

CONNECTION

Community Gem

Book it to the
Round Top
Family Library

**SECOND CHANCE
EMPORIUM**

**FILM
FESTIVAL**



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO

NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

Professionally Secure

NTCA members are committed to your safety

As we enter the holiday season, it is an opportunity to acknowledge a group of professionals you may not realize is working diligently behind the scenes to make this season—as well as every month of the year—enjoyable and safe.

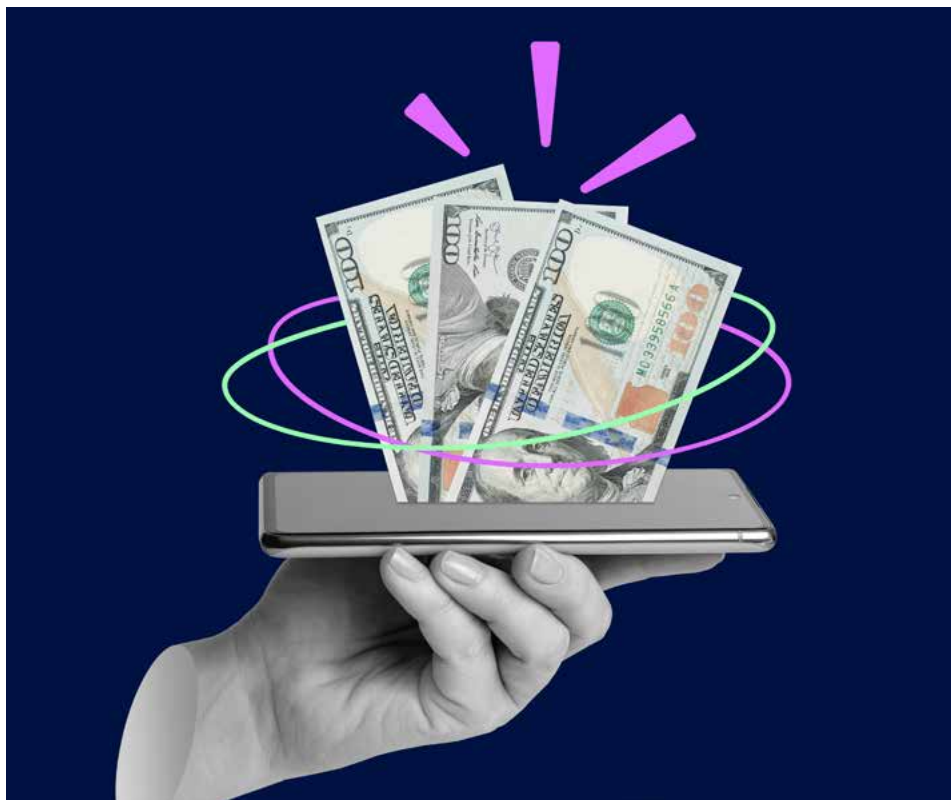
Many of you stream movies, music, short videos or interactive games, and there's always online shopping. NTCA members provide rural communities with the networks vital for all of this and so much more, from banking to education, telehealth and beyond.

Unfortunately, online risks do exist. Scammers may try to capture your personal information, or malicious websites might lead to insecure transactions. There are even attempts to disrupt the infrastructure itself.

Monitoring threats and vigilantly updating everything from software to security strategies is central to the day-to-day job of rural broadband providers. To help with this, NTCA created CyberShare: The Small Broadband Provider ISAC, an information-sharing network that allows participating providers to collaborate and share critical information. Whether it's learning about vulnerable equipment, software exploits, recent cyberattack attempts or mitigation strategies, this information sharing helps members proactively strengthen their defenses to keep you and your family safe online.

You play a role, too. When you're shopping online, make smart choices, such as relying on websites with addresses that begin with https, shop on well-established sites and lean on strong, secure passwords.

Together we can enjoy happy, safe holidays. 📱



Adobe Stock image by LariBat

Use Caution With Cash Apps

While mobile payment apps like PayPal or Venmo make it easy to send and receive money online or through an app on a phone, scammers are also waiting to take advantage.

This service becomes an intermediary between your money and whoever is on the other end of a transaction, which can create an added layer of security.

But if a scammer tricks you into sending money, it's hard to get it back. The Federal Trade Commission notes the risks and offers tips for staying safe.

- Don't send a payment to claim a prize or collect sweepstakes winnings.
- Never give your account credentials to anyone who contacts you.
- Protect your account with multifactor authentication or a personal identification number.
- Before paying, double-check the recipient's information to make sure you're sending money to the right person.
- If you get an unexpected request for money from someone you do recognize, speak with that person directly to make sure the request really is valid, not a scam by a hacker who got access to their account.

If you find unauthorized payments or think you paid a scammer, immediately report the transaction to the service providing the payment app. Instructions should be available on the service's website. Also, report the scam to reportfraud.ftc.gov. 📱

Outside the Box

Personalized presents extend gift-giving beyond holidays

Looking for that gift that keeps on giving long after they've tossed the wrapping paper and bows? With a little online exploration, a nontraditional gift is out there for just about everyone on your list.

GAMING SUBSCRIPTIONS

Just like movie and music services, game subscriptions offer unlimited access to huge catalogs of titles for players who would rather not put up the \$70-\$80 average price for each individual game. Paying a part of the most popular subscriptions—Xbox Game Pass at \$9.99-\$19.99 per month, PlayStation Plus at \$17.99 or Apple Arcade at \$6.99—is a great way to show your gamers some love.

