

# CONNECTION



## Milking a Movement

Raw milk, cheeses  
keep dairy going

THEATER  
FAMILY

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FIVE-YEAR PLAN



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

### The Most Important Rural Broadband Program You Probably Don't Know

In Washington, D.C., we often talk about the new grant programs that are going to help bridge the digital divide in our country. But I want to highlight what I believe has been the most successful rural broadband initiative, the federal Universal Service Fund.

So, what is the Universal Service Fund? The Communications Act of 1934 included language that said all Americans should have access to “rapid, efficient, nationwide communications service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges.” Today, the USF is the main federal program helping rural consumers connect to services comparable in price and quality to those in urban areas. This makes services more affordable for low-income families and supports critical connections for schools, libraries and health care facilities in rural communities by offsetting the high cost of building and managing rural communications networks.

There is one big difference that sets the USF apart from many of the new grant programs: The USF not only supports the construction and deployment of networks but also the maintenance of those networks. It helps ensure that these networks are maintained and sustained so Americans continue to make use of broadband long after the last shovel is put down.

An NTCA survey found that without the High-Cost USF program all rural consumers will pay at least \$100 more per month for their broadband service. And the viability of some rural broadband networks would be at risk, as the operations costs and repayment of the loans needed to build them cannot be covered.

NTCA is committed to efforts to preserve the USF so that the mission of universal service for all Americans can be fulfilled. 📡

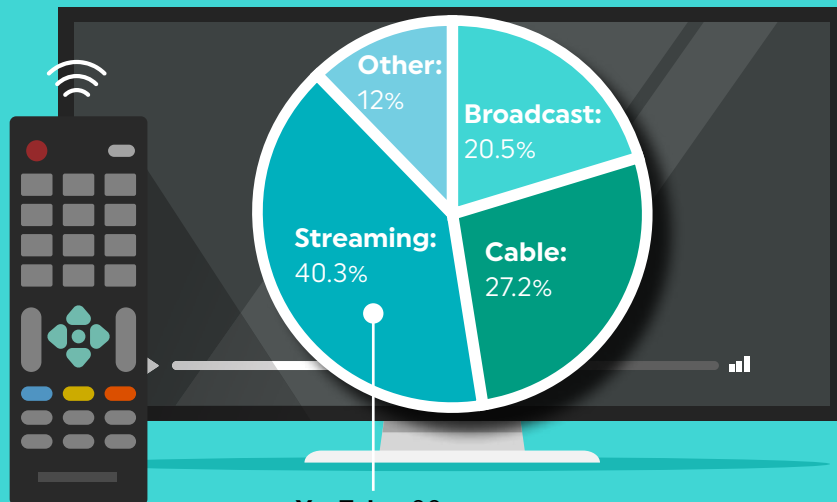
# Streaming Remains Strong

Each month Nielsen, a company that has long tracked viewership habits across a range of media, updates The Gauge. The report offers a snapshot of how various forms of media are consumed to create a picture of the media landscape.

Several key trends shaped the streaming results, such as June marking the end of the school year and start of school breaks, which led viewers 17 and younger to drive the largest upticks in TV usage across all ages.

As a result, this June streaming topped the earlier viewership record set by cable for that month in 2021.

## A SUMMER STREAMING SNAPSHOT



- YouTube:** 9.9%
- Netflix:** 8.4%
- Other streaming:** 6%
- Prime Video:** 3.1%
- Hulu:** 3%
- Disney+:** 2%
- Tubi:** 2%
- Roku Channel:** 1.5%
- Max:** 1.4%
- Peacock:** 1.2%
- Paramount+:** 1.1%
- Pluto TV:** 0.8%

Source: Nielsen The Gauge



# A Web for All

## Technology assists those with diminished sight

About two-thirds of Americans rely on some form of contact lenses or glasses to correct nearsightedness, farsightedness and more. Then there are eye injuries and diseases like glaucoma that can diminish sight, and the inevitable process of aging can also cause a slow decline in eyesight.

In an increasingly online world—where vital information is often communicated using text on screens—people with diminished vision can struggle. However, there are resources available to help those with impaired sight, and even blindness, interact online.

For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires all websites to be accessible to all. While not every website is ADA compliant, those for government agencies, banks and larger organizations are. The basic tools you need are free and as handy as web browsers like Chrome, Edge, Firefox and Safari.

