

CONNECTION



More Than Farming

Ag clubs prepare
kids for the future

FIBER'S
JOURNEY

ADAPTIVE
SPORTS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Broadband Built to Last


How the Universal Service Fund Helps Keep Americans Connected

When we're connected, America thrives, and for rural communities, the federal Universal Service Fund (USF) helps community-based providers deliver broadband built to last for generations. This fund is critical for ensuring high-quality, affordable broadband services are available for families, schools, libraries, health care facilities and so much more.

The idea behind the USF is that all Americans should have reliable access to communications services at a reasonable cost—it's been a national objective for over a century and was codified into law in the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Today, the USF enables providers to make a business case to invest in many rural areas, sustain networks once they are built and keep service rates affordable.

Unfortunately, the USF is at risk of disruption. Last summer, a federal circuit court declared that the way the USF is funded is unconstitutional, and the case is now before the Supreme Court for review.

According to an August 2024 survey of more than 200 NTCA members across 35 states, the loss of USF support could be catastrophic for rural consumers. Respondents reported that rural consumers could see their monthly bills increase by \$72. And 68% of respondents said they may need to cancel over \$1 billion in deployment projects.

These survey results highlight the importance of the USF in both getting and keeping rural consumers connected to high-quality, affordable services. You can learn more at ntca.org/universalservice. 



Adobe Stock Illustration by Julien Eichinger

The Buzz

An internet roadmap

The online world moves fast, and it's a rich, helpful place. In fact, there are so many opportunities and so many resources that keeping up with the latest can prove daunting. Here are a few hot topics:

VIDEO SHORTS

These bite-sized videos usually last a few seconds. They're often lighter in tone. Many are great for showing fun or helpful ideas quickly, such as cooking tips, telling a joke or sharing engaging facts. Others are simply silly fun. Most social media services offer some version of these videos.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OR AI

AI is appearing in more and more places. It may help complete a text message, edit and sort photos on a smartphone or even create an image from scratch. And that's only the beginning. Think of AI as a smart, learning system capable of processing tremendous amounts of information—and it's changing and growing daily.

CRYPTOCURRENCY

This digital currency is stored and managed on secure systems. Bitcoin is a famous example, but there are many others. Some people use cryptocurrency to buy goods or services, and others consider it an investment. It's another growing, diversifying part of the digital world.

VIRTUAL REALITY OR VR

With the right hardware, such as VR goggles, virtual reality can be like stepping into a video game or movie. It's also a rapidly growing technology, expected to become more affordable and accessible over time.

Wading Into the Stream

Catch the current to entertainment

The arrival of streaming entertainment services brought the promise of simple, affordable access to deep, rich libraries of content.

So, how are these increasingly popular

services, ranging from Netflix to YouTube TV, doing? Seemingly endless content? Check. Simple and affordable? Well, that gets a little complicated.

With care, though, you can find the

services that not only meet your needs but also your budget. Live sports, ad-free options, high-definition streams and so much more are a few clicks away. 📺

DEFINE YOUR PRIORITIES

With so many possibilities, first consider what you generally want to watch. Do you love original dramas? Perhaps classic sitcoms and movies are your favorites? Are live sports or kids' programming your go-to shows? Or maybe it's a mix of all of the above. Here are a few options:

For exclusive originals: Netflix, Hulu and Max—formerly HBO Max—are standouts. They mix fresh shows and movies with a wealth of older favorites. And Hulu gives access to TV episodes the day after they air on traditional TV.

For family and classics:

Disney+ shines. And Peacock and Paramount+ serve up plenty of long-time favorites, as well as new shows.

AD TIERS

When it comes to pricing, streaming services increasingly offer a range of options—along with some tradeoffs.

Many services have lower-cost plans, but they come with ads. If you don't want interruptions, be prepared to pay extra. Similarly, Netflix offers a more expensive choice for high-definition content. Meanwhile Disney+ emphasizes the ability to bundle added services like Hulu.

Netflix: A lower-priced ad tier was introduced in 2023 to go along with the more expensive ad-free option.

Disney+ and Hulu: The price difference between ad-supported and ad-free versions is significant, so be aware when considering such services.

Amazon: Members of Amazon Prime must now pay an extra fee to remove ads from streaming content.

So, the price considerations of comparing streaming services to traditional cable television is more complex. But the system offers consumers greater choice—after all, many people don't mind ads. Pricing and offers can change quickly, so check each service for the current rates and offers.

LIVE SPORTS

Traditional TV networks are still the biggest player in the live sports world, but services like YouTube TV and Sling allow you to tap into many of those channels. However, the streamers are catching up.

Services like ESPN+, Peacock and Paramount+ have exclusive sports content. Amazon Prime hosts NFL games on Thursday nights. Even Netflix recently showcased a live night of boxing.