WATCH 'EM PLAY

Video game streaming involves broadcasting live gameplay over the internet, allowing viewers to engage with and watch other players in real time. Like livestreaming on Facebook and TikTok, game streamers provide content for viewers worldwide, playing video games and offering commentary.

Twitch is by far the most popular service, with more than 240 million monthly subscribers who play, watch, create content and follow other gamers. Three subscription tiers with different levels of perks range from \$4.99 to \$24.99 per month. Steam is also huge. Discord, Kick, Caffeine and DLive are other popular choices for gifting your interactive gamers, just confirm the platform they prefer so you're sure to get them a gift they can use.

'OF THE MONTH' CLUBS

With a quick internet search, you can set

up a monthly delivery of everything from pickles to pet chews to bath gels, bacon and beyond. Look at sites like Amazing Clubs or Month Club Store to find multiple choices in one spot.

A monthly themed box or crate can satisfy all ages, from educational toys at Crunchlabs and a monthly Lego set through Brick Loot to a spa-in-a-box from Therabox. Visit Cratejoy for a wide selection.

Consider a gift subscription to Dear Holmes, which mails weekly clues on fancy stationery for solving a Victorian-era crime. For \$50, six months' worth of mysteries will turn your person into a solo Sherlock or the leader of a team of Watsons who share stories on YouTube.

GIFT CARDS

You've no doubt noticed the columns of gift cards at your supermarket or drugstore. They look like colorful credit cards, and that's exactly what they are. These pieces of plastic can be applied toward almost anything from cash to food delivery services. The easiest way to give something everyone wants and by far the simplest to ship, gift cards are expected to generate \$447.1 billion in revenue this year.

You can grab gift cards toward recurring subscriptions, like a movie or music streaming service. You're sure to earn points by gifting a part of the monthly Netflix or Hulu charges. Or find a Spotify, Apple Music or SiriusXM gift card and keep the happy tunes flowing all year. 🎧

GIFT CARD SMARTS

Stick to stores you know and trust. Avoid buying online where shady sellers may promote fake or stolen gift cards.

Avoid cards with signs of tampering.

Pay with a credit card if possible. If you run into problems and have to file a chargeback, your credit card company will investigate.

Keep copies. If the gift card doesn't work, the number on the card and store receipt will help you file a report with the Federal Trade Commission at reportfraud.ftc.gov.

Source: Federal Trade Commission

Happy Holidays!

Let's thrive and celebrate together



KELLY ALLISON
General Manager

The final two months of 2025 will bring turkey dinners, bright lights, festive gatherings and so much more. I always enjoy this time of year, when shared values and community spirit tie us together. At Colorado Valley Communications, we're happy to play our part, too.

We proudly support the local businesses that make our economy strong during this busiest of shopping seasons. Generosity and gift-giving fuel much of that success for businesses of all sizes.

For some companies, the gains made from Black Friday and similar sales events are the difference between a profitable year and lean results. By providing quality communications services, we strive to help them connect not only to you but also to the online tools and resources—even the online shoppers—that create success. A study last year supported in part by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, found rural economies with strong broadband usage grew at a rate 200% higher than similar areas with low broadband usage. Simply put, in places lacking reliable internet, businesses close at a faster rate.

At CVCTX, though, we don't need national studies to tell us how we're doing. We talk to the local business owners to better serve them. We lend a hand when a new company opens. And we know our fast, reliable internet network is considered essential infrastructure for many employers looking for a location.

But shopping and income are only two parts of the equation during the holiday season.

There's time for pure fun, too. Though many people do find plenty of enjoyment in shopping, many families will turn to their broadband connection to unlock a treasure trove of digital experiences.

Music, movies, gaming, social media and far more are a few clicks away. You'll even find an article in this magazine noting several possible digital gifts, perfect for the times when you need a creative solution.

As we give thanks during this holiday season, however, it's important to remember more than fun and opportunity. That's the other side of our mission. Yes, we focus on providing essential services, but we also believe in giving back, both as a company and as individuals.

Not everyone's fortunes are equal. It's often particularly trying during the holidays. If you can help, consider contributing monetarily to a charity, finding a few spare hours to volunteer or donating food or other goods.

Please visit area shops. Check out a local artist. Find a one-of-a-kind gift from an equally unique business. And if you're able, help as you can. Together, we make this community a wonderful home where we can all thrive.

Thank you for letting CVCTX serve you. Have a happy Thanksgiving and a very merry Christmas. 📺

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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.

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. To learn about the service available at your address, visit cvctx.com/signup.

Produced for CVCTX by:



On the Cover:



The Round Top Family Library, located in a converted church, is home to much more than just books. It also serves as a community center. See story on Page 12.

Photo courtesy of Round Top Family Library

Protect Your Data While Shopping Online

The allure of shopping for the whole family without changing out of your pajamas is hard to beat. However, if you forego trips to shopping centers, follow these tips to stay safe when buying online:

Email

- Beware of scam emails. There's been a rash of emails claiming to be from Colorado Valley Communications asking recipients for their usernames and passwords. CVCTX will never ask for that information in an email.
- Don't click suspicious links in emails. Another common email scam is messages claiming to be from shipping companies reporting that a package can't be delivered unless the recipient clicks a link. While you may be worried about package deliveries during the holidays, look up the delivery company's website and check there. Never click the links in unexpected emails from unknown contacts.
- Beware of emails and texts that push a sense of urgency. Messages warning that your service will be cut off or you will be arrested if you don't respond immediately are scams.