### **BROWSER BY BROWSER**

Microsoft's Edge browser scores well for assistive technologies. It lets users

increase the size of text and get image descriptions for screen readers. Also, a simple keyboard command—Ctrl+Shift+U on PCs and Shift+Command+U on Macs—signals the browser to read the current webpage aloud. Most other browsers require users to go into system preferences or use an extension for screen readers.


Meanwhile, Chrome's TalkBack screen reader adds spoken, audible or vibration feedback to your device. While the browser does not have a way to change the look of text, it does have extensions that allow users to customize their browsers to control visual clutter.

Google, the maker of Chrome and a popular search engine, has an award-winning disability employee resource group and says it is committed to hiring employees with disabilities. That commitment also helps it find ways to make its site more accessible.

Like Chrome, Apple's Safari comes with its own screen reader, VoiceOver. Users can choose the voice they find most pleasing and set the speech speed. It also lets users increase contrast, zoom in and

remove ads and distractions.

Firefox allows users to adjust the settings so every site has the same font, type size and color to enhance the ease of reading. It also has extensions for changing text to speech and making bookmarks larger, among other things.

While users may need a sighted person to set up the assistive features, modern technologies unlock the world to more people than ever. 



# Influence That Matters

## Connect locally to make a difference



**KELLY ALLISON**  
General Manager

If you venture into the world of social media—and most people do—you'll cross paths with personalities known as influencers. From social media platforms like Facebook and X to video sites such as YouTube and TikTok, online personalities have the power to generate attention. With attention comes income, often six figures or more.

These people, and they can range wildly in accuracy and professionalism, seem to touch on every possible topic: lifestyle, health, politics, sports, entertainment and just about anything else. They can attract millions of eyeballs, and some of the largest, most visible companies advertise on their channels.

I don't mean to imply this is a new trend. It's not, at all. However, as other types of media fall more into the background, online influencers continue to have greater reach and, well, influence. But in our busy and often highly online lives, we shouldn't lose sight of the other influencers around us. You don't have to look far, either.

One of the things I enjoy about our community, and this is true of many rural places like ours, is that there are individuals who make a tangible positive difference. They lift others up. They provide help where it's needed. You need look no further than the pages of this magazine to see stories of neighbors helping neighbors, and what's more powerful of an influence than that?


You see, every time you smile at someone you pass in the aisle of a store, volunteer with a community organization, help your child with homework or have any of the other interactions that make up daily life, you're an influencer. This is also something we all can do.

In fact, a commitment to helping others is a core part of our mission at Colorado Valley Communications. Naturally, it begins with the services we provide—we want our community to have the best communications resources anywhere. But we also help our community by donating to local charities through the Employee Charity Fund, giving scholarships to local high school seniors and make contributions to first responders like volunteer fire departments, EMS, sheriff and local police departments.

We've seen how high-speed internet changes lives, opening doors for local businesses, expanding career options, supporting education and connecting to an exciting world of online resources. We strive to be the people who can answer your questions, solve your communications problems and provide the resources you need today while planning for the future.

But that's only part of the equation. Every year, CVCTX gives back. One of our guiding principles is that you benefit not only from the services we provide but also through direct contributions of time and money invested into our community.

So, as you enjoy our industry-leading communications services, if there are online influencers you find informative or entertaining, please do enjoy. But I hope you can also join us in finding opportunities to create beneficial, helpful moments right here at home. It's that spirit of togetherness that makes this place so special.

As always, it's a pleasure serving you, and I hope CVCTX remains a positive influence in your life. 

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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:



Stryk Jersey Farm has made changes through the years to meet evolving demands. Today it sells raw milk and cheeses.  
*See story on Page 13.*

Photos by Faith Stork

## Ready to Shred It?

Colorado Valley Communications will host its annual Shred Day on October 4. Bring sensitive documents you no longer need to Colorado Valley Communications' business office, 4915 S. U.S. Highway 77 in La Grange. This is free for up to three boxes and individuals.

People are encouraged to help with our fundraising efforts that will benefit the Children's Advocacy Center and Senior Connections. Shred Day is provided in partnership with Fayette Electric Cooperative to commemorate National Cooperative Month. Details can be found on our Facebook page and website.

