

The Foothills

MAY/JUNE 2016

CONNECTION

MODERN DAY MILKMAN

Still delivering after
30 years

A STYLE OF HIS OWN

Learn why customers keep
visiting Barber Paul

MARLANA VANHOOSE

Inspiring with a powerful voice
and a message of hope



BROADBAND IS “OUR NEW MANIFEST DESTINY”

FCC Commissioner Rosenworcel discusses the importance of broadband for rural communities

During her career, FCC Commissioner Jessica

Rosenworcel has seen the changes that fast broadband service can create throughout the country. Broadband can support economic growth, better health care services and a richer quality of life for area residents.

Rosenworcel recently shared her thoughts with us on how broadband can have a positive impact on rural areas such as those served by your telco.

Q: How do you view the role of broadband in today's society?

A: I like to challenge my agency to think big. I like to push them to set big goals when it comes to broadband. Not just for urban America, but also for rural America and everywhere in between. That's because broadband is not just a technology, it's also a platform for opportunity. And extending its reach across our country, I like to think, is our new manifest destiny, because it is an essential part of civic and commercial life. No matter who you are or where you live, access to modern communications is what you need for a fair shot at 21st-century success. If you think about it, we're a country that put a man on the moon — and we invented the Internet — so we know we can do audacious things. If we set big goals, anything short of trying to deliver high-speed broadband service



ABOUT COMMISSIONER ROSENWORCEL

Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel brings nearly 20 years of public and private sector experience to her position on the Federal Communications Commission. Prior to her confirmation by the U.S. Senate in 2012, Rosenworcel worked under the direction of Senator John D. Rockefeller IV as Senior Communications Counsel for the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

to our communities is setting our goals too low. It will shortchange our children, our future and our digital economy. The challenge of our day is to make sure that it reaches everywhere, rural America included.

Q: What kind of changes are possible for rural health care when medical facilities use broadband?

A: It makes superior health care possible. It used to be that the folks at rural hospitals would have to spend so much time getting files back and forth to a larger city or that patients would have to take a long drive because they couldn't receive the services they needed locally. Now, they can provide health care quickly. They can have consultations with experts in large cities through broadband. And using new technology offers more interactive work for those who are health care providers, while providing opportunities for local residents to age in place and get their health care from people they know and trust.

Q: The FCC has responsibilities for communications nationwide. What role do you see rural telcos playing in terms of addressing the challenges of economic development and education?

A: We've had a mandate since the Communications Act of 1934 to help get service everywhere in this country. It's a principle we call Universal Service, and the USF evolves over time. When I was young, all that meant was having a copper telephone line into every home. But now, we need to make sure that's a high-capacity broadband line. When we do that, there are many more opportunities for everyone. We might have businesses that want to locate in a rural area where it's really easy to get high-speed service, and we might have people who can telework and want to work remotely. There are also opportunities for kids to be able to do homework and research online. So I think there's a lot of economic and educational opportunities that will grow from having a fast network in rural areas.

Q: Broadband in large cities often grabs the headlines, but what story are you seeing play out among rural broadband providers?

A: Anyone who wants to build better infrastructure for this country deserves praise and our support, but sometimes it overshadows the good work that can come from trusted local companies in rural America. So we have

to praise the good when we see it. Rural telcos have a history of providing service; literally and figuratively they have been there from the ground up. They bring jobs, communications, a personal touch and world-class service to rural America. And I will be totally candid with you; they often deliver higher-speed service than I get at my home back in Washington, D.C. 🗨️

ABOUT THE FCC

The Federal Communications Commission regulates interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. An independent U.S. government agency overseen by Congress, the commission is the United States' primary authority for communications laws, regulation and technological innovation.

“WHAT’S WRONG WITH MY WI-FI?”

Many things can impact the strength of the Wi-Fi signal in your home

With so many connected devices being used in homes today, a quality Wi-Fi network is more important than ever. When your Wi-Fi network is not performing properly, your first inclination may be to blame the speed of your Internet connection itself. However, there are many other factors that can cause your home's Wi-Fi network to seem sluggish and to perform poorly. Here are a few:



AGE

Older computers and gaming consoles can have slower processors, making it difficult for them to take advantage of the faster broadband speeds available today.



DEVICES

Every device connected to your Wi-Fi network is sharing your home's total bandwidth. When your family is using several connected devices (tablets, computers, gaming consoles, streaming devices, etc.) some users may experience slower performance.



DISTANCE

The further away you get from your router, the weaker the Wi-Fi signal will be. A laptop on the second floor and opposite end of your home will not get the same connection speed as one downstairs in the same room as the router.



INTERFERENCE

Some items in your home can interfere with your Wi-Fi performance even though they are not connected. The main culprit is your microwave oven. Others include Bluetooth devices (keyboard, mouse, headset), as well as fluorescent lights, cordless phones and some external computer monitors.