Shopping traps

- Stick to reputable retailers. Be wary of offers that seem too good to be true. They usually are.
- Use only secure websites that encrypt your information. Secure websites show "https" and a padlock icon in the browser's address bar. Other signs of a legitimate site include a professional design with few spelling errors, clear contact information, "About Us" pages and a strong privacy policy.

- No matter how secure the website—or even when you shop in person—companies aren't infallible. Data breaches happen. If you get a notification of a breach, make sure you follow the included instructions, such as using any free credit monitoring services they make available.
- Keep an eye on your financial statements. Especially if you ordered an item and then can't get a response to follow-up messages if the package doesn't arrive.



Office Closures

To allow our employees to celebrate the holidays with their families, CVCTX offices will be closed on the following dates:

Thanksgiving—Thursday, Nov. 27, and Friday, Nov. 28

Christmas—Thursday, Dec. 25, and Friday, Dec. 26

New Year's Day—Thursday, Jan. 1

Honoring All Who Served

CVCTX thanks everyone who has served our country. Your efforts and sacrifices protect our nation and the freedoms we hold dear. Take a moment this Veterans Day to thank a veteran in your life.

In honor of the holiday, our office will be closed Tuesday, Nov. 11.



FOLK Art Celebrates Community and Creativity

Artisans share homegrown skills rooted in life

Story by KATHY DENES

Texas runs deep in the hearts of its artists, particularly those whose work reflects Lone Star culture, past and present.

Many of their artistic endeavors can be classified as folk art—a category which includes ceramics, sculptures, paintings, quilts, jewelry, photography, pottery, glass, furniture, musical instruments and more, created by artisans with little or no formal training.

These artists welcome the chance to share their homegrown skills at folk art workshops, classes and communities across the state. The Chicken Farm Art Center in San Angelo offers all these experiences in a single place.

The Chicken Farm Art Center Gallery showcases works by the studio's artists and is filled with creative gifts.

The folk arts scene in this city of about 100,000 residents is a big draw for locals and visitors alike. The genre is so popular that the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts presented a two-part exhibit named True Texas: Folk Traditional Arts of the Concho Valley starting in 2020.

One of the artists featured in the first True Texas exhibit is weaver Audrey Legatowicz, who set up her loom in Chicken Farm Art Center's Studio 2—one of its 17 artist's areas, also known as coops.

Audrey took her first weaving class in Illinois when her children were young. "It was nice to develop a hobby," she says. She learned to sew and crochet as a child from her grandmothers, both seamstresses

by trade. But weaving drew her in as an adult, and she learned all she could from books. Then she joined a weavers' guild, which offered access to workshops and monthly meetings where other weavers would "share their information and little tips along the way that I enjoy passing on to others," Audrey says.

When she moved to Dallas in 1981, weaving became her main vocation, first at a retail shop, then in a private gallery and





Colorful outdoor areas provide an inspiring canvas for art center guests and studio artists.

a series of consignment shops. Teaching opportunities followed at the city's craft guild and in school systems, where she started a textiles study program. But after 30 years in Dallas—the last 10 of those commuting for twice-yearly stints at a Chicken Farm Art Center coop—Audrey made the move to San Angelo.

Visitors to the eclectic Chicken Farm arts community can take classes and workshops there, but they can also enjoy what the farm describes as “a peaceful oasis that allows your soul to breathe.”

THE COOP SCOOP

The Chicken Farm Art Center opened in 1971, when the late Roger Allen quit his job as the Central High School art teacher and partnered with two buddies to create an artists' haven. They bought a vacant set of buildings that had been a 1940s chicken farm and, over time, converted the spaces

into studios and apartments where artists could live as a community. Other property partners came aboard in 1999 and gave some old coops new life as The Inn at the Art Center with four single bedrooms and a couple of two-bedroom suites. They also converted a grain silo building into a restaurant called, fittingly, The Silo.



Painting is just one of the many areas of study artists teach at the Chicken Farm Art Center studio, where they also sell their works.

Besides the chance to learn from talented artisans or simply enjoy a break in a relaxing atmosphere, the Chicken Farm Art Center offers a vibrant art shop and gallery. Also, the first Saturday of every month except January brings a pop-up vendor market, open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., where Texas artists, many of them local to San Angelo, sell their artworks, crafts and goods. When the weather permits, a group of local musicians called the Chicken Pickers is on hand to jam.

The farm hosts a range of events throughout the year. These include a two-day Holiday Art Market & Open House set for Friday, Nov. 28, and Saturday, Nov. 29, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Updates on events and classes can be found on the farm's website, chickenfarmartcenter.com, and on its Facebook page. 

AUSTIN FOLK ART EXHIBIT

The folk art of Texas, and classes to learn how to create it, can be found across the state. Many galleries also offer another way to enjoy folk art, including one in Austin that's displaying artifacts crafted by Latin American artists. The works are on loan from the permanent collection of Austin Friends of Folk Art, a nonprofit organized in 1987 to support and promote the genre.

The exhibit, which opened in September to commemorate Hispanic Heritage Month, runs through Dec. 17 at Toby Shor JGallery in the Dell Jewish Community Center. People who are not members of the JCC can request admission to the exhibit online at shalomaustin.org/jgallery-visitor-form.

Shopping

With a Soul

Resale store's bargains fund community outreach efforts



Story by MELANIE JONES

When Second Chance Emporium's volunteers arrive on Friday mornings, they find a line of cars stretching beyond the parking lot gates. The cars' occupants—some of whom arrived at 5:30 a.m.—wait patiently for the gates to open at 7:30 a.m. Then, there's a dash to line up at the doors to be the first inside when the store opens at 9 a.m.