## HOLIDAY CLOSURE

CVCTX offices will be closed on **Monday, Sept. 2**, to recognize Labor Day.

## Cybersecurity Tips

October is National Cybersecurity Month, the perfect time to review ways to protect yourself against phishing attempts.

Phishing is the term for emails, messages and websites that may look authentic but are designed to steal your personal information or money. For example, a phishing message claiming to be from your bank or Colorado Valley Communications may ask for your Social Security number or request you click a link that downloads malware to your computer. Some effective phishers even pose as an employer to convince employees to send client records or wire money to them.

### How can you protect yourself?

#### Look for warning signs and take the following action:

- **Check the email address**—Scammers often use email addresses that mimic legitimate ones, only spelled slightly differently or with .net instead of .com.
- **Look out for urgent language**—If the message says you must act immediately or your services will be canceled or you will be fired, that's a sign someone is trying to get you to panic and act without thinking.
- **Don't click on unsolicited attachments or links**—You could end up infecting your computer with malware or a virus.
- **If the sender asks for personal or financial information, be wary**—Legitimate institutions won't ask for your password, Social Security number or financial details in an email.
- **Spelling and grammar errors are another sign of phishing**—Legitimate companies carefully craft their emails and edit them extensively.
- **Don't think scammers have given up on phone calls**—Be aware of anyone asking for financial or personal information over the phone or via text.

If in doubt about a call or email, look up the website of the agency the message claims to represent and see if they report any scams involving their company. Or, if it's a smaller company, just call and ask if they tried to reach you. Never call phone numbers or go to websites provided in the suspicious call, text or email.

# SPIRITS OF THE SEASON

## Ghost Tours Scare Up Connections to the Past

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS



Photo courtesy of American Ghost Walks

Allison Jornlin, depicted here in an illustration, researches and writes scripts for ghost tours.

For many, October isn't complete without spine-tingling ghost stories, and chances are your hometown has a few of its own. Allison Jornlin, co-founder and tour developer with American Ghost Walks, conducts research and writes ghost tour scripts in towns across the United States. Allison is also a paranormal investigator and speaker, and

she's been featured on the CW Network's "Mysteries Decoded."

Ghost tours are immensely popular, and Allison says they can be found in almost every large city and even in many small towns across the country. "I think people have lost their connection with history and with their ancestors, and this is a way to reconnect," she says.

Unlike haunted house attractions that have terrifying special effects, ghost tours offer authentic history in locations that give guests the chance to literally step into the paranormal. They allow people to connect to the haunted past through walking tours, bus/trolley tours, investigation-style tours and even pub crawls. Some guests report experiencing



Ghost tour guides are well-versed in local history and are usually gifted storytellers.



Photos courtesy of Houston Ghost Tour

A Houston ghost tour pauses in front of the Sam Houston Monument, the gateway to the city's spooky Hermann Park.



Photo by Ryo Hamasaki

Ghost tours can include exploring the paranormal by bus or trolley, as well as on foot.

paranormal phenomena, like feeling unexplained cold spots or photographing disembodied faces and shadowy figures.

Allison pores through old newspapers and historical archives and interviews local people to give her tours as much local flavor as possible. “I’m looking for stories that are unique to the community that they come out of,” she says. While many stories across the country have common themes, Allison says, every place is a little bit different.

“You don’t have to believe in ghosts to enjoy the tour,” she says. Skeptics can have fun learning spooky stories. Tour guides often encourage guests to share their personal paranormal experiences to relate to one another. Ghost tours can’t guarantee guests will have

an otherworldly encounter, but there is always a possibility.

If you’re ready to test your luck, consider joining these popular local tours, if you dare:

- Considered the most haunted town in Texas, the Historic Jefferson Ghost Walk in Jefferson explores all the myths and legends. [jeffersonghostwalk.com](http://jeffersonghostwalk.com)
- Haunted ATX offers rolling ghost tours of Austin with public van tours and both private and public tours by hearse. [hauntedatx.com](http://hauntedatx.com)
- Learn about the ghosts that haunt the Houston Zoo, the hospital and museum district, as well as tours of historic Old Town Spring. [houstonghosttour.com](http://houstonghosttour.com) 📱

## FUN FACTS

- Most ghost tours in the U.S. run year-round.
- Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, claims to have America's oldest ghost tour. It began in 1970 and is still running. In 1973, historian Richard Crowe started Chicago's first ghost tour. He told ghost stories on the radio around Halloween, which inspired Allison Jornlin and her brother to establish American Ghost Walks.
- Many ghost stories have common themes. Allison notes the prevalence of stories about women who met unfortunate ends. Guides across the nation tell local stories of jilted lovers, forlorn widows and vanishing hitchhikers.

