, found at [go-astronomy.com/planetariums.htm](http://go-astronomy.com/planetariums.htm).



Photo by Adil/Adobe Stock

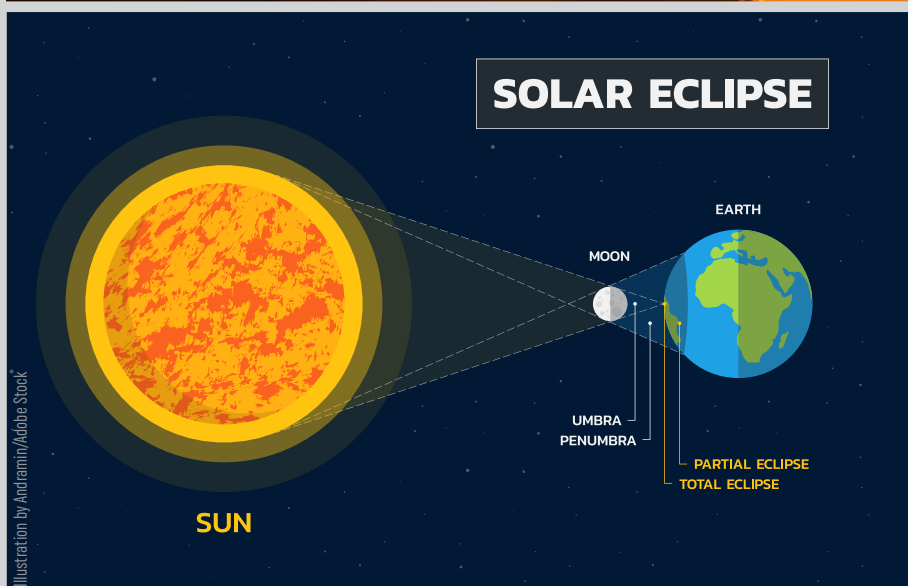


Illustration by Andramin/Adobe Stock

**FOR DETAILED INFORMATION** about the April total eclipse, visit [science.nasa.gov/eclipses/future-eclipses/eclipse-2024/faq](https://science.nasa.gov/eclipses/future-eclipses/eclipse-2024/faq).



Photo by Jiva Core/Adobe Stock

# Carpe

# fermen



## Craft breweries thrive in the Colorado Valley

Story by LAZ DENES



Photo courtesy of Hound Song Brewing Co.

Travis Kocurek starts another batch of Burnin' Daylight, a light lager from Hound Song Brewing Co.



Photo courtesy of La Grange Brewing Company

Goats at Blissful Folly Farm, home of La Grange Brewing Company, eat spent brewing grains.

Thanks to new microbreweries, including establishments in Columbus, La Grange and Giddings, the Colorado River Valley has joined the craft beer renaissance that's poured across the nation for more than two decades. These German- and Czech-inspired creations may rival those of the country's most notable craft brew hotbeds in Colorado, Oregon and Northern California.

### 'CZECH, PLEASE'

On the corner of Walnut and Bowie streets in the heart of Columbus is a 1920s-era landmark that houses Travis and Raven Kocurek's Hound Song Brewing Co. The establishment celebrated its third anniversary in November.

The couple met in Northern Colorado, Raven's home state. Travis, a native Texan from Weimar, was working there for the federal government after a stint in Tanzania with the Peace Corps. Inspired by the Colorado microbrewery scene, which he calls the Napa Valley for beer, Travis completed an intense, six-month American Brewers Guild curriculum.

In 2019, the search for their perfect location led Travis and Raven to Columbus and the 8,000-square-foot building that began its life in 1926 as Harbert's Garage. In 2018, the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Today, the Hound Song beer lineup features Travis' signature Double Backbone Czech Dark Lager, a nod to his family heritage. There's also the Rough String German Altbier Ale. Meanwhile, the food menu features fare like a Reuben sandwich and sticky pork belly bao buns.