The sales floor of Second Chance Emporium is open on Fridays and Saturdays, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The volunteer staff posts 350 to 550 photos of items for sale on the store's Facebook

page on Thursdays. "And let me tell you, that makes them line up," says Linda Morrison, secretary of the organization's board. "Fridays are the new stuff. It's just getting out, so they're a little anxious."

The charity store works two ways. "Those in need can buy items they want or need at a very affordable price, and then the money is given right back to the organizations we all believe in," Linda says.

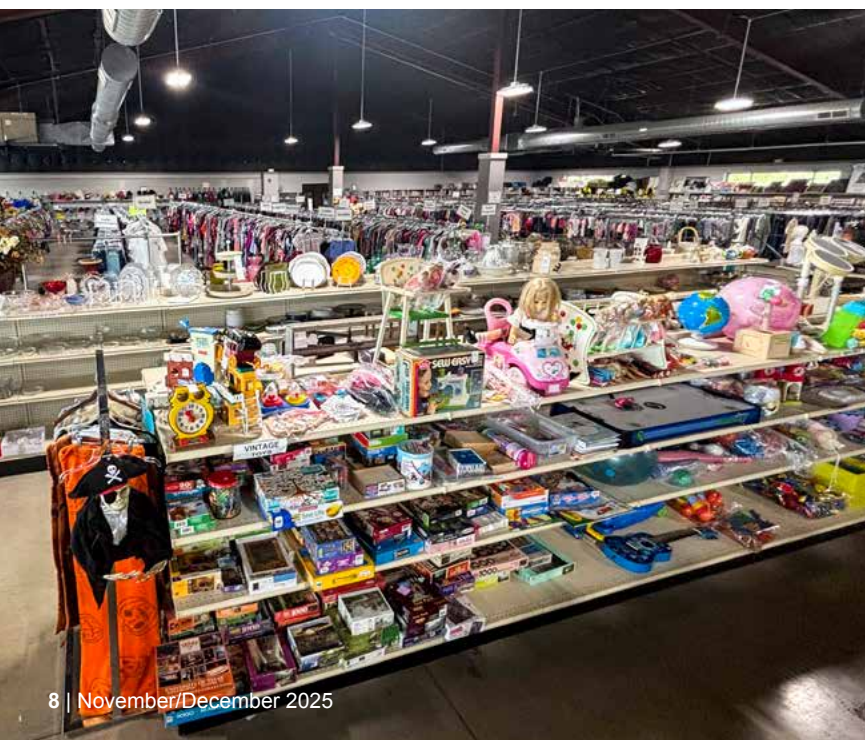
The store gives to different Fayette County charities based on grant applications. It also provides monthly support to seven nonprofits, including

the AMEN Food Pantry, Schulenburg Food Pantry, Flatonia Food Pantry and community service agencies Bluebonnet Trails Community Services, Tejas Health Care, Combined Community Action and the Fayette County Prescription Drug Program. Second Chance Emporium provides scholarships, too.

A BIT OF EVERYTHING

People who need inexpensive items aren't the only ones lining up. Some shoppers are looking for a good bargain. Then there are those looking for a prized item for their own shops. "The antique

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: Second Chance Emporium features aisle after aisle of gently used merchandise. The store carries an array of great gift choices, like picture frames and art prints. Vintage furniture is popular among shoppers and antique dealers. Christmas items are so popular at the store, it displays some year-round. Emporium volunteers set up for a day of sales. The store posts hundreds of photos of available merchandise each Thursday, before opening to shoppers on Friday and Saturday.



Photos courtesy of Second Chance Emporium

dealers and collectors love us,” Linda says.

The store sells a bit of everything. Clothes fill the racks, and shoes and jewelry line shelves. “We do linens of all kinds,” Linda says, “whether it’s tablecloths, comforters, kitchen linens, stuff like that.” The store also sells toys, electronics, kitchenware, books, CDs, DVDs, vinyl albums, home decor, floral displays and furniture. There is a holiday section where volunteers stock things according to season. But the store’s inventory includes so many Christmas items—and so many people shop for Christmas-themed items throughout the year—that some of the winter holiday items are available 12 months a year.

Since the Second Chance Emporium opened in 1996, the store has given \$5.2 million to nonprofits in Fayette County. “Now, you think about it. We sell 25-cent, 50-cent, a dollar or \$2 items. Very few big items, so that’s a lot of adding up,” Linda says.

Not all the money the store generates comes from sales. The store also has an extensive recycling program. “We get so

many items in these mysterious bags,” Linda says of the donations. “A lot of times, there’s a lot that’s not resalable, so we try to keep everything out of the landfill that we can.”

A recycling company picks up items like shoes, clothes, purses, belts and linens. Any metal that won’t sell is recycled, as are glass and cardboard. A jeweler takes pieces that can’t be sold, such as single earring donations.

Secondchanceemporium.org includes a full list of items that cannot be donated, such as stained mattresses and old-style televisions or computer monitors. Donors can drop off acceptable items to the store’s donations center Monday through Saturday, from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The best way to ensure only the good items get to the sales floor is for people to donate high-quality items in good condition. “If it doesn’t have all the parts or doesn’t work, or it’s badly stained or torn, we probably can’t sell it,” Linda says. “We try to tell people, ‘When you donate, think if you would buy it back yourself.’”