## SCARING UP A GREAT TOUR

Are you spending the spooky season exploring a new town—or your own hometown? A ghost tour is a fun way to learn about the history of a place and its people. Before you book one, follow these tips:

### CHOOSE A TOUR THAT SUITS YOUR GROUP

While each tour is unique, they typically fall into these categories: walking tours, bus tours, investigation tours and pub crawls. Investigation tours allow guests to become paranormal researchers for one night, and they typically focus on one building or property. A haunted pub crawl offers spirits of both the alcoholic and ethereal kinds.

### CHECK THE WEBSITE

Tour companies list important information on their websites, including an overview, length of the tour, walking distance, accessibility, age-appropriateness and cancellation/refund policies. Many tours encourage guests to purchase tickets in advance.

### READ THE REVIEWS

Check Google reviews and websites like Yelp or Tripadvisor for reviews. Search for detailed reviews that weigh the pros and cons of the tour. If you find positive reviews of a specific guide, you may be able to book a tour on a night when that person is working.

If you still have questions after your research, don't be afraid to give the tour company a call.

# Raising the Curtain

## Fayette County Community Theatre fosters connections, fun

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

When Heather Barthelme moved to Fayette County, she didn't feel very connected to the community. She was commuting to Austin every day.

"About a year or two in I was like, 'I don't know how long I can do this,'" she says. "I don't live here. I sleep here. But I work in Austin, I eat in Austin, I shop in Austin."

Then, she joined the Fayette County Community Theatre and transitioned to working from home. Soon, she says, she discovered "my community is the theater." Today, she's the group's executive director.

Building community was the goal of the group's founder, Susannah Mikulin, who moved to the area without local connections. Much like many of the company's members today, Susannah was a "theater

kid," Heather says, and thought putting together a group might help foster friendships among locals. Susannah held a first meeting in 2016 and brought 25 handouts with information. Seventy-five people showed up. "She was like, OK, wow, so this is necessary," Heather says.

They formed a nonprofit theater company and opened its first season in 2017. The first production was "The Importance of Being Earnest."

Things have changed since then. "The theater was started with Susannah's dream and \$200," Heather says. "Now, we have a budget of around \$75,000 a year, and we're doing shows like 'Clue: On Stage.' It was the most expensive show we've ever done, and we had the largest opening night audience ever. Just leaps and bounds of growth."

But one thing hasn't changed about the company—its focus on building con-

nections. Indeed, its motto is "Building Community Through Play."

### SPRING COMEDY, FALL DRAMA

The company stages a comedy in the spring and a drama every fall. A student production is held each summer.

For its main productions, auditions are followed by seven weeks of rehearsals. Shows run for one weekend only, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. During Friday-night productions, the company hosts a VIP event with appetizers, wine and beer before the show and a choice of seating for \$40 per ticket—which also includes a cast meet-and-greet. Early seating Saturday and Sunday is \$20. General admission is \$15 per adult and \$10 per student. Performances are held at different locations across Fayette County.

LEFT: Some of the cast of "Clue: On Stage" take a group photo before the curtain goes up.

RIGHT: The cast of "The Great Gatsby" enjoys a curtain call.



Photos courtesy of Fayette County Community Theatre



This year, the company will do five productions. In addition to the three staple performances, “God of Carnage” took the stage in February, and “Four Old Broads” will be performed in October. The theater company calls the smaller shows “FayCo PlayCo” productions. They’re more relaxed with smaller sets and casts, and the shows can travel. “God of Carnage” went on to a competition.

### GROWING RANKS

A group of dedicated volunteers keeps the company running. Around 10 core regulars audition for almost every show, and newcomers often join. For “Clue: On Stage,” for example, several new volunteers were part of the cast and crew. “That was really exciting,” Heather says. “That means we’re growing.”

The theater company’s board of directors meets monthly and votes annually on

which productions the group will tackle. A new system enables volunteers to offer ideas for shows, as well.