Then, there are also the direct-to-consumer options, like the NFL's Sunday Ticket or MLS Season Pass on Apple TV. Fans can binge-watch their favorite leagues.

Be a DIY VIP

Online resources and communities can help conquer many projects



KELLY ALLISON
General Manager

Even though it isn't official yet, spring has nearly sprung in Texas. It's time to get outside for fun and maybe a little bit of work, too. This is the time of year when many of us plan to spruce up the yard, plant a garden or tackle overdue home chores.

Whatever task you need to get done or hobby you enjoy, there are likely internet-based resources that can help. At Colorado Valley Communications, we see firsthand examples of how access to high-speed broadband empowers you to learn,

plan and confidently execute projects.

Consider gardeners, for example. It doesn't matter if someone is a beginner or a seasoned green thumb, they can use the internet to research plant varieties suited to their climate, find layout ideas for vegetable gardens and even order seeds and supplies online. YouTube tutorials provide step-by-step guides for building trellises, creating compost bins and improving soil quality. Websites like the Farmers' Almanac are also great resources that can provide planting calendars and pest management tips.

And don't forget our great local extension office website, fayette.agrilife.org. There, you can find tips on issues like fire ant management and topics of particular concern in Texas, like lawn management. There is also a section on planting xeriscapes, which is landscaping using plants that don't need regular watering.

Even better, online communities let gardeners share advice and troubleshoot problems in real time. From identifying mysterious weeds to diagnosing yellowing leaves, having access to expert advice—or a crowd of helpful fellow gardeners—can make all the difference.

Tech-savvy homeowners can even use smart irrigation systems connected to Wi-Fi to control watering systems from a smartphone. These tools improve water usage and keep your lawn looking great, even during hot, dry spells.

There are plenty of other ways modern digital tools can make life a little easier. From fixing leaky faucets to repairing drywall, the internet has become a go-to resource for home repair solutions. With access to instructional videos, product reviews and downloadable manuals, you can tackle many common repairs.

While the internet can help you dream big about your spring projects, it's important to make safety a priority—especially if your plans involve digging. Before you break ground for a new garden bed, fence or deck, call 811 to have underground utilities marked. It's free. It's easy. And it could save you from costly repairs—or worse, a dangerous accident.

Broadband internet has made it easier than ever to plan and execute DIY projects, but some tasks still require a little extra preparation. As you gear up for a productive spring, let the web be your guide—but don't forget to make that crucial call before you dig.

Here at CVCTX, we're proud to keep our community connected and equipped for success, whether you're planting tomatoes or building a new patio. Happy spring—and safe digging! 📧

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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.

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:



Grant Fryer works on a 4-H project. 4-H and FFA help children hone skills they will use for years in many areas of their lives. See stories on Pages 12 and 13.

Photo courtesy of Fayette County 4-H

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

A long-standing Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative tradition will continue in 2025 with the award of \$5,000 scholarships to graduating seniors from local high schools.

To be eligible for the scholarship, students must live in a household that has a membership with the Cooperative. For information and an application, go to cvctx.com/scholarships.

Applications must be received by April 1.

Colorado Valley Communications 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.

Honoring

Good
Friday

CVCTX OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED APRIL 18 IN OBSERVANCE OF GOOD FRIDAY. Regular business hours will resume on **MONDAY, APRIL 21.** Assistance is available anytime by calling our 24-hour tech support line at 877-452-9035.

Protect Your Equipment

Spring is the time for lightning storms in Texas, and that means it's time to make sure your modems and routers are safe.

To best protect your home from surges, unplug your modem and router during lightning storms. Otherwise, if lightning strikes a cable line it can "fry" a modem, rendering it useless.

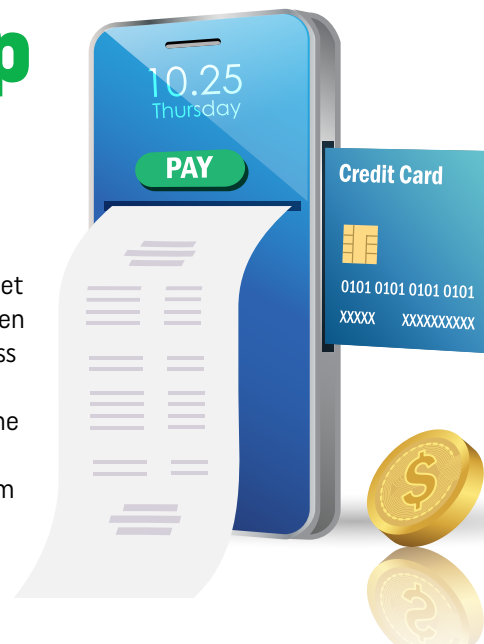
While surge protectors are helpful, they can't provide complete protection in case of a close strike, so the best bet is still to unplug them until the weather clears.