Providing Second Chances

Second Chance Emporium has a small paid staff, including a manager, two assistant managers and some part-time employees who help with the donations. Volunteers from local churches, including St. Paul Lutheran, Sacred Heart Catholic, First Presbyterian, St. James Episcopal, Crosspoint Community, New Life Methodist, Mt. Calvary Lutheran and Shared Lutheran Ministry, have a six-week rotation to staff the store.

Linda Morrison, board secretary of the organization that runs the store, says she and her fellow workers volunteer because they like seeing the money the store generates support nonprofits in their own county. “It’s a community of people who are volunteer driven,” she says.

New faces are always welcome. Most of the current helpers volunteer with multiple organizations, and they’re not getting younger, says Linda, who has volunteered at Second Chance for 23 years.

“Our volunteers tend to be retired people, so it’s not unusual to have 80- and 90-year-olds working the weekends,” she says. “Your average volunteer base is late 60s to 80s. We kind of see our volunteers aging out, so we are trying to recruit the next generation to come in and follow behind us.”

Second Chance Emporium

841 S. Reynolds St., La Grange

979-968-6070

secondchanceemporium.org

Find Second Chance on Facebook under Second Chance Emporium Fayette Resale Inc.





HEALING BONDS

Pets for Vets makes the perfect match

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Clarissa Black first took Bear, her husky-malamute, to visit patients at a Veterans Administration medical center, she had no idea he was about to change hundreds of lives.

Of course, she knew Bear was special. He had a way about him. When someone needed quiet company, Bear could lie perfectly still for hours. If someone was working on mobility, Bear would position himself at the perfect distance, paws up, as if to offer encouragement. And when people looked into the dog's eyes and spoke to him, he'd cock his head and let out one of his husky "woos" right on cue.

"People really felt like he was talking to them," says Clarissa, whose background in animal science and anthrozoology gave her a deeper insight into the interactions. "They felt seen, and they felt heard."

Clarissa's experience with Bear at the VA hospital sparked the idea for Pets for Vets, a nonprofit organization that matches veterans with specially trained companion animals. Since she founded it more than 15 years ago, the organization has matched more than 800 animals with veterans.

WANT TO HELP?

Pets for Vets is a four-star rated, not-for-profit organization that relies on donations to provide free services to veterans. There are several ways to donate.

Donate online: Visit petsforvets.com/donate to make a secure online donation.

Donate by mail: Pets for Vets Inc., P.O. Box 10860, Wilmington, NC 28404.

Other ways to give: The organization also accepts cryptocurrency and vehicle donations that include cars, trucks, boats and motorcycles.

Volunteer: Fill out the volunteer form at petsforvets.com to offer your time and expertise.

For more information about the program, or to apply for a companion animal, visit petsforvets.com or send an email to contactus@petsforvets.com.



LEFT: Spyder's tendency to jump in laps and lick faces helped calm and center Leif Mesinger when he became frustrated.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Clarissa Black, founder and executive director of Pets for Vets, with her late dog, Bear, who sparked the idea for the not-for-profit organization.

We're looking for that reciprocal match where both are getting exactly what they want."

MAKING A MATCH

Once the group approves a veteran's application for a companion animal, the search gets underway. Clarissa's experience as a marine mammal trainer taught her the most powerful relationships happen when both parties get exactly what they need. The process isn't about finding a good dog. It's about finding exactly the right dog.

The matching process is not only thorough, it's personal. Veterans work closely with trainers to identify their needs and prepare for pet ownership. "We spend a lot of time getting to know our veterans, finding out what it is they need, what they're looking for and what would be a good fit for them," she says.

Meanwhile, trainers visit shelters and rescue groups to conduct one-on-one "interviews" with potential animal companions, which can include cats, rabbits and other species, as well. If a veteran enjoys outdoor activities, for example, the trainer might look for a more active dog that loves to fetch and hike. On

the other hand, a more sedentary vet might need a peaceful pooch or calm cat.

From there, each animal undergoes foundation training customized for its future human. During this time, which often takes place in a foster situation, trainers enhance what Clarissa calls the animal's "superpowers," or the natural behaviors that made them perfect for their veteran in the first place.

"We're really trying to make this connection where both are getting exactly what they want," she says. "Ultimately, that connection is what's going to fulfill them and maybe even heal them. There's some research out there that suggests that it's not just any dog, it's the right dog—the dog that people feel connected to—that can help mitigate anxiety and depression." 🐾

SECOND CHANCES

After Leif Mesinger returned home from Iraq, the world felt different. It was harder to navigate and harder to understand. The Army infantryman and gunner suffered a traumatic brain injury from an improvised explosive device blast, and it changed everything.

"My mind was racing, and I struggled to communicate," Leif says in a Pets for Vets testimonial video. "I felt disconnected from everything I used to know."

But help arrived in the form of a tiny, hairless waif of a dog named Spyder. Clarissa Black, founder of Pets for Vets, discovered the dog after meeting with Leif and finding out what he needed in a companion animal.

Spyder's superpower was that he loved to jump into people's laps and lick them. It was a trait Clarissa intentionally honed in Spyder before presenting him to Leif. She knew that kind of gentle, rhythmic contact could ground a person dealing with anxiety.

In time, Spyder's constant presence gave Leif a growing sense of purpose and a deepening bond. Thanks to his more than 15 years with Spyder, Leif's communication with others has improved and his life is more fulfilling than ever. "Spyder was kind of like that saving grace that centered me again and brought me back," he says.

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

The program generally serves veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries, but the organization is open to helping any vet who could benefit from a deep connection with a pet. And while the service is completely free to the veterans, it relies on donations from the public and a network of more than 100 volunteer animal trainers across the country.