For the past several years, the company has held a summer workshop for middle and high school students. Each day, they come together to learn about acting, voice and diction, lighting, sound, costuming and more. This year, the company partnered with Arts for Rural Texas, which runs an elementary school-aged workshop, to offer a program for younger students.

A student summer production is held every year, featuring dozens of local kids. This summer’s was “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.”

### GRASSROOTS MARKETING

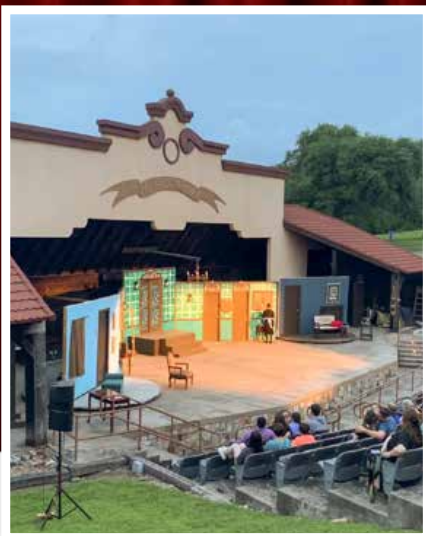
To get the word out about upcoming shows, Heather says, the company uses its website, Facebook, Instagram and local media outlets.

It also started to use some more experimental and interactive marketing tactics. For “Clue: On Stage,” the company recruited 18 local businesses to become either a character, a weapon or a location from the classic board game. Community members had to visit each business as if they were playing the game, trying to find the guilty party. Theater company members also wore shirts that read, “Ask me about ‘Clue on Stage.’” The final location to visit and offer guesses was the box office.

Heather says the company often uses grassroots methods to reach the community and further connect. “This theater is really special to a lot of people,” she says. “It’s really an asset to our community, if we do say so ourselves.”



ABOVE: The crew builds the set for the May 2024 production of “Clue: On Stage.” This was the largest set the Fayette County Community Theatre ever built.



LEFT: Audience members enjoy May’s performance of “Clue: On Stage” at the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center.

## UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

In October, the Fayette County Community Theatre will present **“Four Old Broads,”** a FayCo PlayCo production, in Schulenberg. The director, Kenny Couch, is the executive director of Habitat for Humanity in Fayette County.

Then, in November, **“The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance”** will take to the stage. The Western will be directed by first-time director and longtime company participant Kyle Hartmann, who is also a county justice of the peace.

“It’s very much a community effort,” Executive Director Heather Barthelme says. “Everything is very community centered.”

For details, visit [fayettecountycommunitytheatre.com](http://fayettecountycommunitytheatre.com).

Story by DAVID HERDER and DREW WOOLEY



# RUNNING TOWARD THE FUTURE

## Rural Athletes Must Overcome Hurdles to Win Scholarships

For much of her life, Olivia Murphy focused on becoming a collegiate swimmer. The biggest obstacle she faced didn't come in the pool—it was catching the eye of college coaches.

Each year thousands of student-athletes pursue college athletic scholarships. Ultimately, only about one out of every 50 succeeds, according to a 2021 study by Next College Student Athlete. That bar can be even tougher to clear for athletes like Olivia, who live in rural areas, where it's often difficult to get the attention of major programs.

For those students, earning a spot on a college roster takes more than just the talent and commitment to be a high-level athlete—it also takes a “second job” as a communicator and organizer, working just to be seen.

“I didn't start the actual recruitment process until summer of my junior year, which is a little late for some people,” says Olivia, a Tennessee resident and 2024 Tullahoma High School graduate.

### MAKING A SPLASH

Olivia's path was more straightforward than that of many other athletes: Swim fast, win races. A key member of the Wildcats' school-record-setting relay team, she recorded plenty of fast times while helping the team win its first division title.

She knew she had the speed, she just needed the coaches to know it, too. “When you first reach out to a coach, whether it's through a questionnaire or an email, you put your best events and your best times in there,” Olivia says.

When prospective recruits submit statistics, coaches compare their times to those of their current swimmers, as well as the

ones winning division and national titles. Athletes from almost every sport send out these cold-call emails to coaches across the country. In sports like football and basketball, where skills can't be boiled down to a set of times or statistics, athletes will create their own highlight videos and send those to coaches.

