



CONNECTION

TIME TRAVEL

Local veteran
remembers his
service

CUTTING EDGE

Knifemaker reveals
his craft

UNLIMITED LEARNING

Broadband creates
educational opportunities



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Let's 'build once' under RDOF

As an organization representing rural broadband providers, we are excited about the FCC's plans to invest \$20.4 billion to bring affordable high-speed broadband to rural Americans. While the agency's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) is a terrific opportunity for unserved and underserved communities, it is important that as a nation we are investing in networks that can meet broadband needs for the foreseeable future.

Services delivered in high-cost rural areas using RDOF funds should be reasonably comparable to those in urban areas — both now and over at least the term of support distribution, if not longer. We believe it is far more efficient to have policies that encourage providers to "build once," deploying rural networks that are scalable and will offer services at speeds that are still relevant to customers another decade from now.

NTCA was one of the biggest and earliest supporters of a program that will promote sustainable networks capable of delivering the best possible broadband access for many years to come. After months of advocacy by our members and staff, including securing bipartisan letters signed by dozens of members of Congress, the FCC announced in January that it will consider rules to fund sustainable and forward-looking networks.

This will help strike a terrific balance by looking to reach as many rural Americans as possible while ensuring that the FCC is funding the best possible networks for the available budget. I am energized by the role that NTCA members can play in being a key part of the solution in bridging the digital divide. 🗨️

A count that matters



★ UNDERSTANDING THE CENSUS ★

Once a decade, the United States counts its citizens. This results in a treasure trove of data relevant to politics, businesses, schools and much more. For example, federal agencies use census results to distribute more than \$675 billion in federal funds annually.

Similarly, states use census data to draw congressional district boundaries. The numbers can even determine how many congressional representatives a state sends to Washington, D.C. Locally, many counties, cities and towns lean on census statistics when planning infrastructure such as roads, schools and emergency services. Businesses also factor census data into calculations that determine the locations of new stores, hotels and more.

As you can see, the census is an important program and one in which you'll be asked to participate. For the first time, everyone can complete the census online, as well as by phone or by mail. You will still receive a census form by mail, but you will have the option of visiting respond.census.gov/acs to complete your duty to respond to the census.

Census Day is April 1, and census takers will visit households that have not already replied to census questionnaires online, by phone or through the mail. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau hired thousands of temporary workers to help implement the 2020 census.

The bureau also understands the unique challenges of counting people in rural areas. Some rural homes do not have typical mailing addresses, using instead post office boxes in nearby community centers. However, census questionnaires are not mailed to P.O. boxes. In these remote areas, census takers will deliver paper questionnaires to each home and offer guidance on how to respond by phone or online. If there's no response, expect an in-person follow-up.

By law, the Census Bureau must keep your information confidential, using the details to produce statistics. The bureau may not publicly release responses in any way that might identify an individual. 🗨️

Maybe it's not so smart

Streaming boxes can add a layer of TV security

Story by NOBLE SPRAYBERRY



Is your TV watching you? Could it be a backdoor to your private information? Those are questions recently posed by the FBI. For people who rely on a smart TV, the answer might be, “Yes.”

A smart TV can connect directly to the internet, allowing access to services and applications that provide movies, TV shows, music, videoconferencing, photo streaming and more. It's all right there in one consolidated interface.

But convenience comes with tradeoff. Some smart TVs include microphones and cameras. These features allow voice commands and the potential of using facial recognition to customize content to an individual viewer.

Those innovations, however, raise the possibility of TV manufacturers eavesdropping. Similarly, an unsecured TV has the potential to be used by a hacker as a backdoor into your other Wi-Fi-connected devices.

The FBI suggests a range of strategies to ensure a TV protects your security. Do internet research on your specific TV model to check the status of updates and reports of security breaches. Also, if possible, change passwords. Then, learn how to turn off microphones, cameras and the ability of the TV manufacturer to collect personal information. Even placing tape over the camera lens is an option.