It's important to note that Pets for Vets animals aren't service dogs that have been highly trained to assist people with disabilities. Still, the organization works hard to meet the veterans' needs as well as the animals'.

"We're not just asking what the dog gives the veteran," Clarissa says. "We want to know what the veteran gives the dog."



Photos courtesy of Kathy Young

The Round Top Family Library hosts many programs, but it hasn't forgotten the importance of children's books.

Growing to Serve

Story by MELANIE JONES

Round Top Family Library programs need more space

Several mornings a week in Round Top, a group of octogenarians take a Falling Is Not an Option class, a course that provides training on strengthening core muscles and limiting injuries from a fall. The class is so popular that people line up in front of the stage, peek over bookshelves and even exercise in the aisles. That's because the class isn't held in a gym. It's in the main building of the Round Top Family Library, a 125-year-old former church.

"One of my favorite taglines is 'Round Top Family Library, where we love to read and so much more.' We are definitely way more than a library," says Jenn Broadbent, president of the library's board of directors.

GROWING TOGETHER

One such community program is Junior Master Gardeners. Founded by Board Member and Master Gardener Suzanne

Ellis, the program teaches school-age children how to plant and grow food. It also gives a way for seniors to connect with kids.

"It's a gateway to bring people in, starting as a volunteer, and ultimately cultivating their desire to give back by becoming involved in the leadership of RTFL," board member Kathy Young says.

The popularity of the library's community programs has it running at capacity, so its board of directors announced plans to expand. To date, the board has raised about 90% of its goal. A new building, to be located next to the main library, will provide classrooms, more shelf space, meeting rooms and offices.

"It's a great problem to have," says Pam Langford, board member and chair of the recently launched Honor-Serve-Build capital campaign. "Most people would love to have the problem of having more folks

wanting to participate than we have room for, but we've got to fix that problem."

RTFL launched the capital campaign at the end of last year. "We are excited about the additional space that will be built, as well as making improvements to our entire campus," Pam says.

Offering more space is important because the library doesn't just serve the local community. It serves an international community. "We serve anyone who wants to come, literally from around the globe. During the town's two big antique fairs, people treat the library as their home away from home," Jenn says. "We're open to any and all. Our goal is to enrich the lives of our community and foster connections."

Visit Round Top Family Library at 206 W. Mill St. Call 979-249-2700 or go to ilovetoread.org for hours, information about classes and details about the capital campaign. [📍](#)

Small Town, Big Stories

Round Top festival celebrates filmmaking

Story by MELANIE JONES

The Round Top Film Festival isn't merely a four-day celebration of film. It's a year-round labor of love. From soliciting film entries to securing locations and planning youth workshops, the RTFF team is looking to the future with an ultimate goal of becoming an Academy Award-qualifying film festival within the next seven years.

Shanna Schanen and her daughter, Skylar, founded the festival in 2024 to provide a platform for filmmakers to showcase their work, to enhance the cultural landscape of Round Top and to implement an educational program for students in surrounding rural areas.

"It's been a lot of fun, and it's been interesting. You don't know how it's going to go when you're working with family, but it's been a wonderful experience," Shanna says. The generational difference turns out to be an advantage. "She brings a creative perspective driven by interest in all things film," Shanna says of Skylar.

In addition to all the films, panels and special events, a unique component of the Round Top festival is its recognition of stunt performers. RJ Casey was recognized with the festival's first Maverick Stunt Performer Award for his work on films such as "Dunkirk" and "Inception." RJ has since joined the RTFF Advisory Board, working to further develop stunt-

performer recognition heading into the second year. Shanna says she believes the Round Top Film Festival may be the first festival to recognize the achievements of stunt performers.

Shanna reminisces about the beautiful personalities that filled last year's festival. "I was thrilled to meet everyone, from the up-and-coming filmmakers who each had unique, individual stories to tell, to the more established talents like Virginia Madsen and Vondie Curtis-Hall," she says. Each interaction added to the festival's charm, creating a sense of warmth and community that is often missing at larger events.

Shanna and Skylar also enjoyed meeting writer Christian Wallace, a West Texas native who attended the inaugural Round Top Film Festival for the sneak peek of the episodic "Landman," which he co-created with Tyler Sheridan.

The RTFF isn't just about films—it's about creating an experience for filmmakers and guests alike to network in an intimate setting. "It's a four-day escape where people can truly connect through the magic of storytelling," Shanna says.

This year's festival, set for Nov. 6-9, promises to build on that spirit, inviting all film lovers to immerse themselves in a world where creativity knows no bounds. Passes are available at roundtopfilmfest.org.

First Festival Winners

The inaugural Round Top Film Festival's juried award recipients:

BEST MUSIC VIDEO:

"Funeral," directed by Vanessa PlaBest

DOCUMENTARY SHORT:

"How to Sue the Klan," directed by John Beder

BEST LIVE-ACTION COMEDY SHORT:

"The Word," directed by Rob Neilson

BEST LIVE-ACTION DRAMA SHORT:

"Deep in My Heart Is a Song," directed by Johnathan Pickett

BEST OVERALL SHORT:

"Once More, Like Rain Man," directed by Sue Ann Pien

RTFF AUDIENCE AWARD:

"Takin' Care of Business," directed by Tyler Measom

RTFF LEGENDARY SCREENWRITER:

Bill Broyles Jr., "Cast Away," "Apollo 13" and "Flags of Our Fathers"



ABOVE: The director and cast of "Sheepdog" talk about the film. RIGHT: "Sheepdog" was one of the films featured at the inaugural Round Top Film Festival in 2024.