"Back in the day, there was a bus stop right outside where local soldiers began their journey to go serve in World War II, Korea and Vietnam," Travis says. "Every so often, we'll see local Vietnam vets, now in their 80s, enjoying a beer here and reminiscing about their time overseas and how they left from here to go do all that."

### GERMAN STYLE IN LA GRANGE

The 30-acre Blissful Folly Farm is outside La Grange. In 2009, Houston transplants John and Wendy Rohan began crafting their own meads, ciders and wines under their Rohan Meadery brand. Over the next decade, their versatile, self-sustaining farm evolved. There is an acre each of blanc du Bois and tempranillo grapevines, as well as beehives, fruit trees, sheep and goats.

John began tinkering with beer-making, putting his background in chemical engineering to use in a whole new way. By 2019 he had perfected his craft, and La Grange Brewing Company was added to



# tummy



Photo courtesy of LaGrange Brewery

the Blissful Folly Farm portfolio. It offers such creations as the Miss Mae Golden Honey Ale, the Walter Tex-Czech Pilsner and the Chalk-line Blue Agave American Pale Ale.

“Our beer style is a Texas take on the traditional German style, so we tone it down a bit. The easy drinkability of our craft beverages is really important,” Wendy says. “We have one tap room for all of the many things we have to drink and eat. So, you can have a beer, a wine, a mead and a cider all in one flight. There are definitely places where beer and wine and mead intersect. The bottom line is that it’s all craft stuff, and it’s really transparent as far as what all the ingredients are, how they’re made, how the process happens. That’s what people appreciate and why craft beverages have become so popular.”

## CARRYING ON THE FAMILY NAME

One of the area’s newest establishments is also in a historic landmark. The circa 1918 Sterling Theatre movie house was transformed into the Giddings Brewhaus that opened for business in January 2022.

Robert Zoch headed up the project with his dad, Bob, who passed away early last year. Robert takes pride in carrying on the family name in Lee County. Zochs were among the community’s founding families after immigrating to the U.S. from Wendish Germany in the mid-1800s.

With Zoch Bock, Bob’s Pils and the signature Pecan Porter leading the way on the beer menu, Giddings Brewhaus is a bona fide sports bar with 19 large-screen TVs and chicken wings and specialty pizzas. 🍷



Photo courtesy of Giddings Brewhaus

The late Bob Zoch, left, and his son, Robert, toast the success of Giddings Brewhaus, the business they opened together in 2022.



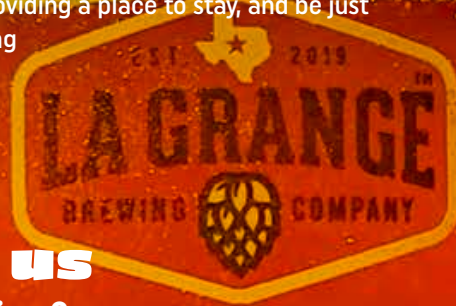
## Leaving the hustle and bustle

Eva Park and her partner, Bryan Broussard, wanted to escape the daily grind of commuting to their jobs in and around Houston. That led to the creation of Vintage Hideaway Beer & Wine Garden, a truly one-of-a-kind gathering place in Carmine.

They bought the 12-acre property in 2019 and cleared it themselves. Then, they built and outfitted five small cottages for city dwellers and others to enjoy the serenity of the country for a time. Each 300-square-foot, one-bedroom cottage — the Lone Star, Yellow Rose, Ruby Redbird, Blue Moon and White Wing — is uniquely decorated and available year-round via online vacation rental sites like Airbnb and Vrbo.

Their popular beer and wine garden, open Thursdays and Saturdays, gives locals and out-of-towners a chance to enjoy a wide selection of adult beverages and a food menu featuring appetizers, entrees, sides and salads with a Cajun flair.

“We thought it could be a one-stop-shop for people coming out into the country, providing a place to stay, and be just steps away from enjoying good food and drinks,” Eva says. “People seem to love it.”