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

Partnering for rural health care

The importance of health care to rural citizens has long been on the minds of three groups: NRECA, the association representing the nation's rural electric cooperatives; NRHA, the association representing health care providers and institutions in rural America; and us, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. While we all would acknowledge that access to health care is vital for a rural community's well-being, we had not figured out a way to combine and intersect to further that goal. Until now.

Leaders from NTCA, NRECA and NRHA met earlier this year and agreed that we have a lot of interests in common. Instead of shooting off in different directions as we try to address rural health care, telemedicine and support for rural facilities, we could be more powerful working together — so that is what we are going to try to do.

In our initial meeting with these two groups, we learned that 673 rural hospitals are vulnerable to closures. I was impressed by NRHA's efforts to promote federal legislation to save rural hospitals. When a rural hospital closes, the economy of a rural community erodes. How might broadband play a role in keeping essential services supported, or even assist in the transition from traditional to telemedicine care? I think there are some really interesting places to take this partnership, and we're willing to devote the time and energy to do just that. I will keep you posted as these talks progress. 🗨️

Saluting small businesses

Small businesses are the backbone of our community, and that's why we're excited to celebrate National Small Business Week May 1-7. But while we're happy to celebrate them, we're even happier to support them with the network they need.



RUTH CONLEY
Chief Executive Officer

Nationwide, small businesses account for about half of the private sector jobs — and our area is no exception. Small businesses bake, repair, sell, install, design, service, grill, build, sew, paint, grow, harvest and manufacture much of what gives our community its unique identity.

These small business owners and employees have decided to dedicate their working lives to providing goods and services to people in our community. Were it not for them, in many cases local residents would have to do without those products or travel long distances for those services. And without the leadership and generosity of many small business owners in our area, local festivals, nonprofit groups and civic projects might not exist.

In the telco world, we're a small business compared to the billion-dollar national communications companies. Just like those small businesses in our communities, we're committed to providing high-quality services that might not exist here without us.

And just like those small business owners, we're a part of this community. In fact, we're working hard every day to support those small business owners and give them access to advanced technology.

A 2010 study of small business owners by the Small Business Administration found that businessmen and women believed Internet access is as essential to their business as other utilities such as water, sewer and electricity. In the six years since that study, I think it's safe to say that broadband access has grown even more important.

The same 2010 study predicted that a fiber network was the best way to meet the increasing demands of small businesses. That's why I'm proud that we're working to build the network to meet those needs. In 2016, small business success means connecting to customers both near and far through the Internet.

I like to think about it like this — in order to keep doing what they do best, small business owners need to stream training videos, search for addresses, browse industry websites, promote their business with Web ads, interact with customers on social media, swipe credit cards, post job ads, update their accounting records, send files to vendors, order supplies and research customer trends.

Our network is what enables them to do that. We're one small business helping many other small businesses. I'm proud we are their trusted technology partner; I'm proud of the important role they play in our community; and I'm proud of the network we've built to help them compete, succeed and grow. ☎

The Foothills Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Foothills Communications, ©2016. It is distributed without charge to all customers of the company.



Foothills is a member-owned cooperative that has been serving residents and businesses in eastern Kentucky since 1951. In the early days, we only offered telephone service over copper wires. Over the years, we have expanded our network and now provide broadband Internet and cable TV services over fiber-optic facilities to much of our service area. Our service area includes Magoffin County and portions of Johnson County and Lawrence County. We love being part of the communities we serve; our customers are our families, friends and neighbors.

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Foothills Mission Statement

"To provide the latest in communications at affordable prices with exceptional service."

Produced for Foothills Communications by:



On the Cover:



B&B Distributors, a family-owned company delivering milk, ice cream and other products, celebrates 30 years of service.
See story Page 12.



In honor of all mothers, Foothills Communications is offering **FREE activation** on telephone calling features, as well as premium movie packages, from May 1 through May 8.

And, what's a holiday without great movies? Enjoy a **FREE HBO weekend** May 7 and 8.



To honor fathers, Foothills Communications is offering **FREE activation** on telephone calling features, as well as premium movie packages, from June 12 through June 19.

Also, enjoy hours of great programming with a **FREE Cinemax weekend** June 18 and 19.



MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY

The Foothills Communications office will close Monday, May 30, to observe Memorial Day.

Please enjoy **FREE SHOWTIME MOVIES** on the holiday weekend May 28, 29, and 30.

The Gift Basket Giveaway



Don't forget our extra-special Mother's Day and Father's Day drawings!

For a chance at a gift basket — one perfect for Mom and another ideal for Dad — visit our Facebook page during the week of each holiday. Just like the Foothills Communications page. Then on our page, write a post containing the "secret" code below.

Mother's Day: Connect to Mom
Father's Day: Make the link to Dad

Items must be claimed within two weeks of being announced.