"Sheepdog" actor Matt Dallas takes part in a panel discussion.

Share a Pizza

Share Your Heart

Start a new holiday meal tradition

Turkey, ham, lamb—tradition gives them all a place on the holiday table. But gather the family together for a pizza party, and you can roll out a whole new tradition.

Make your own pizza dough with just a handful of ingredients, and you'll know that there are no preservatives and other unhealthy additives. For a family affair and fun for the kids, create a bar with pizza toppings—pepperoni, sausage, onions, peppers, cheese and the like—and let them make their own.

A preheated pizza stone will crisp the crust, but a cookie sheet also works.

A pizza salad with Italian herbs and a creamy vinaigrette dressing is the perfect pairing.

A dessert pizza with fresh berries and other fruits available year-round delivers a refreshing finish. Make the crust the day before and layer on the cream cheese spread. But wait until shortly before serving to add the fruits so they will stay colorful and fresh.



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Food Styling by **Rhonda Gilliland**



FAMILY NIGHT PIZZA

- 1 cup warm water (105 F)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast
- 1 tablespoon olive or avocado oil
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 to 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

Preheat oven to 500 F. Put a pizza stone or cookie sheet in the oven while it preheats, and let it warm for at least 10 minutes.

MAKE THE DOUGH

In a large mixing bowl, stir water, yeast and sugar to combine. Let mixture sit for 5 minutes or until it becomes frothy and bubbles form. Gently stir in olive oil.

Add 2 cups of flour and salt and mix with a spatula until a ball begins to form. The

dough will still be slightly sticky. Add more flour as needed to form a dough ball.

Transfer to a floured surface and knead into a smooth dough, adding up to 1/2 cup extra flour if needed.

Cover the bowl with a damp tea towel, and let it rise for 10 minutes or up to 1 hour.

ASSEMBLE THE PIZZA

Roll the dough into your desired shape and put it on a piece of parchment paper. Add pizza sauce, cheese and toppings of choice. Transfer the pizza to the preheated pizza stone or cookie sheet in the oven.

Bake for 12-15 minutes or until the bottom of the crust is golden brown. Remove the pizza from the oven, and let it cool for 5-10 minutes before serving.