This can be especially valuable for rural athletes. Coaches can't visit every town to scout athletes, but there's no travel time in opening an email. Olivia says coaches especially want to see the swimmers' videos. “They love videos,” she says. “Most coaches like to see video because they want to see your technique or where your weaknesses might be.”

### SHOWCASING SKILLS

Sometimes, rather than sending videos, recruits travel to camps and showcases so coaches can watch them in action and compare their skills to athletes at a similar level. These are often sport-specific camps run by college programs where potential recruits get hands-on practice time with

Photo illustration by Mark Gilliland



Photo courtesy of Olivia Murphy

Olivia Murphy's best swimming events are the 100-meter freestyle, butterfly, backstroke and the 50-meter freestyle.

coaches. At regional showcases or tournaments, thousands of athletes can test their skills while scores of coaches look for diamonds in the rough.

Landyn Cox, a 2024 high school graduate from McKee, Kentucky, competes in archery and found success at these large events since most high schools don't have archery teams. He was offered a scholarship to be an archer at the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, Kentucky. He competed on the USA Archery U18 Compound National Team, the World Archery 3D Championships and other USA Archery Team events. He says the USAT events are a solid way to draw attention. "If you win like one of the USATs or certain big events, that gets your name out there pretty fast," he says.

### MAKING A DECISION

Once coaches begin recruiting, the challenge comes in settling on a school. Olivia narrowed down her list to three. "I wanted to limit myself to three visits because I'm really bad at decisions," she says.

Part of the process was deciding what size school she wanted to attend. Many athletes feel the need to compete at a prestigious NCAA Division 1 school, but they



Photo courtesy of USA Archery

Landyn Cox first competed in archery through the National Archery in the Schools program.

### SCORING AN OFFER

1. Know your skill level and learn the NCAA or NAIA eligibility requirements.
2. Compile an athletic resume with:
  - Skills video
  - Athletic stats
  - Academic transcripts, ACT/SAT scores
  - Extracurricular activities
3. Email coaches.
  - Include your athletic resume.
  - Subject line: Name, position, current grade level and key stat. "Jane Doe, High School Sophomore, Pitcher, 90 mph fastball"
  - Individually craft each email, clearly stating why you're interested in that program.
4. Make campus visits and meet coaches. Keep sending updated stats.
5. Lock down your offer and negotiate your amount. Don't discount merit-based, academic or other scholarships.




could find a home—and potentially more playing time or better financial aid—at a smaller school. "Division 1 isn't everything," Olivia says. "It's not live or die."

No matter the size or program, a visit is the critical component. After a successful recruiting visit where she got along great with her future teammates, Olivia chose Delta State University, a Division II school in Cleveland, Mississippi.

"They need to go where they feel like they best fit," she says. "I was like,

'There's no way that I'm not going to go Division 1,' and then I found a school that matches up with Division 1 schools and I got better scholarship offers and felt like I fit with the team better. And so, I was like, 'Oh, that's not the end of the world.'"

But it will be a whole new world for Olivia, Landyn and other rural athletes as they aim to parlay their hometown successes and hard work to the next level. 

# SMALL TOWNS, BIG PLANS



RIGHT: Field Engineer Mike Hensel reviews plans in his truck.

LEFT AND BELOW: Crews work to lay fiber optic cable to serve more communities.



## Colorado Valley Communications brings fiber to rural communities

Colorado Valley Communications is out to prove that small towns don't have to settle for less.

The La Grange-based cooperative's ambitious \$70 million five-year plan aims to bring fiber internet access to rural communities in parts of Fayette, Lavaca, Colorado and Lee counties.

CVCTX President and General Manager Kelly Allison said the Fiber 5 Buildout Project is central to the cooperative's mission to be a good steward and citizen of the communities it serves. "Reliable, high-speed internet is no longer a luxury but, in fact, a central piece of infrastructure," Allison says, noting the increasing prevalence of remote jobs, online schooling and key business technologies.

### FORGING CONNECTIONS

Like any large-scale infrastructure expansion, the Fiber 5 Buildout Project has faced logistical challenges, which were exacerbated during the pandemic. Despite these hurdles, CVCTX has already expanded fiber capabilities into nearly 50% of the cooperative's service territory.