Sign Up and Save!

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

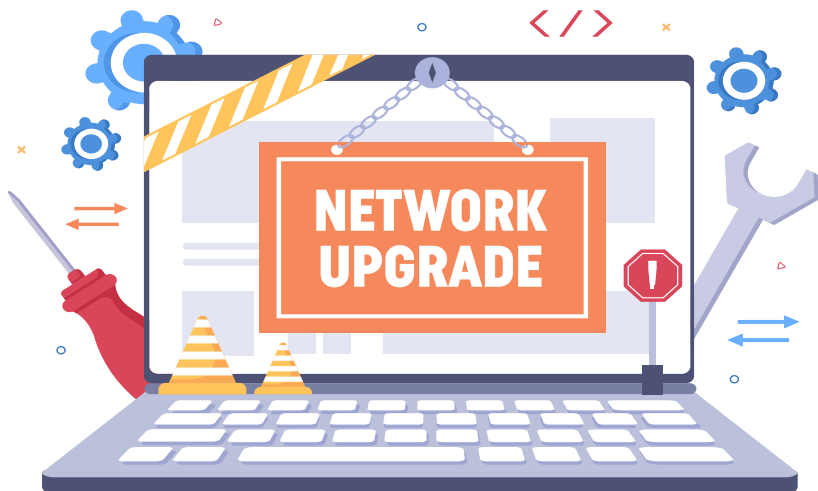
Faster than a trip to the mailbox, SmartHub lets you make payments from anywhere, at any time.

Learn more at:
cvctx.com/billing.



Is It Time to Upgrade?

CVCTX is constantly upgrading its network, and depending on your address, you may be able to upgrade your internet service. Check cvctx.com/signup for details on the service packages and speeds available in your area.



ALONG FOR THE RIDE

Roller coasters take thrill-seekers to the limit

Story by KATHY DENES

It's a rite of passage—a child in the roller coaster line steps up to the mark, stands up straight and finally hits that magical measurement, tall enough to be welcomed aboard for a lifetime of adventure.

The thrill of roller coasters never grows old, whether they're modern rockets of cold, sleek steel or creaky, wooden rides that are a nostalgic nod to yesteryear. Around 1,000 coasters in the United States and thousands worldwide offer limitless options for destination vacations.

“At this point, I've been on just under 1,200 unique coasters at over 300 different amusement parks,” says James Nocito, a CoasterNerds contributing writer whose hobby of “chasing down rides” has taken him to 38 countries on four continents.

“Sometimes, I do actually think the hobby is ridiculous, but it's also given me a chance to visit all sorts of places I probably wouldn't have otherwise, like all 50 U.S. states. I guess I've always compared it to people who try to see a baseball game at every Major League Baseball stadium or such.”

Roller coaster fans seeking out the fastest ride, wildest twists and turns or just a new experience have created a community. Numerous websites, like coaster101.com, and social media pages, like Facebook's CoasterNerds, are dedicated to informing and connecting enthusiasts.

“There's this whole community within the parks and coasters fandom, and some of the best people I met from internet chatrooms or online message boards when I was a teenager are people I know 20-plus years later, now hanging out in person,” James says.

He hesitates to cite one roller coaster as his favorite, “but if I were going to suggest to someone some of the biggest, baddest or craziest rides in the U.S., I'd probably start with Fury 325.” That ride at Carowinds in Charlotte, North Carolina, is North America's tallest, fastest and longest giga coaster—one with a height or drop of at least 300 feet. 📺

IF YOU'RE GOING

- For a selection of the country's top 100 coasters, consult coasterbuzz.com/rollercoasters/top100.
- If taking younger travelers along, be sure to check height requirements for the coasters you hope to experience.
- To check real-time waits before you go, visit queue-times.com.
- Concerned about motion sickness? Snack on something fairly bland 30 minutes to an hour before jumping in line.





PLANNING A COASTER VACATION?

Consider visiting these thrill rides:

The Beast broke all records when it opened at Kings Island in Mason, Ohio, in 1979, and it still reigns as Guinness World Records' longest wooden roller coaster.

The Voyage at Holiday World in Santa Claus, Indiana, is the world's second-longest wooden coaster, running for 1.2 miles and featuring a world-record five underground tunnels.

It's always coaster weather at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, where the 7-acre center court offers five unique options.

Two record-breaking coasters—the nation's first tilt coaster, the Circuit Breaker, and Palindrome, a one-of-a-kind infinity coaster—are set to open in Texas this year at Austin's COTALand.

Also opening this year at Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, is the Siren's Curse, expected to break records for height, speed and longest tilt.