There's another strategy, too — do not directly connect your TV to the internet. Instead, consider a third-party device to create a bridge between your television and streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu and more. 📺

HERE ARE A FEW OPTIONS TO CONSIDER:



Roku: Many devices that allow TVs to connect to online streaming services are sold by companies that also offer TV content. As a result, not all services are available on every device. If that's a concern, consider a Roku, which can generally connect to all content providers. Rokus typically range in price from \$30 to \$99.



Apple TV: Prices for an Apple TV device range from \$149 to \$199, with the more expensive options having more storage capacity and the ability to play 4K video. The device will connect to most streaming services, and currently the purchase of a new Apple TV comes with a one-year subscription to the Apple TV+ streaming service.



Amazon Fire TV Cube or Fire Stick: Amazon's Fire streaming devices cost from about \$30 to nearly \$200, based on capacity and the ability to offer 4K content. Look for frequent sales to find a bargain. The interface is clean and useful. Fans of Amazon Prime can have easy access to that service's streaming options. While most streaming services may be available, that has changed from time to time.



Google Chromecast: Google offers its twist on the streaming boxes with a small, hockey-puck-shaped device that allows content to be “cast” from a computer, tablet or phone to the television. Most streaming services are supported, and viewers with a Google Home smart speaker can control programming with voice commands.

The 2020 census matters for rural America



RUTH CONLEY
Chief Executive Officer

How important is the 2020 census? For rural areas like ours, \$675 billion is at stake.

In mid-March the U.S. Census Bureau will send postcards to most addresses in Kentucky and across the country. That is one of the more important pieces of mail you will receive in 2020. Why does the census matter to your broadband and telephone provider, and why am I using this space to encourage you to participate?

Simply put, our part of Kentucky has a lot to gain from accurate census numbers — and a lot to lose if we aren't all counted.

These risks and benefits come in three main areas dependent on census data: government funding, political representation and statistics for economic growth.

According to the Census Bureau, census data determines the spending of more than \$675 billion in federal funds. That can mean anything from schools, roads and equipment for first responders to grants for expanding our broadband network or programs that help those in need. Many of those projects seek to do the most good for the most people — and if we don't help to create an accurate count of all of our people, that funding may go elsewhere.

As you may have heard if you follow political news, the census data is used to draw and redraw districts for state and federal lawmakers. The number of congressmen and congresswomen we have representing Kentucky is dependent on our population. If we don't count all of our state's residents, we would show a lower population and run the risk of losing representation in Congress to a bigger state that may have different interests than ours.

The same thing is true on a more local level in the state legislature. If the counties in our region come up short on the population count, we could lose a legislator and have a more difficult time making our area's concerns heard in Frankfort.

Lastly, our area's population is a key factor in almost all of the statistics businesses look at when considering a market to build. Whether it's a fast-food restaurant or an industrial plant, corporate managers are looking at our population when it comes to customer base, workforce and market potential. Showing a lower population on the census because many people weren't counted would make us less appealing for businesses to locate here.

If you want to know more, visit census.gov.

I know everyone is busy, and that little postcard later this month may seem like just adding one more thing to your to-do list. But from what I've read, the Census Bureau is making things simple, quick and easy for everyone to be counted.

As someone who cares deeply about our rural area, I hope you'll take those few minutes of time to make sure you and your family participate in the census.

Our communities are counting on you.



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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, which 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."

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— A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY —

On the Cover:



Frank Williams was plucked from his platoon to serve in Korea during the Vietnam War. It turned out to be a lucky break. See story Page 8.

AND THE PRIZE GOES TO ...

Congratulations to our big-prize giveaway winners! Three lucky customers won prizes after signing up for select services in December. Their names were then entered into a drawing. The Platinum Customer prize winner was Cathy Reinthaler, who won an iRobot Roomba. The winner of the TV prize was Peggy Lyons, who won a 50-inch, 4K TV. The winner of the internet prize was Kathleen Collett, who won a Nintendo Switch.



MEET OUR TOY DRIVE WINNER!

The Foothills Communications Annual Toy Drive was a success thanks to you. So many Christmases were made so much brighter because of your generosity. Those who donated an unwrapped toy for a child or a teen were entered into a drawing for a \$250 Visa gift card. Our winner was Phyllis Mullins. Congratulations, Phyllis, and thank you to all who gave!