ELIMINATE CHANNELS YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE

Is there a channel that's just not right for you or your family? Well, with a few simple steps you can take control:

1. Press the "Settings" button on the remote control to access the "Quick Settings" menu.
2. Scroll down to the "Turn ON Parental Control" choice and press select to activate the feature.
3. Enter your four-digit PIN number — it's set to 0000 by default.
4. Tune to the channel you wish to block.
5. Press the "Settings" button on the remote control to access the "Quick Settings" menu.
6. Scroll down to the "Block this Channel (VLDHD)" choice and press "Select."
7. Enter your four-digit PIN.

Now, do you also want to remove descriptions of blocked channels from appearing in the channel guide? Well, that's only a few steps away:

1. Press the "Settings" button on the remote control twice to access the "General Settings" menu.
2. Scroll down to the "Block: Titles" option and press select.
3. Enter your four-digit PIN number — it's set to 0000 by default.
4. Then scroll up to the "Hidden" option and press select.



Magnificent MUSEUMS

BY ANNE BRALY

Photo courtesy of Thinkery

Finding appropriate activities for kids when families travel can be one of the most difficult aspects of a summer vacation. That's where children's museums can help, offering at least a few hours of entertainment for the young ones. It's a win-win experience, fostering education while offering parents a well-deserved break. Here are some Southern favorites.

CREATIVE DISCOVERY MUSEUM

321 Chestnut St., Chattanooga, Tennessee

Contact: 423-756-2738; www.cdmfun.org

An anchor of Chattanooga's exciting riverfront district, the Creative Discovery Museum offers kids a one-of-a-kind experience, where they explore art, science, music, engineering and more. Young visitors investigate the world around them through dozens of interactive exhibits.

Newest exhibit: "Make It" encourages children to put on their tinker's hats and learn basic woodworking, sewing and construction skills.

Most popular: Kids love making a splash and climbing the two-story structure in "RiverPlay" while learning about the power of water and how a river works.

- Summer hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. seven days a week
- Restaurant: Cafe Dino-Mite
- Tickets: \$12.95 (ages 2 and up)
- Bonus: It's within easy walking distance of the Tennessee Aquarium and IMAX 3D Theater.



TECH-SAVVY TRAVELER:

School is almost out for the summer, but that doesn't mean the learning has to stop. Mobile apps and e-books can keep your kids engaged in the reading, art, math and music skills they learned at school. Browse your tablet's device store for apps from well-known brands like **PBS**, **Crayola** and **Duplo** for fun, educational games. Amazon's Kindle store even has a full line of interactive books from **Dr. Seuss**. And best of all, the books and games stay nice and organized on your tablet instead of flying all over the back seat!



EDVENTURE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

211 Gervais St., Columbia, South Carolina
Contact: 803-779-3100; www.edventure.org

EdVenture is an all-compassing experience for kids with more than 350 interactive and hands-on exhibits, including an amazing anatomical journey through Big Eddie, the world's largest child. "We're the perfect destination for curious minds," says Kristy Barnes, director of marketing.

Newest exhibit: "Blooming Butterflies" teaches children the life cycle of butterflies, from cocoon to flight.

Most popular: Slide down the fire pole, hop on the fire truck and sound the alarm! It's "Dalmatian Station," an exhibit focusing on fire safety.

- Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday (summer hours), noon-5 p.m. Sunday
- Restaurant: Canalfront Cafe
- Tickets: \$11.50 (ages 2 and up)
- Bonus: The Columbia Riverwalk, a 4.5-mile stretch of greenway along the Congaree River, is within walking distance and ideal for picnicking.



Photo courtesy of EarlyWorks Children's Museum.

THE EARLYWORKS FAMILY OF MUSEUMS

404 Madison St. SE, 320 Church St. NW,
109 Gates Ave. SE, Huntsville, Alabama
Contact: 256-564-8100; www.earlyworks.com

A three-in-one explosion of fun and education can be experienced with a visit to Huntsville's EarlyWorks Family of Museums: The EarlyWorks Children's Museum, the Alabama Constitution Village and the Historic Huntsville Depot. Each offer a taste of history based on how Alabama became the state it is

today. "There's something for everyone to enjoy," says Amanda Cook, educational services manager.

Newest exhibit: "Dog Days of Summer" teaches the history of our canine companions — where they originated, presidential pooches and the most popular breeds. Kids can play dog games, too.

Most popular: "The Talking Tree" at the EarlyWorks Children's Museum lets kids enjoy sitting around a tree and listening to stories of the olden days.

- Hours: EarlyWorks Children's Museum — 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (summer hours), Huntsville Depot and Museum — 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily (park hours) and 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday (museum hours, closed in January and February), Alabama Constitution Village — 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Saturday (summer hours, closed in January and February)
- Restaurant: None, but picnic tables on-site
- Tickets: \$5-12 depending on age and museum
- Bonus: Bundle your fun with ticket packages for all three museums — \$5 (children 1-3), \$20 (ages 4-17 and seniors 55-plus) and \$25 (adults 18-54).