As a member of the Colorado Valley Communications team and a Schulenburg resident, Greg Janda witnessed the impact of this project firsthand. He recalls a customer who upgraded from satellite internet, enabling her to work from home. "She ended

up getting over a Gig with us, and she was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is what I've been missing,'" Janda says.

Access to Multi-Gig speeds—up to 20 times faster than the highest speeds of traditional copper-based DSL connections—has been a game changer for rural communities. And in Janda's view, access to fast, reliable internet is about more than just streaming the latest hits—it's about freedom. Specifically, the freedom to "access the world without having to live in the hustle and bustle of the city and fight that every day," he says.

### SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES

For Janda, the fiber expansion project also presents a unique opportunity to serve the community he grew up in. As a local company, CVCTX can offer upgraded services and provide reassurance to residents adjusting to this new resource. "Hey, we're down the road. If you need something, just call," Janda often tells customers.

Belonging to a close-knit community while still having access to life-changing technology underscores a core message Janda wants young people in the service area to remember. "Don't be afraid to dream, because the internet brings everything to your fingertips," he says. "And just because you're from a little 2,000-population town, don't feel like you can't make something of yourself, because you can." 

# From BOOM to BUST to BOUTIQUE

Learn how Stryk Jersey Farm thrives



Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

**S**chulenburg's Stryk Jersey Farm has a rich history of change. From large-scale milk production to a focus on raw milk and cheese, Bob and Darlene Stryk have found ways to adapt and keep the farming heritage alive.

The Stryk family's legacy began in Fayette County in 1882. In 1952, Bob's father, John, bought the farm and started milking Jersey cows. Bob followed in his footsteps, graduating with a degree in dairy science and joining his father in 1979.

## A FOUNDATION IN FARMING

After their milk truck driver introduced the couple—Darlene's parents also had a dairy nearby—Bob and Darlene married in 1986, and Darlene has worked with Bob on the farm ever since.

In the 1980s, things got big. "Get big or get out was kind of the mantra," Darlene says. The Stryks bought another 40 cows, bringing the farm up to 125 head. This meant transitioning from a solely grass-fed herd to a high-energy feed mix to

maximize milk production. That was their standard practice through the 1990s.

By then, dry periods affected corn and hay growth, and milk prices declined. The Stryks had to buy more corn silage and hay. Costs went up, while milk prices went down. Darlene says they made the decision in 1998 to downsize to 35 cows and get into rotational grazing again. She and Bob took off-farm jobs, too, to keep the farm going.

## NEW IDEAS


In the mid-1990s, Bob was a director with the American Jersey Cattle Association. Darlene was putting together gift bags to place in hotel rooms for his fellow directors at a meeting, when she discovered Texas-shaped cheese in red wax. The Stryks got into the business, supplying hotels and food gift box companies with shaped cheeses crafted by hand and encased in wax.

That venture then led to another. "We had quite a few people stopping

by wanting to buy raw milk," Darlene says. Bob testified before the state legislature to encourage modernizing regulations for the sale of raw milk. Stryk Jersey Farms got its raw milk permit in 2006. In addition to raw milk, Stryk Jersey Farm sells raw milk cheeses. Each is cheddar-based with several other flavors.

Today, the farm has around 60 dairy cows. Stryk Jersey Farm primarily sells raw milk, but whatever isn't sold is used to make raw milk cheese. Those cheeses age at least 60 days before being sold.

The farm's website, [texascheese.com](http://texascheese.com), is an important place for selling its milk and cheese and is instrumental for communicating with customers, Darlene says.

"I really want to give credit where credit is due, because our customers are the ones who are really educated and have researched the benefits of raw milk and are the ones that help keep us going," she says. "It makes our day just so nice." 

**ABOVE:** Bob and Darlene Stryk adapted over the years to keep their farm running.

**RIGHT:** The Stryks' raw milk cheeses are cheddar based, and some have other flavors added.

**FAR RIGHT:** Jerseys gather in the pasture.



Photos courtesy of Faith Stork

# Kick Off THE SEASON



## Healthy Eats for Your Tailgate

It's time to think about tailgating. Even if you aren't a football fan, you can enjoy the food that goes along with the big game, from pots of chili to tater skins and Buffalo wings.

But these tailgating treats may not agree with your waistline. There are healthy alternatives to consider for lightening up your football spread without sacrificing taste. You'll score some touchdowns yourself.