Photo courtesy of Lake Winnepesaukah



Adobe Stock photo by Panosk18

TOP: The Cannon Ball at Lake Winnepesaukah is the oldest wooden roller coaster in Georgia.

ABOVE: The Six Flags family of parks is known for exciting roller coasters, like the Joker at Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson Township, N.J.

LEFT: Southern California's mild weather means rides like the roller coaster and Ferris wheel at Pacific Amusement Park on the Santa Monica Pier can be enjoyed throughout the year.

FIND YOUR THRILL

Look for CoasterNerds on Facebook and visit these websites for more information: coasterforce.com, aceonline.org, coaster101.com and coasterbuzz.com.



Adobe Stock illustration by Wasum



3 KEYS to High Performance

Speed, bandwidth and Wi-Fi

Fast, reliable internet is more important than ever, connecting you to work, school, friends, family, fun, health care and far more. Quality matters. Your system is built upon three pillars of internet performance: speed, bandwidth and Wi-Fi.

SPEED

More speed means everything online works better. It's particularly critical when using applications requiring seamless, buffer-free performance. Do you stream high-quality videos or make video calls? Is someone in your household a gamer, when a tiny delay can be the difference between victory and defeat? Do you work with video or online editing tools?

SPEED makes all the difference.

BANDWIDTH

Think of bandwidth as a highway. A higher number of lanes means more vehicles can travel at the same time. Fewer lanes, particularly at rush hour, create bottlenecks and slowdowns.

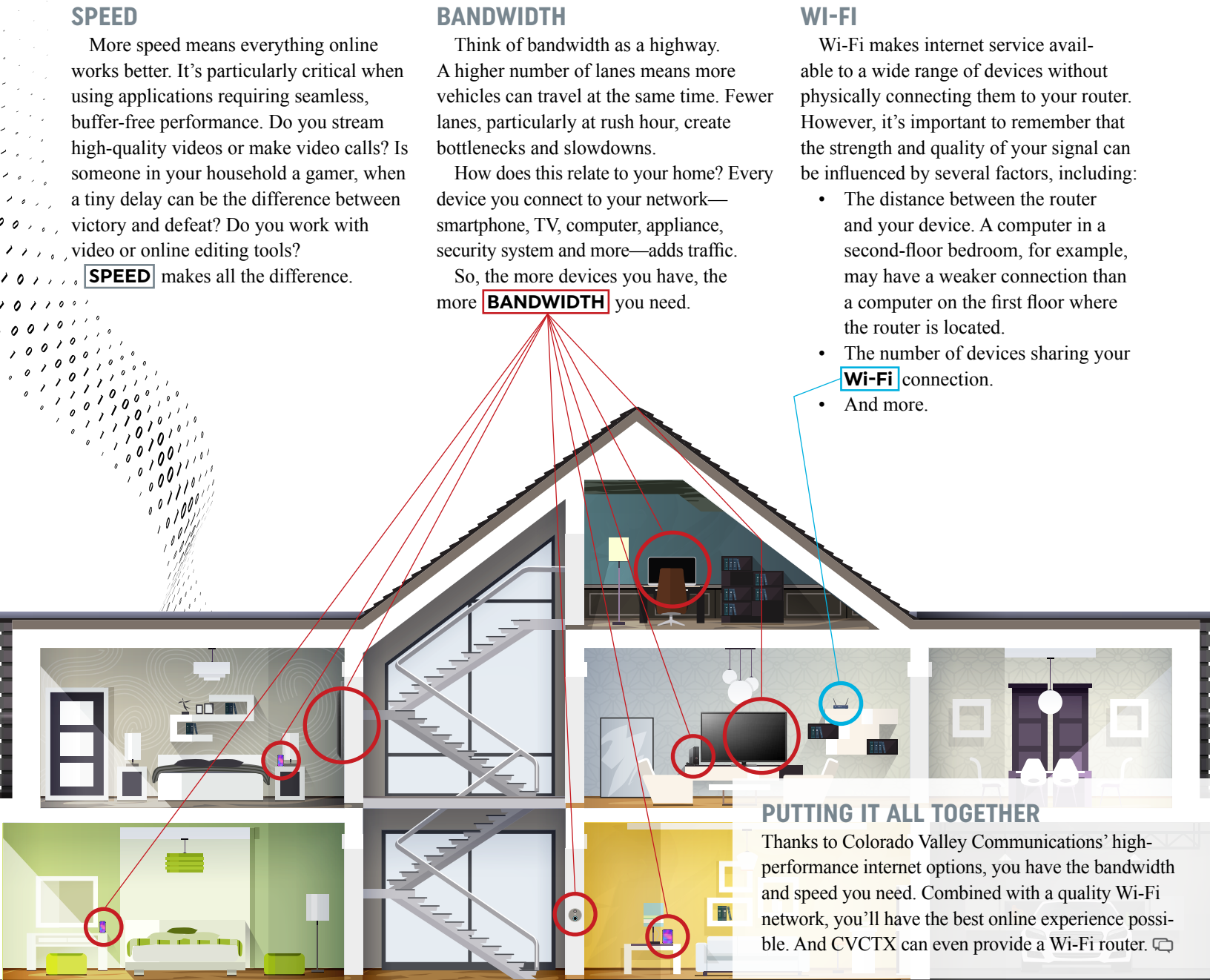
How does this relate to your home? Every device you connect to your network—smartphone, TV, computer, appliance, security system and more—adds traffic.