Cathy Reinthaler



Peggy Lyons



Kathleen Collett



Don't forget to spring forward!

Remember to move your clocks forward one hour! Daylight saving time begins at 2 a.m. on Sunday, March 8.

HAVE AN EXTRA-GOOD FRIDAY!

Our offices will be closed on Friday, April 10, in observance of Good Friday. From all of us at Foothills Communications, we'd like to wish you and yours a wonderful Easter.

A biblical journey

A museum
explores
the story
of Noah



Story by ANNE BRALY

The heavens opened, and the rains came down — not in biblical proportions as they did in Noah’s day, but could there have been a better backdrop for a recent visit to the Ark Encounter?

This religious attraction in Kentucky opened just over three years ago on an 800-acre site. At a cost of \$100 million for Phase I, its primary feature is the massive ark, taller than a four-story building and built to the specifications God laid out for Noah. In keeping with measurements in the book of Genesis, converted from the Hebrew cubits specified in chapter 6, the three-deck ark is 510 feet long, 85 feet wide and 51 feet high.

Sitting in a beautifully landscaped area

just off Interstate 75 in the small town of Williamstown, Kentucky, the Ark Encounter draws more than 1 million visitors annually from around the world who come to learn more about Noah and his family, the animals aboard ship and the ancient flood that most Christians believe engulfed the earth. Ticket booths are located at the 4,000-spot parking lot, which has plenty of room for group buses, and guests take the free shuttle service from the lot to the ark grounds.

In addition to the ark, the attraction offers a zip line and the Ararat Ridge Zoo. And you won’t walk away hungry — a tremendous buffet replete with Asian, Cajun and American fare will satisfy your hunger, and there is seating for 1,500.

THE SHIP

It took Noah 50 to 75 years to build his ark. It took a team of Amish builders and others just two years to build Kentucky’s

new ark, a project that was the dream of Australian Ken Ham, founder and CEO of the Answers in Genesis ministry, the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum in nearby Petersburg, Kentucky.

Patrick Kanewske, director of ministry and media relations for the Ark Encounter, says much of the ship matches accounts in Genesis, but “ark”-tistic license — imagination — fills in the blanks. Such license includes names of the women/wives onboard, the color of their skin, the placement of rooms and animal cages, and so on.

Look up from the first deck to the top of the ship, and it’s easy to see the scope of the Ark Encounter. Sixty-two trees, mostly Douglas firs from Utah that were standing dead timber, went into the frame structure. Throughout each deck are divided rooms, each with a different theme and exhibits — some interactive — telling stories of the ark, the flood and



Photos courtesy of the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum.

If you go...

- **WHAT:** Ark Encounter
- **WHERE:** 1 Ark Encounter Drive, Williamstown, Kentucky
- **HOURS:** Times vary by season, so please check the website
- **TICKETS:** \$48 for adults 18-59, \$38 for seniors 60 and up, \$25 for youth 11-17, \$15 for children 5-10 and free for children 4 and under
- **PARKING:** \$10 for standard vehicles, \$15 for oversized vehicles
- **INFORMATION:** arkencounter.com

why it happened; what life was like before and after the flood; and the Christian belief that God created Earth in just six days. Movies on the second and third decks depict life then and now.

Plan on spending a good half-day at the Ark Encounter to experience all it has to offer. And when your day is through, Kanewske hopes people will walk away with the truth of God's word and the gospel. "We proclaim that here," he says. "That's the bottom line. People will learn a lot about the flood account, Noah and his family and all that, but what we want them to take away is God's word."

ALL ABOARD

How, one may wonder, did all of the animals fit on the ship? First — according to "Ark Signs That Teach a Flood of Answers," a book that you can pick up in the Ark Encounter gift shop — you need to consider the term "animal kind,"

referring to a group of animals not related to any other animals. So at the most, Noah, who God only charged with bringing air-breathing animals on board, was responsible for fewer than 6,744 animals to house, feed and clean. "When you see the size of the ship, there's every possibility that 6,000 to 7,000 animals could fit in a ship of its size without any problem," Kanewske says.