## Where to find us

### Hound Song Brewing Company

535 Walnut St., Columbus  
979-500-4253  
houndsongbrewing.com  
Facebook/Instagram — @houndsongbrewingco

### La Grange Brewing Company

6002 FM 2981, La Grange  
979-249-5652  
lagrangebrewingco.com  
Facebook — La Grange Brewing Co.  
Instagram — @lagrangebrewingco

### Giddings Brewhaus

199 N. Burleson St., Giddings  
979-315-2337  
giddingsbrewhaus.com  
Facebook/Instagram — @giddingsbrewhaus

### The Vintage Hideaway Beer & Wine Garden

3820 Schoenst Road, Carmine  
281-235-7486  
thevintagehideaway.com  
Facebook/Instagram — @thevintagehideaway



# FUNKY CHICKENS

Ornamental poultry are not your basic backyard birds



Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

Light Brahma bantams are Turner's favorite chickens to breed and show.



Joe, Meagan, Turner and Kaiser Holland have found a home in the world of exhibition poultry.

Seven-year-old Turner Holland wanted to keep busy outside of school, but he knew he wasn't athletic and couldn't stand sports. That's when his dad, Joe, brought home a half-dozen baby chickens from Tractor Supply.

Those first six chicks led to hundreds more as Turner and his family jumped into the world of backyard poultry at their home in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Now known as Chicken Hill Farm, they are a go-to source of the rare blue Araucana, as well as several other breeds of ornamental chickens.

Their clientele is a growing group that finds joy in raising chickens. More than 12 million people — about twice the population of Arizona — share their yards with a flock, according to The American Pet Products Association's most recent national pet owner survey. The number of households with chickens rose from 8% in 2008 to 13% in 2020.

Many people choose to keep them as pets or as a steady source of fresh eggs.

But exhibition chickens like the Hollands' are often inconsistent layers. Instead, these flashy fowls have a different job — strutting their stuff.

The Hollands' signature Araucana chickens are recognizable by their poof of feathers — known as tufts — that grow at their ears instead of at their “rumpless” tail ends. While the “hilarious, friendly girls,” known for their pastel blue eggs, are Chicken Hill Farm's stars, they share the spotlight with many other funky chickens. There's the Muppet-like jet black Polish with their explosion of fluffy, white head feathers that often obscure their eyes. The Brahmas have abundant, soft feathers that cover their legs and feet. And then there are the small silkies, the most unique of all. Lacking the barbicels that hold a feather's shape, they look — and feel — like they're covered with fur rather than feathers.

Maintaining the chickens' genetics is fascinating, says Turner's mom, Meagan.



At first, she and Turner focused on breeding, but then they discovered the exhibition part of fancy poultry. They took a few of their favorites to a local county show in June 2022 and then to another one a week later. Turner is now 11 and a rising star on the exhibition poultry circuit.

"After that, it just snowballed, and he's all in," Meagan says. "He just fell into it and is obsessed. This is such a great activity for him and for us to do as a family."

The family now spends most weekends in the summer and fall traveling to exhibitions where Turner is making a name for himself. Meagan handles the birds. Joe, an Army veteran, drives. And younger son, Kaiser, is beginning to join his brother in the show ring.

"I don't know if my husband was as excited about our new lifestyle," Meagan says with a laugh. "He's not into the breeding like Turner and I are. But he enjoys the birds and the time we spend together as a family." 🗨️



**ABOVE:** Turner's light Brahma bantam cockerel won champion of the Feather Legged Class in the junior show at the Ohio National Poultry Show.

**LEFT:** As more people become involved with raising fancy chickens at home, the number of exhibition poultry shows and entrants continues to grow.



Photo by Sara D. Patterson

## Are you ready for backyard chickens?

Saving money and healthier eggs are the intent of many people who raise chickens, but those goals are often difficult to reach, says Gregory Archer, associate professor and extension specialist for Texas A&M Department of Poultry Science.