Photo courtesy of Amazeement Square.

AMAZEEMENT SQUARE, THE RIGHTMIRE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

27 Ninth St., Lynchburg, Virginia
Contact: 434-845-1888;
www.amazeementsquare.com

An award-winning museum with 29,000 square feet of interactive fun. Guests can paint the walls, explore life

on the farm, float a boat down the James River or rock out onstage in their own band. It's a stimulating space for children to gather.

Newest exhibit: "The League of Healthy Heroes" encourages a balanced diet and active lifestyle by pitting a healthy body against three villains: Sofablix, Junk Monster and Screen Blob.

Most popular: "On the James" is a replica model of the James River. Children float boats with locks and channels to maneuver along the way.

- Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 1-5 p.m. Sunday
- Restaurant: A cafe inside the Kidz Warehouse Museum Shop offering snack options
- Tickets: \$9 (ages 1-59), \$6 (ages 60-plus)

Bonus: The neighboring Craddock-Terry Hotel offers a package deal that includes free admission for two to the museum.

THINKERY

1830 Simond Ave., Austin, Texas
Contact: 512-469-6200; thinkeryaustin.org

Austin's new home for the "how and why," Thinkery is a place where science and children play side by side. "It's a place for a new generation of innovators," says spokeswoman Adrienne Longenecker.

Newest exhibit: "Space 8" is designed for children 8 and up. The exhibit deepens their understanding of science, technology, engineering, art and math through old and new technologies.

Most popular: In the "Currents" exhibit, children and parents get wet exploring concepts of fluid dynamics, engaging visitors in aquatic investigations.

- Museum hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday-Sunday
- Restaurant: SNAP Kitchen
- Tickets: \$9 (ages 2 and up), \$1 off for seniors
- Bonus: Mueller Lake Park is directly across the street with lots of play and picnic areas. ☞

A stylish success

Paul Daniel cuts his way through life

BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY



A visit to the barber shop of Paul Daniel, a member of the Johnson County Commission, is a tradition for many.



For 20 years, Daniel has cut Greg Gray's hair.



Daniel first cut Jake Howard's hair 47 years ago.

Growing up in Nippa, Kentucky, Paul Daniel cut his first head of hair when he was about 14.

His father was tired of searching for a barber.

"I told him that if he could get me a set of clippers, I thought I could do it," Daniel says. "The first one wasn't too good, but after that I learned what to do, and what not to do."

He also had plenty of opportunities to practice, including neighbors and his two younger brothers. At the time, though, Daniel never anticipated the career as a barber that still keeps him busy decades after buying his first shop.

"The customers mean a lot to me," he says. "A lot of people, I've cut their hair for years. Then, I cut their kids' hair, and now I'm cutting their grandkids' hair."

Daniel moves around the neat, wood-paneled shop with practiced steps, his hands darting out for the right brush or clipper. A chest-high partition separates a few seats from the barber's chair, making conversation with the next customer easy.

"I've been coming here for 47 years, since I was 17," Jake

Howard says from the barber chair as Daniel begins to trim. "That's a long time to keep a customer happy."

And The Haircutters off U.S. Highway 23 north of Paintsville isn't Daniel's only contribution to the community. He has served as a Johnson County commissioner since 2006.

FINDING A CAREER

For Daniel, the path to becoming a barber began when he was in college and a friend opted for barber school. "I finished that year of college, and I decided to go in that direction also," says Daniel.

He drove about 60 miles from Paintsville to attend Ashland Barber College. After

graduation in 1965, he was a busy barber, and he bought a Paintsville shop two years later. For 39 years, he cut hair in Paintsville, before moving the business north of town.

Still, customers keep coming, and he knows one secret to his success. "First, you've got to do quality work, but then you've also got to be someone who is dependable," he says. "My main goal is to be prompt, and if you have an appointment at 12 o'clock, I expect to be putting you in the chair at 12 o'clock."

Through the decades, hairstyles have changed, and he kept up with annual training. "I always try to do what my client wants, and not what I want — it's their money and their head," he says. "And now, any style is popular; anything from skin-tight to shoulder length."

EMBRACING POLITICS

Daniel also helped organize the local volunteer fire department, which meant attending several sessions of the Johnson County Fiscal Court. Other supporters of the fire department encouraged him to run for county commission.

He is part of a group that's provided stable leadership for several terms. "We've gotten along real well, and we've worked together well as a court," he says.

Daniel also brings lessons from the barbershop to the courthouse. "Being self-employed, you learn to do things correctly real quick if you want to stay in business," he says. "You can't spend everything you have today right away because there might be other needs down the road." 📱



ANTHEMS OF FAITH

Marlana VanHoose inspires with her voice

BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

Rafter-rattling, full-throated cheers punctuate the final notes as Marlana VanHoose finishes a performance of the national anthem. It's a scene that's been repeated everywhere from NBA games to local retirement parties.