So, the more devices you have, the more **BANDWIDTH** you need.

WI-FI

Wi-Fi makes internet service available to a wide range of devices without physically connecting them to your router. However, it's important to remember that the strength and quality of your signal can be influenced by several factors, including:

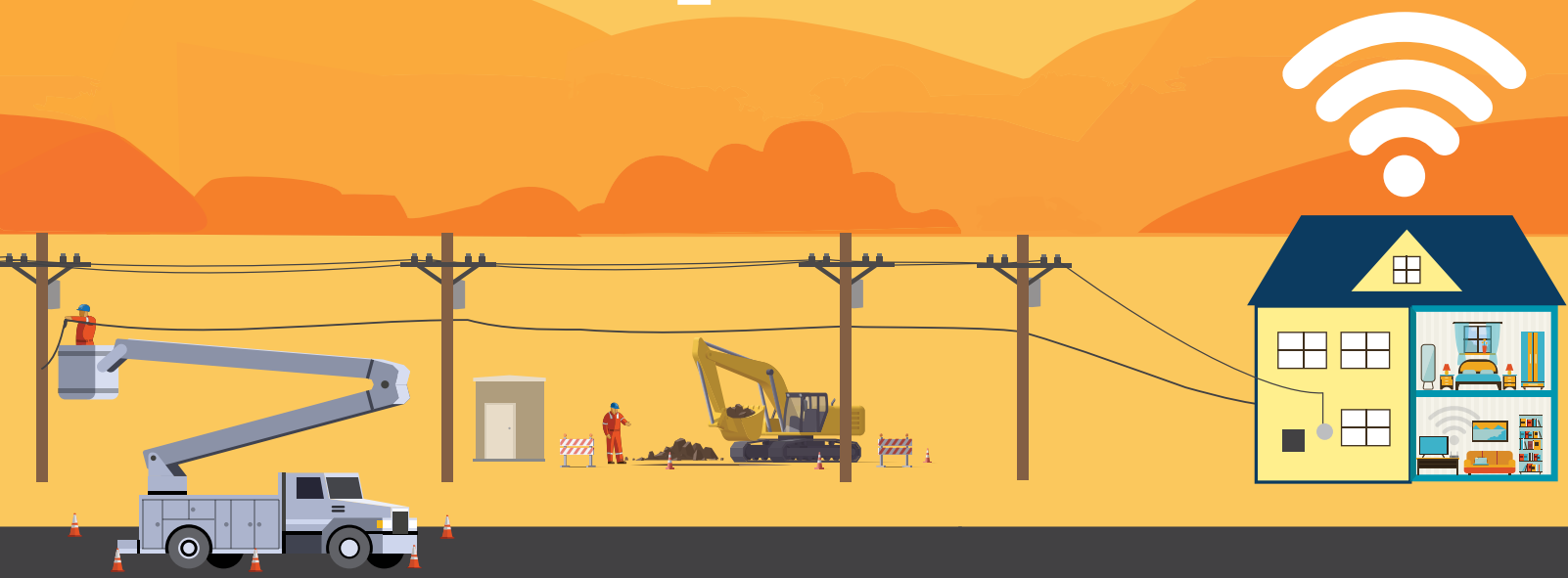
- The distance between the router and your device. A computer in a second-floor bedroom, for example, may have a weaker connection than a computer on the first floor where the router is located.
- The number of devices sharing your **Wi-Fi** connection.
- And more.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Thanks to Colorado Valley Communications' high-performance internet options, you have the bandwidth and speed you need. Combined with a quality Wi-Fi network, you'll have the best online experience possible. And CVCTX can even provide a Wi-Fi router. 🗨️

Steps to Broadband Completion



STEP
1

PLANNING AND DESIGN

Months of planning, engineering and design precede construction.

STEP
2

PRELIMINARY CONSTRUCTION

Work crews prepare poles for fiber installations.

STEP
3

MAIN-LINE FIBER INSTALLATION

Fiber cable is buried or strung from poles to build the network.