"I tell people it should be more about self-satisfaction and the desire to know exactly how and where your eggs came from. Chickens are also fun, and kids love them."

Possible challenges include bird medical care, waste management or strategies for excess eggs. Similarly, predators can quickly be an issue.

Also, there are geographic-specific considerations. "Often, people don't manage heat or get the correct breeds for Texas heat," he says. "You need to make sure you have fresh water, shade and maybe some fans."

A little research will help identify birds suitable for heat, cold or any environment.

## CHICKEN CONSIDERATIONS



If you're contemplating backyard chickens, consider these points before adopting the chicken lifestyle.

### LOCAL LAWS AND NEIGHBORHOOD REGULATIONS

- Check for the latest rules on chicken ownership in your town and county. Many cities limit the number of chickens allowed per household and prohibit roosters entirely.
- Often, cities require chickens to be kept enclosed and that the coop is well maintained and cleaned frequently.
- If you decide to sell your eggs, ensure it's legal where you live.

### EXPENSES

Even small-scale chicken farming requires ongoing expenses after buying or building a coop and fencing.

- A 40-pound bag of feed can cost \$25 or more, depending on the brand, nutritional value and other factors.
- Dietary supplements are typically needed, so budget for extra proteins and treats, like dried insects — a 5-pound bag can cost at least \$50.
- Chickens require fresh bedding, like pine shavings or chopped straw, every time the coop is cleaned.

### CARE

While caring for chickens isn't a full-time job, do expect to invest time.

- Most people adopt a daily or twice-daily routine for feeding and watering.
- Many times, chickens need to be let out of a small coop in the morning and herded back in at night for safety.
- Remember, chickens can fly. Some people prefer to clip their wings regularly, while others choose a run with fencing or netting overhead.

Source: Osceola County Extension Agent Jessica Sullivan





# Hometown heroes

## Local volunteers save lives and protect property

Story by JEREMY WOOD

In rural America, volunteers are often the first to respond to a fire in a home or business, a highway wreck or many other emergencies. They're part of a long tradition of neighbors helping neighbors in the hardest of times.

Strong community support, thorough and detailed training and a commitment to continue the mission by introducing newcomers to the tasks are among the challenges and satisfactions embraced by the volunteers who make life safer.

For example, Frank Menefee wears many hats — and helmets — for the city of La Grange. He works as the assistant city manager where his responsibilities include the coordination of emergency management and acting as the chief fire marshal. On his own time, he serves as the chief of

the La Grange Volunteer Fire Department, leading the all-volunteer organization.

The La Grange VFD is responsible for 232 square miles in Fayette County. Its volunteers are trained to respond to incidents like structure fires, grass fires, automobile and farming accidents, water rescues and rope rescues.

Menefee says the department enjoys tremendous community support — so much so that there is a waitlist of potential volunteers. Once volunteers earn an initial certification, they must begin training to operate a range of equipment and respond to various incidents.

When they are needed, volunteers receive dispatches through pagers and a phone app before making their way to the fire station to gear up and take a fire

vehicle to the emergency. “Our volunteers have to either live or work in our response area,” Menefee says. “We have people who have accounting backgrounds, we have people who work in the local tire plant.”

Menefee, a volunteer firefighter for 36 years, attributes the support the department receives from the community to the volunteers' efforts both on calls and in proactive situations like school visits.

“We're fortunate to get a lot of community donations, and we've had folks who pass on leave us money from their inheritance,” Menefee says. Donations provided \$125,000 for the purchase of new Scott packs, a type of breathing apparatus used when fighting a fire inside a structure, and one donor bought new extrication tools, he says.

**LEFT:** As a teenager, Rylan Stork trained with the Carmine VFD. He intends to remain a volunteer firefighter for years to come.

## A LIFETIME CALLING

Like its neighbor to the southwest, the Carmine Volunteer Fire Department is staffed by members of the community. David Mohr, a volunteer since 1981, now holds the rank of captain and serves as the department's training officer. "I got into it because I loved getting juiced up on adrenaline," he says with a laugh.