And the results are always the same — cheers. A 20-year-old from Denver, Kentucky, Marlana is more than a singer and pianist. She's an inspiration. She is also blind — but that does not define her.

Instead, when the woman with small frame and dark glasses takes a stage or steps into the center of a sports stadium, it's her voice that demands attention.

She is part of Eastern Kentucky's musical legacy. And when asked why the region has produced musical legends, such as Loretta Lynn, or up-and-coming stars, like Chris Stapleton, Marlana has a simple answer. "It's God," she says.

MUSIC AND FAITH

In the weeks after she was born, doctors learned that her optic nerve never formed. Then



Marlana VanHoose's voice has brought stadiums full of people to their feet for the national anthem.

Photos courtesy of David Lee Photography. Licensed by Artists Music Guild.



when she was 2 years old, she was diagnosed with mild cerebral palsy.

And while given challenges, she also received the gift of music. "She was humming 'Jesus Loves Me' even before she could say the words," says Teresa VanHoose, Marlana's mother.

Marlana learned gospel hymns from relatives, and music provided comfort. "When I was a baby, gospel music calmed me down and put me to sleep," she says. "I also listened to old country songs. But I don't like

modern country because, like my daddy says, country ain't country no more."

She took her first group voice lesson when she was 7 years old, and her first private lesson a year later. Her mother, though, still worried. "There was a time when she left elementary school and went to middle school. We started thinking of long-term goals for her," says VanHoose of the worries she and her husband, David, faced. "We wondered if she would be able to go to college, or if she could have a career in singing. It's just all worked out."

TAKING THE STAGE

While she often sang locally, her first big-stage experience was a performance of the national anthem before a University of Kentucky women's basketball game. "I

loved the band, the crowd and the cheerleaders," she says.

A YouTube video of that 2012 event went viral, and others noticed Marlana's gifts. Afterward, her story appeared on national news. She has sung at a NASCAR race, the 2015 NBA Finals and many other events.

"God gave me my voice, and it's a blessing to me for everyone to hear me sing," she says. "It's such a blessing. I witness to lots of people, and I tell them to never give up on their dreams. I tell them to put Jesus first and follow him."

Marlana also intends to use her voice and faith to guide her toward the future. "My dream is to travel around the world and sing," she says. "I'd love to put every single gospel singer together and to make a big ol' mass choir. And I want to direct it." 📺

Jeff Clark

HITTING *the* TRAIL

A Q&A with Jeff Clark, a blogger from western North Carolina, who writes about his adventures hiking our nation's trails.

Check out his blog, *Meanderthals*, at
HTTP://INTERNETBROTHERS.ORG



Q: What do readers find at your blog?

Jeff Clark: Meanderthals is a series of trail reports for many of the best hikes in western North Carolina and the surrounding region. Most posts on my blog are about hikes available in this area. Occasionally, however, I do branch out to other parts of the country. For example, I love the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and the red rock desert and canyons of the Southwest.

Q: When did you begin blogging and how has it changed your life?

JC: In 2000, I started a blog about the curves that life can throw you. It ran until 2007. Then, I took a break. In 2011, I returned to the blogging fraternity when I introduced Meanderthals. Blogging hasn't changed my life. It has enabled me to journal it.

Q: What sparked your interest in the outdoors, and when did you first start hiking?

JC: I developed an interest in wild places and things on a cross-country family trip right before I started high school. I've now hiked for 40 years, and it's become my primary passion in the last 10.

Q: Do you often set out for a day hike, or do you enjoy making your hikes a multi-day escape?

JC: When I was younger, I would occasionally combine hiking with camping, but never more than a few days at a time. Despite my love of the outdoors, "roughing it" has never really been my thing. A year ago I purchased a Subaru Outback. I can now sleep overnight in my car, enabling me to go farther afield in search of trails.

Q: What's a good, easy but beautiful hike for a beginner?

JC: Grassy Ridge in the Roan Highlands. It's located along the North Carolina and Tennessee state line, where Pisgah and Cherokee National Forests merge. The month of June simply isn't complete without a visit to Roan Highlands for the annual rhododendron and azalea blooms.

What is the most important gear to take, even if you're just going to be out for a few hours?

JC: A companion in case of emergency, preferably someone with more experience and the 10 essentials: food, water, sun-block, a change of dry clothes, flashlight, matches and fire starter, map, compass, pocket knife and first-aid kit.

OTHER HIKING BLOGS YOU MIGHT LIKE:

► **HTTP://YOUROUTDOORFAMILY.COM**

This blog bundles favorite places for outdoor activities, from hiking to biking to zip lining.