STEP
4

SPlicing AND TESTING

Crews splice together the fiber optic cable and test the network.

STEP
5

SERVICE DROP

The fiber cable is extended to the location receiving service.

STEP
6

DROP SPLICING

This final outdoor step in fiber construction prepares the network to connect homes and businesses.

STEP
7

INSTALLATION

Once the fiber network is ready, the team will hook up homes and businesses to receive faster broadband—and great customer service.

Empowerment Through Sports

Adaptive competitions and

Story by DREW WOOLLEY and JEN CALHOUN



ADAPTIVE CLIMBERS FESTIVAL

After Shane Farver's lower-level spinal cord injury, the rock-climbing enthusiast realized he needed to learn new ways of moving through the world, whether scrambling up rocks or making his way through shopping malls and office buildings.

"Early on in my recovery, a friend of mine said, 'A cool thing about climbing is the problem-solving aspect of it. You have to figure out how to get from this hold to that hold as efficiently as possible using your body as it is and kind of figuring those things out,'" Shane says.

It's the same for people with disabilities, he says. "We have to be problem-solvers, because—very often—the world is not made for us."

Today, Shane is communications director and a member of the organizing committee for the Adaptive Climbers Festival. The three-day event offers people with disabilities a chance to learn rock climbing and other outdoor skills while camping and communing in Eastern Kentucky's Red River Gorge.

"We really emphasize the notion that we do not take people with disabilities rock climbing," Shane says. "We teach people with disabilities how to rock climb. The nuance there is we're not here to take you on a ride. We're here to empower you and help you see what's possible in rock climbing and hopefully provide some confidence elsewhere in your life."

SWEET SETUP

The idea for the Adaptive Climbers Festival came about during a hot tub hang with a few adaptive climbers and their allies. "They were talking about the fact that outside of the competitive environment, there aren't a lot of opportunities for people with disabilities to rock climb," Shane says.

The first Adaptive Climbers Festival was in 2018 at a climbing area in northwest Alabama, but by 2022 the event found its home at Lago Linda Hideaway, a 410-acre wonderland that offers cabins, RV sites and campgrounds surrounding a 5-acre lake.

"We have our run of the place," Shane says. "Once we figured out that setup, we didn't want to hold it anywhere else. We also have other partners who help us out, including the local search and rescue folks. It's a huge coordinated effort."

MOVING MOUNTAINS

The event offers about 30 clinics, including courses on rappelling and anchor-building, which shows attendees how to set up their ropes for climbing. Most of the courses are led by people with disabilities.

"That's kind of our ethos—the idea that we're here to empower people and to give people opportunities to grow and lead," Shane says.

The Adaptive Climbers Festival has grown from about 30 participants to about 150 in 2024, including attendees from across the country, as well as some from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Spain. 📍

events shatter barriers



Photos courtesy of Beth King



ABOVE: Training to succeed in new sports, like javelin, cycling, powerlifting and rowing, gives Beth King the confidence to overcome life's other challenges.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Participants in the Adaptive Climbers Festival come from all over the world to enjoy a weekend of rock climbing, fellowship and fun in Eastern Kentucky's Red River Gorge area.

RESTORING FREEDOM

The first time Beth King saw a recumbent tricycle, she thought it was a joke. She rarely left the house for anything other than doctors' appointments after retiring from the military in 2014 due to injuries she sustained three years earlier when a rocket-propelled grenade brought down her Chinook helicopter in Afghanistan.

Then, after battling a traumatic brain injury, rehabbing for permanent damage to her spine and back and undergoing a bilateral joint replacement for severe pain in her jaw, Beth's occupational therapist wanted her to hop on what to her looked like a child's toy.

"When she showed me a picture, it looked like a Big Wheel from when I was a kid," says Beth, who was not happy about the idea. "But halfway through my first ride, I realized I'm out here by myself, no one's running after me to catch me. And I really found that

liberating. I felt a sense of independence I hadn't felt in years."


She then took part in the Wounded Warrior Project's Soldier Ride, introducing her to the world of adaptive sports. Now based in Missouri, Beth has trained in javelin, rowing, discus and powerlifting, even competing at the 2022 Invictus Games in the Netherlands. She hopes to qualify for the Paralympics in 2028.

"It's what saved me. I was really struggling with depression, suicidal thoughts and isolation. I just couldn't deal with anything. And it gave me something to train for, to get out of bed for," Beth says. "Sports made me realize that I could still do all the things that I thought I lost."

FINDING INSPIRATION

Realizing she was losing almost all function in her feet, in 2023 Beth decided to have her right foot amputated, allowing her to begin learning to walk with an artificial one. Last year, she completed her first year of welding school, a goal she set after retiring from the military.