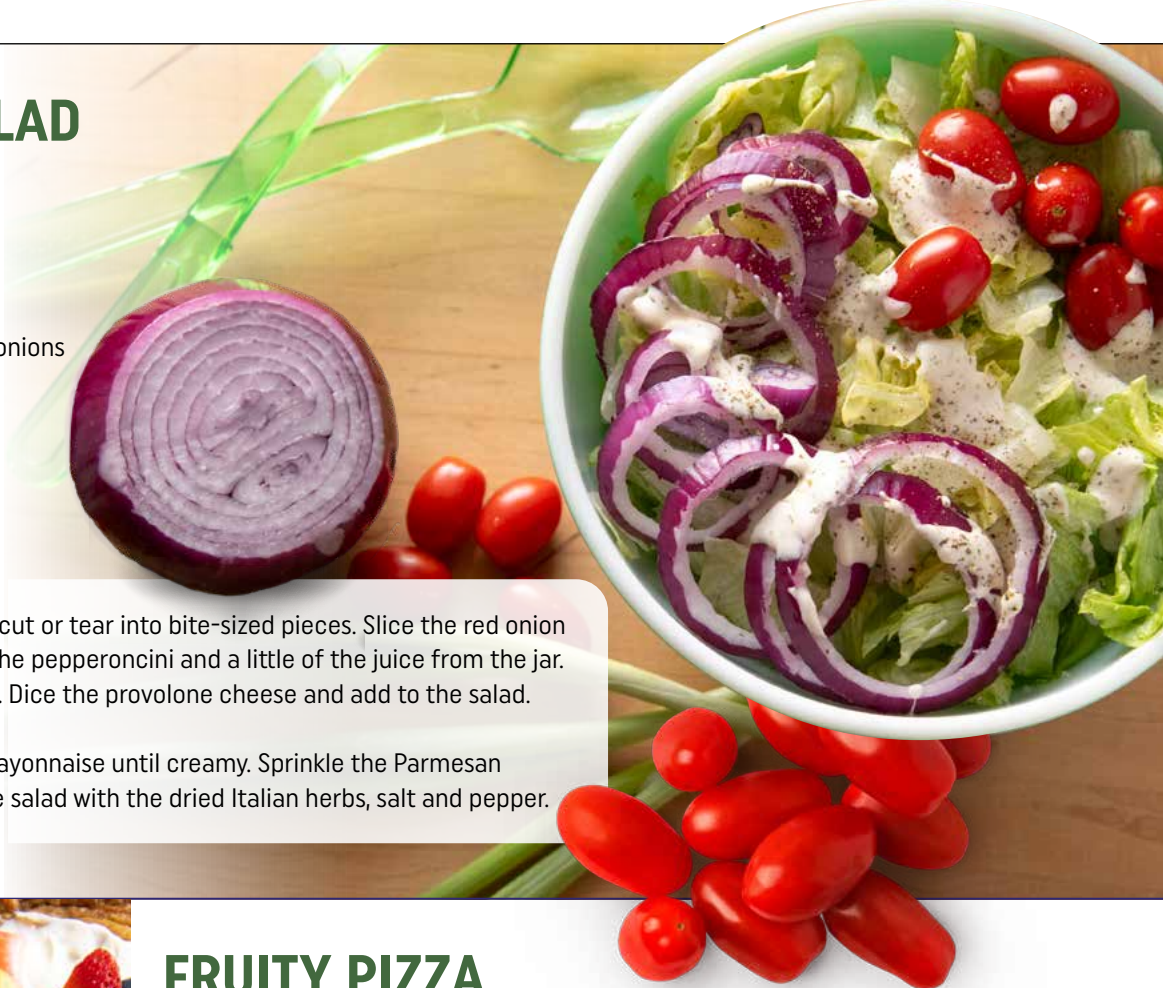
PIZZA NIGHT SALAD

- 1 head iceberg lettuce
- 1 medium red onion
- 6-8 pepperoncini peppers
- Chopped tomatoes to taste
- 8 slices provolone cheese
- 1 bunch fresh chives or green onions
- 1 1/3 cup favorite vinaigrette
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon or more dried Italian herbs
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Wash and air dry the lettuce and cut or tear into bite-sized pieces. Slice the red onion and add to the lettuce, along with the pepperoncini and a little of the juice from the jar.

Toss the tomatoes over the salad. Dice the provolone cheese and add to the salad. Sprinkle the salad with the chives.

Mix the salad dressing and the mayonnaise until creamy. Sprinkle the Parmesan cheese over the top and season the salad with the dried Italian herbs, salt and pepper.



FRUITY PIZZA

FOR THE CRUST

- 1 1/3 cups unsalted butter, softened
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 eggs, room temperature
- 2 tablespoons whole milk, room temperature
- 4 cups flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

FOR THE FROSTING

- 2 7-ounce jars marshmallow creme
- 2 8-ounce packages cream cheese

SUGGESTED TOPPINGS

- Kiwi, sliced
- Blueberries
- Raspberries
- Pears, cored and sliced
- Mango, peeled and cubed
- Strawberries, sliced

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

For the cookie crust: In a large bowl, cream the butter, sugar, orange zest and vanilla thoroughly. Add the eggs and beat until light and fluffy. Add the milk and mix.

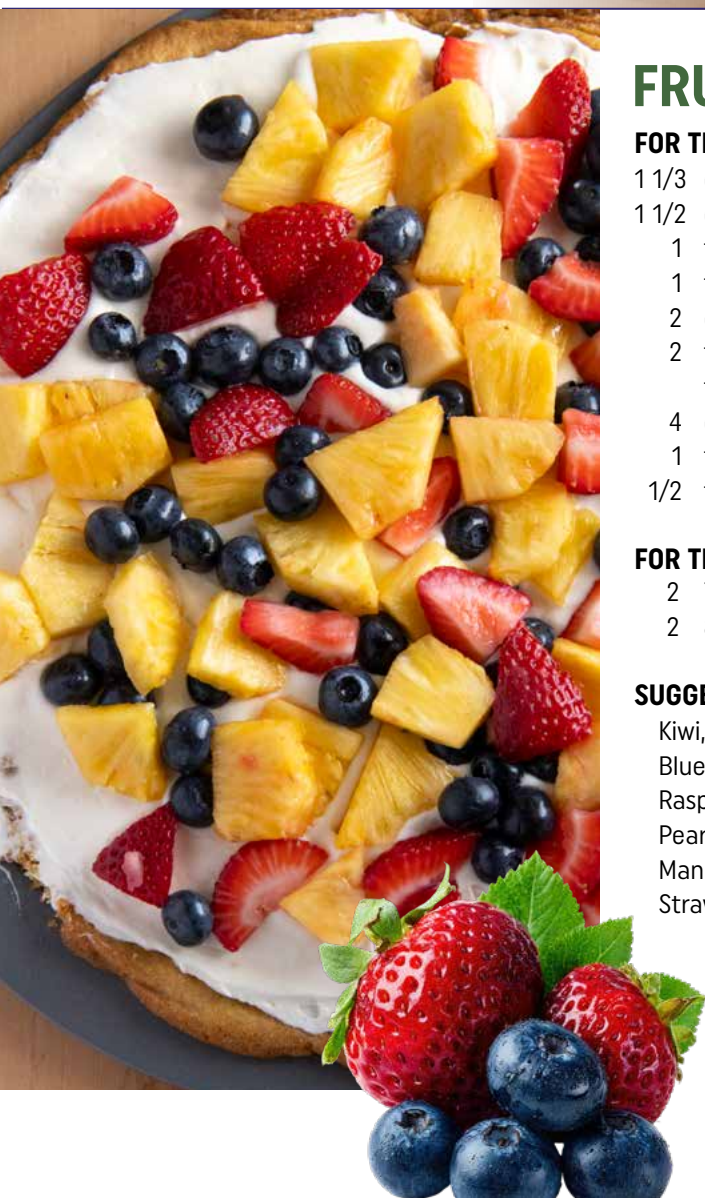
In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder and salt, then blend this into the butter mixture. Divide the dough into two disks and lightly flatten each disk between two sheets of parchment paper. If baking one large pizza, do not divide the dough. Refrigerate for 1 hour or freeze for 20 minutes.

Roll each dough half into an 11-inch round, then transfer to pizza pans. Or, press the dough into a large sheet cake pan.

Bake until the cookie dough is cooked and golden brown, but not overly crisp, 15-18 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool completely.

For the frosting: In a mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip together the marshmallow creme and cream cheese until light in texture. Spread onto each cooled crust.

To decorate: Top the pizza with prepared sliced fruit, as desired. Slice into squares or wedges and serve. 🍷



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