► **HTTP://THEOUTCASTSHIKEAGAIN.BLOGSPOT.COM**

This group of bloggers from the Murfreesboro, Tennessee, fire department write about their quests to tackle the trails of Tennessee and beyond.

Q: Is it a good idea to take young ones along? If so, what's the best kind of hike for them?

JC: Absolutely! Getting children interested in wild places early in life will usually keep them interested forever. The wilderness is a better tool for nurturing than are television and video games. ☺

GO-TO SUMMER GADGETS *for the great outdoors*

Whether you're planning the perfect summer party with guests or simply spending time with the family, we've found a few gadgets that will make your summer backyard experience into the ultimate staycation location.

By JENNIFER CALHOUN

GRILLBOT

Take the ill out of scrubbing the grill. Outdoor grilling is great until it comes to cleaning the mess left behind by those char-grilled masterpieces. But now that we're fully locked in the 21st century, it's time to stop scrubbing and leave the mess to someone — or something — else. Try the Grillbot, (\$129.95, grillbots.com) a robotic grill cleaner that works with the touch of a button. Whether your grill needs a light scrub or a deep clean, the Grillbot can do the job that you'd rather not. The robot offers replaceable, dishwasher-safe wire brushes that pop off for easy cleaning, a rechargeable battery, three electric motors, an LCD alarm and timer and a chip that controls movement, speed and direction of the brushes. The Grillbot comes in four colors, blue (shown), red, orange and black.



Smart Sprinkler Controller (\$224.95 at Amazon.com) can take the tension out of getting a lush landscape. This techno gadget connects to your Wi-Fi network, monitors the weather, manages your sprinkler system remotely, sends water usage reports and incorporates local water restriction schedules by the day or hour. At the same time, it also creates and manages watering schedules to keep your lawn green.

SOJI POD SOLAR LANTERNS

Consider giving your yard a colorful makeover after the sun sets with Soji Pod Solar Lanterns (\$26.99 at allsopgarden.com.) Forget the fairy lights and try out these nylon-covered, oblong lanterns to give your yard a touch of the Far East. The 15-inch high lanterns collect light all day through their solar panels and feature dual LED lights and AAA rechargeable batteries so you can enhance the beauty of those summer nights in an eco-friendly way.



MISTO OUTDOOR MISTING FAN

Stay cool all summer with the Lasko 7050 Misto Outdoor Misting Fan (\$115 at Amazon.com.) This portable, but sturdy, misting fan hooks to your garden hose to reduce the nearby air temperature by about 25 degrees. Use it on your deck, at a picnic or while playing sports. The fan offers a 90-degree

pivot to direct mist flow, automatic louvers to create a wide sweep and three speeds.

SKYDROP SMART SPRINKLER CONTROLLER

Want to go greener while also getting a greener lawn? The Skydrop



SHOWER CREATURES

While originally for the shower, Shower Creatures (\$30 at thegrommet.com) are funky, water-resistant Wi-Fi speakers that are good anywhere water might be present. Kids, as well as

adults, will love the adorable, snail- and octopus-shaped speakers that power on with a 30-foot range. Hard-gripping suction cups adhere them to even the slickest surfaces, and the six-hour battery life will keep you jamming well into the night. The Shower Creatures also feature a built-in microphone so you can answer your phone without using your hands. 📞

Finding the way home

B&B Distributors celebrates 30 years

By NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

John Blanton grew up in Paintsville, and he never planned to leave. But he faced a tough choice — one familiar to many people in Eastern Kentucky.

During the early 1980s, when both the national and local economies faltered, he worked with a regional telephone company. “Due to a surplus of employees and a slowdown similar to the one we have right now, they asked for volunteers to move to Houston for a couple of years, and then you’d transfer back,” he says.

So, he traded home for the heat, humidity and hustle of one of the nation’s largest cities. “After a couple of years, there was still no transferring,” he says. “In an attempt to get home, I came back and went to work with a guy who ran a local milk distributorship.”

That one decision set a course that would shape the next three decades of his family’s life. Thirty years ago, he founded B&B Distributors, which employs about 30 people.

The industry has changed over time, shifting from mom-and-pop markets to corporate-owned stores, and the distributorship has grown and adapted. Like so many people in coal country, he turned hard work into a future, but it wasn’t always easy.

HOURS OF WORK

When Blanton describes the early days of the company, he is matter of fact. He started with two trucks. The front storage section of each truck was used for frozen

items. A second chilled compartment carried milk.

In the first week of operation, he sold about 700 cases. “That’s about half of a trailer load,” he says. “Within 10 years, we were up to 22 trailers a week, and we expanded our distribution area.”

Now, the company has five distribution centers, and delivery routes cover a radius of about 120 miles around Paintsville. The drivers supply milk, ice cream, frozen pizzas and more for companies such as Broughton and Nestle.