Cages large and small line the walls and center of the lowest deck. Once again, ark-tistic license is used to show how Noah and his team might feed the animals and store grain. For a realistic experience, live animals come from the zoo onto the ship each day.

Jose Jimenez, a Naval chaplain from Rhode Island, recently brought his young family to experience the Ark Encounter. "It's a great place for kids," he says. "And it's good for people who have questions. It doesn't answer all of them, but a lot."

ARK ENCOUNTER PHASE II

Plans are in the works for major expansion of the Ark Encounter, and some of those plans have already been realized. April 2019 brought the opening of The Answers Center, with a snack bar, a gift shop and a 2,500-seat auditorium that hosts daily presentations, movies, special speakers, concerts and more.

A new playground has also opened and is designed to accommodate children of all abilities. And the summer of 2019 saw the opening of the zoo expansion, including the addition of more animals — lemurs, sloths, peccaries and a bearcat — and stages for zookeeper talks.

"We take things seriously here," Kanewske says, "from our food to exhibits to how our employees are trained. It's a world-class experience." 📺



Oil Springs native Frank Williams was singled out of his platoon at Fort Lewis, Washington, to serve in the 8th Army Honor Guard during the Vietnam War. Almost everyone from his platoon from Fort Lewis died in Vietnam.



FROM OIL SPRINGS TO KOREA

Army veteran remembers his service

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Photography by MELISSA GAINES

The story of Frank Williams' service in the U.S. Army started the way many of those stories do — a young man looks for employment, finds none and ends up at his local military recruiter's office.

But for Williams, now 75, that story unfolded with a lucky twist. It was 1964, and the United States had started sending thousands more troops to Vietnam. To make matters worse, the North Vietnamese Navy attacked the USS Maddox destroyer in August of that year in the Gulf of Tonkin, leading to what historians call "the full-scale Americanization of the war."

Williams, like many Americans at the time, didn't know much about that. All the then-19-year-old knew was that he couldn't find a job and that he was going to face the draft anyway. "So, I volunteered," he says. "I didn't have sense enough to be scared."

IN THE ARMY NOW

Volunteering for the Army was the lesser of two evils anyway, he figured at the time. If he enlisted in the Marines or the Navy, he'd need to serve three or four years. But the Army only required two.

After finishing boot camp at Fort Knox, Williams, an infantryman, found himself at Fort Lewis in Washington. But in January 1965, the Army pulled him away from his unit to serve in Seoul, Korea, while the rest of his platoon went to fight in Vietnam. In Korea, officers recruited

Williams to serve in the 8th Army Honor Guard, which guarded the commanding general and his staff.

"It was a pretty good duty," Williams says. "You had to be a certain height, and they looked at your records to make sure you weren't a troublemaker. You also needed to be fairly coordinated. There was a tryout period, and if you made it, you were fine. If not, you were shipped to the DMZ." Luckily for Williams, he was chosen to stay in the 8th Army Honor Guard.

The Korean Demilitarized Zone is a 160-mile strip of land that divides North Korea and South Korea. It came to be in 1953 as part of an agreement after the Korean War. After that war ended, fights continued to erupt, especially along the DMZ. Between 1966 and 1969, at least 43 U.S. soldiers and many more South Koreans and North Koreans died in a series of skirmishes. But as unpredictable as Korea was, it was still safer for a soldier in the mid-1960s than Vietnam.

SEPARATED FROM THE PACK

Williams says he never learned the Army's reasons for plucking him from his platoon. But soon enough, he would be grateful. "I think the Lord was watching over me," he says. "The platoon that I was in — they were some of the first ones that got caught in one of those horseshoe ambushes over in Vietnam. I think there was only two out of that platoon that got back alive, and they were both wounded."

A horseshoe ambush meant that the enemy would surround a unit on three sides, firing from the front, left and right. Williams says he doesn't remember what went through his head when he found out about the deaths of his comrades. "I can only guess that I was thankful I wasn't there," he says.