"I think sports really gave me the confidence to advocate for myself. To believe that I didn't really lose as much as I thought I had," she says. "If you had asked me a year ago if I'd be welding right now, I would have said, 'No way.' I couldn't see a life bigger than the box I had put myself in with my injuries."

Once she finishes school, Beth hopes to be able to make adaptive equipment for more people. "I don't think people always understand that it's not just sports equipment. It's freedom," she says. "It's a regular life and feeling like you're a part of things. To have a place where people can go and just have fun and play a sport, even if it might look different. I think people are starting to realize that it really does matter." 

MORE THAN

Stories by MELANIE JONES

FFA PRODUCES WELL-ROUNDED ADULTS

Fayetteville High School students flock to an organization that can open doors to everything from artificial intelligence and drone technology to medicine and business. This is the new National FFA Organization. Formerly known as Future Farmers of America, today's FFA is not just about crops and animals.

"Any career field you can think of, really," ag teacher and FFA sponsor Caleb Loafman says. "One of the things I talk with the kids about is that biology degrees are huge. There are so many opportunities within agriculture."

Students are paying attention. At a K-12 school where this year's graduating class is projected to have around 20 students, the FFA chapter is 49 members strong, made up of students from grades eight through 12.

From left, Fayetteville Chapter Treasurer Saige Gasaway, current State Vice President Cash Smith, former chapter President Cooper Mau and Chapter Vice President Indie Sikes show off the state FFA jacket.



The Fayetteville Chapter President Harper Mau is also the Area XI president, and she attended the national conference this year. The chapter also is represented at the state level by Vice President Cash Smith, who graduated from Fayetteville last year.

Caleb wasn't part of the organization as a student. "In my mind, it was all about showing animals and things of that nature," he says. "But on the contrary, it really has not much to do with that at all. FFA is very much leadership development."

FFA competitions have events in radio broadcasting, public speaking and job interviews. "It really teaches a kid how to speak, how to communicate effectively, diligence, organizational skills—just how to be a well-rounded adult," Caleb says.

BIGGER BENEFITS

One member of Caleb's group joined an area FFA community service committee that required several meetings, then came back and helped organize a canned food drive for a local food pantry. That wasn't the club's first service project, and it won't be its last.

But is it worth it? If students want to be prepared for a future in agriculture—or just as responsible adults—the answer is yes.

"It was surprising to me because I thought it was just really about farming, right? But it's really not," Caleb says. "I have highly encouraged my own children to be part of FFA because, again, it teaches you speaking, writing, interpersonal communication. So, obviously, it is going to benefit anybody, whatever they do." 🗨️

Fayetteville Chapter officers are, from left, Secretary Izzy Coufal, Reporter Rylee Jeffcoat, President Harper Mau, Vice President Indie Sikes, Treasurer Saige Gasaway, Sentinel Logan Poncik and Advisor Caleb Loafman.



Photos courtesy of Caleb Loafman

FARMING

4-H RAISES LIVESTOCK AND LEADERS

In Fayette County, kids can start working on their college applications as early as third grade. It's all in their 4-H record books.

They track their achievements in 4-H projects and their leadership positions through church, sports and other activities. When it comes time to fill out their college applications, all the information is right there.

And while 4-H may prepare kids for the future, it's also about creating better citizens now.

"They learn so many life skills," Kayla Kaspar, Fayette County extension agent in charge of 4-H says. "We like to call them our 'soft skills,' like leadership, communication and teamwork. It's been a blessing for my family. I don't know how I'd want to raise my kids any other way, and I feel like most of our families feel the same."

A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM

4-H, which has 11 community clubs in Fayette County, involves projects in agriculture and livestock; family and community health; leadership and citizenship; natural resources; and STEM, or science technology, engineering and math. Livestock, however, is the focus.

Members range in age from third graders through high school students. A Clover Kids program is for kindergarteners through second graders. 4-H members have a chance to show at a local stock show, the Fayette County Fair and major stock shows. Wherever they exhibit their animals and projects, the community supports them.

Typical market projects include raising lambs, goats, pigs, steers, rabbits and chickens, plus the commercial heifers. Last year's sales through local and major shows

brought in about \$1.8 million for the kids. The members get to keep the money from their sales, minus a commission. The money covers the cost of raising the animal and gives the students enough left over to invest in an animal for the next year or spend as they like.

"To me, it testifies to the support of the community," Kayla says. "I definitely see huge community support, but also they volunteer in different project areas," she says, citing volunteers and sponsors for the banquet and the food nutrition group.

Being involved in 4-H doesn't exclude students from joining the National FFA Organization or Junior FFA through their schools. "I personally encourage them to do both because I think that they both have some great things to offer, and they both can benefit from each other," Kayla says. 📱

FAYETTE COUNTY 4-H

979-968-5831

fayette.agrilife.org

Find Fayette County 4-H on Facebook.