Blanton’s wife, Teresa, manages the paperwork needed to keep the business running. And her memories of the early years offer a more personal perspective.

When Blanton made the leap into running his own business, she was on maternity leave from her bank job. Their first son was 3 months old.

She was visiting her grandparents when Blanton came to tell her the news. “He was white as a ghost,” she says. “He had borrowed the money to get started from his mom and dad, and he was scared to death he wasn’t going to be able to pay it back.”

So, Blanton worked, and he worked hard. “In the first few years, he’d come home about three hours a night to sleep,” she says. “And he’d take the boys in his arms and sleep with them. That’s the kind of details I remember.”



John Blanton and his wife, Teresa, have managed the business he founded, B&B Distributors, for 30 years.



As the owner of a small business, he took responsibility for building success. “At that time, I was the sales force, the mechanic, the refrigeration guy, and she’s always done the book work,” says Blanton, nodding toward his wife of 32 years.

The multiple roles required plenty of juggling, Teresa Blanton says. “He took two or three different sets of clothes out in case he needed to work on a truck and then go see a customer,” she says.

CHANGING TIMES

The business of delivering milk, ice cream, frozen pizzas and other perishable items is not the same as when Blanton started. Once, small mom-and-pop stores required a personal touch, a one-on-one connection Blanton worked hard to build. At that time, he was also responsible for setting prices, adjusting sales strategies and the days of delivery.

Today, big-box stores and national chains dominate. A supplier might have offices anywhere in the country, working stores scattered across several states. “Once, a personal relationship with a store owner meant everything, but not so much anymore,” Blanton says. “Now, a major portion of accounts are maintained by the

corporate side of the dairy.”

Competing in a complex world with contacts at corporate offices around the nation, reliable communications tools are essential. For that, Blanton has always relied on Foothills.

“Foothills, even 30 years ago, was just as advanced as AT&T was,” Blanton says. “For an independent company in an entirely rural area, I’ve always found that amazing. They’ve always had great people and great management, and I have a great respect for the company and the people.”

Like Foothills, Blanton built a business serving a rural area where others did not always see the possibility of profits. “We fit into the same mold as Foothills,” he says. “With the big national companies, it’s not cost effective for them to come in here and distribute products. That’s where we fit in. That is our niche.”

A FAMILY BUSINESS

The Blantons raised three sons: Adam, 29; Justin, 27; and Seth, 20. Baseball became a family passion, with the boys earning accolades. Blanton proudly talks of trips to baseball tournaments in states throughout the Southeast, and he suspects they are the only family with three sons who pitched in a Kentucky high school baseball championship tournament.

“And they all helped out with the business during summers,” Blanton says. Each son is following his own professional career path. “I’m not pushing them into the family business,” he says.

Blanton, though, also considers his other family — the people who have made the business possible. He credits people such as Danny Hannah, who was there at the beginning. “Also, my staff is dominated by others with long tenures of 20-plus years,” Blanton says.

And the Blantons want to continue to offer jobs in today’s tough Eastern Kentucky economy. “I’ve never been able to keep up with coal company wages, but they make a living, and we’re consistent,” Blanton says. “We’ve known these people, or their families, for most of their lives, and we want to keep the business operating for them, too.” ☎



Long-time employees such as Danny Hannah are at the heart of B&B Distributors' success.

THE TASTE OF SPRING — LUSH, FRESH STRAWBERRIES

There is just one thing wrong with fresh local strawberries: The season doesn't last long enough. Mother Nature opens the window just a bit, allowing us to reach in and grab the sweet, red juicy berries before she shutters the season. It's almost gone before it begins.

"Fresh, locally grown strawberries are eagerly anticipated every year," says Bill McCartney, owner of The Red Door Art Cafe in Cullman, Alabama, home of one of the biggest strawberry festivals in the South. Since 1939, it's been happening around the first of May — this year May 6-7. Expect to find some of the biggest and best strawberries in North Alabama.

"Of course we can buy strawberries in grocery stores all year; however, they're a poor relative to local warm, luscious berries picked and sold at our farmers markets," McCartney says, adding that it's these berries his customers crave. "We have locals and tourists come to The Red Door to enjoy our classic berries and cream.

"The quality and taste of Cullman County strawberries are so much better than what grocers ship from 'somewhere,'" McCartney adds. "And while we may use strawberries as garnish or in fruit cups throughout the year, we only shine the spotlight on our strawberry concoctions during our local growing season."

The Red Door Art Cafe opened in a historic 1898 home in late 2014, more as a place to feature local art than as an eatery. But in the short time the cafe has been open, it has evolved into a bit of both. It features both culinary and visual arts, and it supports area nonprofits. After bills are paid and payroll is met, all proceeds are donated to charity.

"All of our recipes are influenced by what I have done for years at home," McCartney says. "In particular our hamburgers reflect our family cooking. Customers tell us that we have the best hamburgers in Cullman."