As the training officer, one of his responsibilities is recruiting and training new firefighters. Carmine has a successful junior volunteer program. High schoolers who are at least 16 years old can begin training to be full-fledged responders. Junior volunteers have mandatory twice-monthly training and can help at fire scenes but, are not certified to drive fire equipment until they are 18.

"It's all a progressive deal where they come in knowing very little about the fire service," Mohr says. "It's all about keeping them engaged and giving them chances to put their hands on."

One drill Mohr designed came as a surprise to his volunteers. Without knowing it was a drill, they were dispatched to a location on Mohr's property where he had rigged a mannequin trapped in a bulldozer cab by a fallen tree. Under supervision, the volunteers had to make sure the scene was safe, stabilize the tree and then assess the situation before extricating the mock patient. Mohr says the most important thing he coaches them on is their decision making. "It was a three-hour drill, and then we went back to the station and sat in our training room and talked about it," he says. "Giving them problem-solving tools is the biggest thing."

## GETTING INVOLVED EARLY

Rylan Stork joined the Carmine VFD as a 16-year-old junior volunteer. Now 18 and with high school completed, he is studying diesel mechanical technology at Texas State Technical College in Waco. But he still attends training and responds to calls when he's back home in Carmine on the weekends.



Photo courtesy of Brent Gorman Jr.



Photo courtesy of Brent Gorman Jr.



Photo courtesy of Capt. David Mohr

**TOP:** Columbus VFD battles a truck fire near Interstate 10.

**LEFT:** Columbus VFD Lt. Duane Naiser and firefighters Hadley Sciba and Michael Smith extinguish a car fire on Interstate 10.

**RIGHT:** A team of junior firefighters works together during a training exercise created by Carmine VFD Capt. David Mohr.

"I like helping out people a lot, and I always thought fighting fires was cool," says Stork, who intends to return to Carmine after graduation. "The most rewarding thing is helping people at wrecks by providing first aid and later hearing they are doing better."

Stork wants to be a full-time diesel mechanic while remaining a volunteer firefighter. However, some volunteers at both the Carmine and La Grange depart-

ments found a passion for the fire service and went on to work full time at departments in larger cities. Mohr says helping someone discover that passion is one of the most rewarding things about working with younger volunteers.

"They'll come back from getting to work on a grass fire and looking like they've been sprayed with soot," says Mohr. "Then they don't sleep all night because they're so excited." 📱





# Regional Accents

Local favorites are  
key ingredient of  
America's melting pot

**E**very local dish has a story behind it, history heaped with flavor. One of the best ways to discover these is by stirring the nation's culinary pot to see what's cooking.

Certain dishes are common to us Americans across the board. We'll fry just about anything. From Twinkies to turkeys, they all go in the deep fryer. But, when it comes to comfort-food classics, states and regions have their own distinct accents. U.S. culinary traditions form a giant melting pot with regional flavors blended in for extra deliciousness.

Regional foods are some of the most fascinating bites one can experience. Here's a look at some of the ones that are favorites across our nation.



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

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

## SMOKED GOUDA MAC AND CHEESE

*You'd be hard-pressed to walk into a diner around the South and not see mac and cheese on the menu. This recipe just takes it up a notch.*

- 1 pound short pasta, such as elbow macaroni or shells
- 1 pound smoked gouda cheese, grated
- 8 ounces extra-sharp white cheddar cheese, grated
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mustard
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- Salt, to taste
- 4 slices of bacon, crumbled (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Cook pasta according to package directions to al dente stage, then set aside.

In a large Dutch oven or other deep pot, heat butter over medium-low heat. Once butter has melted, add in flour and whisk until all flour disappears, then slowly add in heavy cream and whole milk. Stir and let mixture come to a slight boil. Add in all spices and stir again. Lastly, add in 8 ounces of smoked gouda cheese and white cheddar cheese. Whisk until all cheese has melted.