Fayette County 4-H Council Officers meet with Judge Dan Mueller, center, and commissioners at the signing of a 4-H Proclamation during National 4-H Week.



Photo courtesy of Fayette County 4-H

Pasta Supremo

Italian translates to a great meal

Italian cuisine, with its fresh ingredients and age-old techniques, has woven itself into the fabric of American culture.

Pizza, spaghetti and Alfredo are all favorites, but lasagna may top the list. It's simply hard to resist. Keep the Italian theme going with an Italian chopped salad and a cannoli poke cake. Loosen your belt and get ready to embark on your Italian culinary experience without leaving home.



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

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

ITALIAN LASAGNA

- 1 pound sweet Italian sausage
- 3/4 pound lean ground beef
- 1/2 cup minced onion
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 2 (6.5-ounce) cans tomato sauce
- 2 (6-ounce) cans tomato paste
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried basil leaves
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided, or to taste
 - 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
 - 1/2 teaspoon fennel seeds
 - 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 12 lasagna noodles
- 16 ounces ricotta cheese
- 1 egg
- 3/4 pound mozzarella cheese, sliced
- 3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Heat the oven to 375 F.

Cook sausage, ground beef, onion and garlic in a Dutch oven over medium heat until well browned.

Stir in crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, tomato paste and water. Season with sugar, 2 tablespoons parsley, basil,

1 teaspoon salt, Italian seasoning, fennel seeds and pepper. Simmer, covered, for about 1 1/2 hours, stirring occasionally.

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Cook lasagna noodles in boiling water for 8 to 10 minutes. Drain noodles, and rinse with cold water.

In a mixing bowl, combine ricotta cheese with egg, remaining 2 tablespoons parsley and 1/2 teaspoon salt.

To assemble, spread 1 1/2 cups of meat sauce in the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Arrange 3 to 4 noodles lengthwise over meat sauce to cover. Spread with 1/2 of the ricotta cheese mixture. Top with 1/3 of the mozzarella cheese slices. Spoon 1 1/2 cups meat sauce over mozzarella, and sprinkle with 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese.

Repeat layers, and top with remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheese. Cover with foil. To prevent sticking, either spray foil with cooking spray or make sure the foil does not touch the cheese. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 25 minutes. Remove lasagna from oven, and let it rest for 15 minutes before slicing and serving.



CANNOLI POKE CAKE

1 (15.25 ounce) yellow cake mix, plus ingredients on box to make the cake as directed

Topping:

- 1 1/2 cups ricotta cheese, well drained
- 2 cups mascarpone cheese
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1 (3.4-ounce box) instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon fresh orange zest
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 10 ounces mini chocolate chips

Make sure ricotta cheese is well drained—overnight is best, if possible, because it needs to be thick.

Prepare and bake cake according to directions on the package for a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Remove cake from oven

and poke holes all over it using the handle of a wooden spoon, large wood skewer or a straw. Set cake aside to cool.

In a large bowl, beat the ricotta and mascarpone cheese with an electric mixer on medium speed until well combined. Beat in the powdered sugar and dry pudding mix. Then beat in the vanilla, orange zest, cinnamon and salt. Once well combined, slowly beat in the milk a little at a time.

Spread about 1/3 of the topping over the cake, making sure it gets into holes. Then continue spreading the remaining topping, and sprinkle on the mini chocolate chips. Cover the cake and refrigerate for a few hours or overnight. Cut and serve well chilled.

Note: This cake is especially good with a little chocolate syrup drizzled over the top.

ITALIAN CHOPPED SALAD

Make the dressing in advance to allow flavors to marry.

Lemon Vinaigrette:

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 shallot, finely chopped

- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Salad:

- 1 head iceberg lettuce
- 1 head radicchio
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1 can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 4 ounces fresh pearl mozzarella, drained
- 4 ounces provolone cheese, diced
- 5 pepperoncini peppers, stemmed and sliced
- Kosher salt and pepper, as needed
- 1 teaspoon fresh oregano, for garnish

Make the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, vinegar, shallot, garlic, oregano, salt and pepper. Set aside.

Cut the iceberg lettuce in half, then cut out the core. Slice the lettuce lengthwise into 1/4-inch strips. Repeat with the radicchio.

In a large bowl, combine the lettuce, radicchio, onion, tomatoes, chickpeas, mozzarella, provolone and pepperoncini. Drizzle with the dressing and toss gently to coat. You may not need all of the dressing, so serve any leftover vinaigrette on the side. Season salad with salt and pepper and toss again. Garnish with oregano, if desired, and serve. 📺



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