Buying local, including the strawberries



In North Alabama, nobody knows what to do with strawberries better than Bill McCartney.

McCartney purchases from local markets and farms, is a signature at The Red Door.

"Cullman has led Alabama in agricultural production for decades, and it's only natural that buying locally grown produce is part of what we do," McCartney says. "It's a win-win-win proposition for The Red Door, its customers and its producers."

The Cullman Strawberry Festival brings fantastic crowds to the town, and it's during the festival that The Red Door Art Cafe rolls out its berry best.

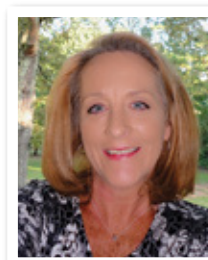
"We had two or three strawberry offerings last year and plan to make a much bigger splash this year," McCartney says.

Additions to the menu will include homemade strawberry shortcake. Also, expect strawberry "babies," which are luscious berries sweetened with honey and orange zest and tucked between pastry rounds. Another treat will be strawberry Napoleons, berries layered between sheets of flaky phyllo dough drizzled with honey yogurt.

McCartney grew up in the city, the son of a NASA engineer. He credits his mother for instilling in him an appreciation for farms and what farmers do for us. "As a kid, our family would make annual trips to pick strawberries and other fruits and vegetables," he says. "On the way home from picking, we would talk about all the ways we wanted to prepare them."

And it's some of these ideas that laid a tasty foundation for his future in the restaurant business.

"Customers start looking for our desserts using real Cullman strawberries as soon as the jonquils start blooming," he says. "The Red Door Art Cafe and big, red strawberries are a natural fit." 🍓



Food Editor **Anne P. Braly** is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Prior to pursuing a freelance career, she spent 21 years as food editor and feature writer at a regional newspaper.

RED DOOR SOUTHERN STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE

- 32 ounces fresh strawberries
- 12 Pillsbury frozen biscuits
- 1 cup whipping cream
- 3/4 cup powdered sugar, divided
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract (more if you like vanilla)
- Fresh mint sprigs

Bake biscuits according to package directions, then set them aside to cool. Halve strawberries and combine with 1/2 cup powdered sugar. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours to macerate. Beat whipping cream with an electric mixer until it begins to stiffen. Add remaining powdered sugar and vanilla. Continue beating until soft peaks form. Cover and chill while strawberries macerate. To serve, split biscuits in half. Divide the berry mixture and place on biscuit bottoms; top with a rounded tablespoon of chilled whipped cream and cover with tops. Makes 12 servings.

Note: If there is extra whipped cream, put a dollop on the top with a sprig of mint or garnish with mint, however it looks good to you.

RED DOOR STRAWBERRY BABIES

- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1/2 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/2 tablespoon arrowroot or 1 tablespoon cornstarch (see note)
- Zest of half an orange
- 1 1/4 cups diced strawberries
- Cooking spray
- 2 refrigerated pie crusts
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon water

Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Whisk together the honey, lemon juice, arrowroot (or corn starch) and orange zest until smooth. Stir in the strawberries and set aside. Spray a muffin tin with cooking spray. Using a biscuit cutter, cut out 12 (3-inch) and 12 (2-inch) circles of dough. Press the 3-inch circles of dough into the muffin cups. Beat the egg and



*Red Door Southern
Strawberry Shortcake*

water together to make an egg wash. Divide the filling among the 12 muffin cups. Brush the top edge of the bottom crusts with egg wash and place the 2-inch tops on each. Crimp edges of dough together with a fork, then brush tops with egg for a nice finish. Cut 1/4-inch slits in the tops of each so steam can escape. Bake for 14 minutes or until golden brown. Cool for 30 minutes before removing from pan. Makes 12 servings.

Note: If you can find it, arrowroot typically works better with acidic ingredients.

RED DOOR STRAWBERRY NAPOLEONS

- 16 ounces strawberries, sliced in rounds
- 10 ounces plain yogurt
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 4 frozen phyllo sheets

Vegetable cooking spray

- 1 teaspoon sugar
- Mint sprigs, for garnish

Stir together yogurt and honey, cover and place in refrigerator. Combine strawberries and 2 tablespoons sugar; cover and refrigerate for about an hour to macerate. Place 1 sheet of thawed phyllo on work surface. Spray with cooking spray and sprinkle with 1/4 teaspoon sugar. Place a second sheet over first one and repeat. Cut stacked phyllo into 6 rectangles. Repeat procedure with two remaining sheets of phyllo. Place phyllo on cookie sheets and bake at 450 degrees until browned, 10-12 minutes. Divide strawberries onto six rectangles. Drizzle with half of the yogurt-honey mixture. Top with remaining phyllo rectangles and drizzle with remaining yogurt-honey mixture. Garnish with mint. Makes 6 servings. 📖



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