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## WHITE CHICKEN CHILI

- 4 boneless chicken breasts (2 to 2 1/2 pounds)
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 3/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 2 cans whole green chilies, chopped (see tip)
- 3-4 cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed (see note)
- 2-3 teaspoons cumin
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2-1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/2-1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- Additional chicken broth, if needed

In large pot, add chicken breasts and completely cover with water (4-6 cups). Simmer chicken breasts with basil, salt, onion powder, garlic powder, thyme and parsley until completely cooked.

Remove chicken from broth and let cool. Reserve the seasoned broth for the chili. Once chicken is cool, chop and set aside.

In a large stock pot, add butter and olive oil, and saute onion, celery and bell pepper until vegetables are translucent. Add chopped chilies and two cans cannellini beans. When mixture is warm, mash beans with a potato masher.

Add 2-3 cups of the reserved broth, chopped chicken, cumin and 1-2 more cans cannellini beans. Let simmer 30 minutes to an hour. If mixture becomes too thick, add more broth. Add sour cream, heavy cream and fresh cilantro, and stir well. Taste and adjust seasonings, such as salt and cumin. Just before serving, stir in grated Monterey Jack cheese and ladle into serving bowls.

**Tip:** You will get better quality if you buy the whole chilies rather than chopped chilies.

**Note:** Progresso brand provides a better-quality bean that holds up well as the chili simmers, and you should only need three cans. If you use another brand and find that it is disintegrating as the chili simmers, add a fourth can of beans.



## PARMESAN CHICKEN WINGS

*These delicious wings are oven-baked.*

- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons ground pepper
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- 1 1/2 cups panko breadcrumbs
- 1 1/4 cups grated parmesan cheese
- 2 pounds chicken wings, cut at joints, wing tips discarded
- 3 tablespoons balsamic glaze (store-bought or made from scratch)
- Lemon wedges
- Ranch dressing
- Celery and carrot sticks

Preheat oven to 450 F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Coat with cooking spray. Combine flour, garlic powder and pepper in a shallow dish.

Place eggs in a second shallow dish. Combine panko and cheese in a third shallow dish. Working in batches, dredge chicken pieces in the flour mixture, then the eggs and finally in the panko mixture, shaking off excess after each dredging. Place on the prepared baking sheet. Coat the chicken lightly with cooking spray.

Bake, turning the chicken halfway through, until the chicken is golden brown, and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest portion registers 165 F, 20-25 minutes.

Arrange the chicken on a platter. Drizzle with balsamic glaze and serve with lemon wedges and ranch dressing for dipping with celery and carrots.

## DOUBLE DIP HUMMUS

*This recipe from Eating Well could be the creamiest hummus you've ever tasted. It's best made a day in advance.*

- 8 ounces dried chickpeas (about 1 cup)
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 7 large cloves garlic, divided
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1/2 cup tahini, divided
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice plus 1 tablespoon, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin, plus more for garnish
- Paprika for garnish
- 1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons of the prettiest chickpeas for garnish.

Rinse the remaining chickpeas and garlic and set the colander over a bowl. Refrigerate the chickpea mixture, reserved cooking water and pretty chickpeas separately overnight.

The next day, combine the chickpeas, 6 of the garlic cloves and 1/2 cup of the reserved cooking water in a food processor (or blender) with 1/4 cup each oil, tahini and lemon juice. Add salt and cumin. Process until creamy. Transfer to a serving bowl. Puree the remaining 1/4 cup each oil and tahini with the remaining garlic clove, 2 tablespoons of the cooking water and 1 tablespoon lemon juice until smooth.

Make an indentation in the center of the hummus and spoon in the tahini-lemon mixture. Sprinkle the hummus with cumin and paprika, if desired. Garnish with the reserved whole chickpeas and parsley. Serve with fresh carrots, celery and other colorful vegetables and/or pita chips. 📄

Place chickpeas in a medium saucepan and cover with 2 inches of water. Stir in baking soda. Soak overnight. Drain the chickpeas and rinse well. Rinse out the pan. Return the chickpeas to the pan and cover with 2 inches of fresh water. Add garlic. Bring to a boil. Keep at a rolling boil until the chickpeas are tender and almost falling apart, 25-40 minutes.

Reserve about 3/4 cup of the cooking water, then drain the chickpeas. Set aside



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