Add in pasta and mix everything together to fully incorporate, making sure all pasta is coated with sauce. Add salt, to taste.

Transfer mixture to a large, lightly greased baking dish, then top dish with remaining smoked gouda. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until mixture is golden and bubbly.

Let cool for 15 minutes and serve warm topped with crumbled bacon, if desired. Makes 8 servings.





## WILD RICE CHICKEN CASSEROLE

*Wild rice is found throughout the Midwest, where this recipe originates.*

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) chicken broth
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 4 cups cubed, cooked chicken
- 4 cups cooked wild rice
- 2 jars (4 1/2 ounces each) sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1 jar (4 ounces) diced pimentos, drained
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
- 1/3 cup slivered almonds

In a large saucepan, saute onion in butter until tender. Stir in the flour, salt and pepper until blended. Gradually stir in broth. Bring to a boil. Boil and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Stir in the half-and-half, chicken, rice, mushrooms, pimentos and parsley. Heat through.

Transfer mixture to a greased 2 1/2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with almonds. Bake, uncovered, at 350 F for 30-35 minutes or until bubbly. Makes 6-8 servings.

## SALSA ROJAS

*Salsa is the condiment of choice throughout Texas and many of the Western states.*

- 1 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes with garlic and onion, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) stewed tomatoes (with Mexican seasonings, if you can find them), drained
- 1 can (10 ounces) diced tomatoes and green chilies, drained
- 1 medium onion, quartered
- 2 banana peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 cup minced fresh cilantro
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 2 ripe avocados, peeled and cubed
- Tortilla chips



Place the first 10 ingredients in a food processor; cover and process until chopped. Add cilantro and lime juice; cover and pulse until combined.

Transfer to a bowl; stir in avocados. Serve with tortilla chips or use as a condiment for your favorite Tex-Mex dishes.

## SALMON PICCATA

*This is a popular recipe in the Northwest where fresh salmon is easy to find. In other states, try to get your hands on the freshest fish possible to bring out the flavors in this dish.*

- 4 salmon steaks, 1 inch thick
- All-purpose flour (for dredging)
- 1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 3 tablespoons onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 heaping tablespoon capers, drained
- 1/8 teaspoon dried Italian seasonings, crushed
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons beef broth

Preheat oven to 400 F. Rinse salmon steaks under cool water, pat dry and roll in flour.

In a large ovenproof frying pan or saute pan, heat 1/4 cup butter until it melts. Briefly saute the salmon steaks, browning them lightly on both sides.

Bake, covered, 10 to 15 minutes until a meat thermometer registers an internal temperature of 140 F, or until salmon is slightly opaque in the thickest part. You may need to cut to test. During this time the meat continues to cook because the meat temperature will rise 5 to 10 degrees after it is removed from the oven and the juices will redistribute. Remove from oven. Reserve liquid in the pan, and transfer salmon onto a warm serving platter.

Using the same pan over medium heat, stir into the reserved liquid the onion, garlic, capers and Italian seasonings. Simmer for 5 minutes. Add white wine, lemon juice and beef broth. Stir until well blended. Turn off the heat, whisk in the remaining 3 tablespoons butter until blended. Remove from heat, pour sauce over salmon and serve immediately. Makes 4 servings. 🍴



# Over the next five years,

Colorado Valley Communications will be expanding our fiber-to-home network to residents in our Cooperative service areas.

**PROJECTED  
COMPLETION  
IS SCHEDULED  
FOR 2028.**



**Scan for  
project details  
and easement  
information.**



**Now Accepting  
Scholarship Applications.**  
*See inside for details.*



**COLORADO  
VALLEY**  
Communications  
**WHERE CONNECTIONS MATTER.**



**GIG-CERTIFIED  
PROVIDER**

979.242.5911 | [cvctx.com/fiberbuildout](http://cvctx.com/fiberbuildout) | 800.242.5911