LEAVING THE ARMY

When Williams got back to Kentucky in early 1966, his father, a pipefitter, got him in with the local union. For the next 31 years, he worked as a pipefitter and welder in several states. Later in his adulthood, he also became a United Baptist preacher, baptizing many people, including several members of his family.

But one of the most important things that happened after returning from Korea took place around March of 1966. He had noticed a girl working at a Paintsville hardware store. Her name was Brenda, and everything about her was lovely. "I had seen her, but I had never met her," Williams says. "So, I went in there to meet her one day, but she was out on lunch."

Another employee at the store, Cecil Auxier, told Williams to pick out an item he wanted and Auxier would leave it on Brenda's desk. When Williams came back, he could buy it from her. The ploy worked. In three months, the couple was engaged. In six months, they were married. "I just loved the way she was and the way she looked and the way she walked — everything," Williams says.

For the next 50 years, until Brenda's death in September 2018, the couple spent most of their time together. "If she wanted to go somewhere, I went," he says. "If I wanted to go somewhere, she went."

As Williams looks back on his life now, he still feels lucky. His knees are weak, so he spends much of his time reading the Bible or looking online to research Scripture or study up on his favorite hobbies. He feels blessed to have his daughters, Kim Williams and Sandy Ward, and his grandchildren, Quade and Bailey Ward. He was even able to baptize his wife into the church sometime before her death, as well as Sandy and Bailey.



Williams talks about his service while showing his uniform and a replica of the gun he carried.

"THE PLATOON THAT I WAS IN — THEY WERE SOME OF THE FIRST ONES THAT GOT CAUGHT IN ONE OF THOSE HORSESHOE AMBUSHES OVER IN VIETNAM."

— Frank Williams,
Oil Springs veteran

And while he doesn't know for sure what kept him safe from danger back in the '60s, he thinks God had something to do with it. "I tell you what I believe," Williams says. "He knows all things. I believe that He had other things for me." 📖





A class of their own

Broadband brings education to students on their schedule

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In 2012, Aziza Zemrani was busily putting together an accelerated online program for the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The curriculum would allow students to complete courses they need in just seven weeks from anywhere in the valley or beyond. But there was a lingering concern about handling presentations using the available online technology.

“I needed them to present so I could see their skills and competency in communication,” Zemrani says. “We use Blackboard Collaborate, which allows for face-to-face engagement and interaction. But my colleagues were worried about how it would work if we had a student with a disability.”

As if in answer to those concerns, the program’s first cohort group in 2013 included one deaf student, Phillip Robinson. When it came time for each student to present that June, the university’s Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology worked with the disability office to arrange for a sign language interpreter to present with him.

“He presented live with his classmate, and it was beautiful,” Zemrani says. “He was almost in tears telling me this was the first time he was able to present live like that in an academic setting.”

Robinson graduated in December, joining hundreds of other students who have

come through the accelerated online program of the university in Edinburg, Texas. While Zemrani originally expected the program to appeal primarily to students from outside the state or even the country, it has also been popular among local students in the valley looking to fast-track their education.

“Some of these students might be working two jobs, so they can’t fit traditional classes into their schedule,” she says. “With the online program, because of the course delivery and structure, students can take up to two more modules and finish in one year.”

A PLACE TO START

Online courses like the ones offered at UTRGV are taking off across the country thanks to improved broadband access. But with so many online options available to students, it can be daunting to figure out which one is the best fit. That’s why the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system contracted with Distance Minnesota to act as a single point of contact for all online students in 2004.

Distance Minnesota was founded as a consortium of three local colleges that wanted to offer online courses. Today, the organization partners with 37 colleges and universities throughout





the state, answering any questions prospective or current students may have about their online options.

“We do chat, phone assistance and email assistance seven days a week,” says Distance Minnesota Executive Director Lisa Leahy. “In all, we handle approximately 25,000 student inquiries a year.”

But more than acting as a helpline for students, Distance Minnesota compiles data on the programs each school offers and the level of interest in each course. This makes the organization a resource for schools deciding which classes to offer online and for students looking to fulfill a specific course requirement. That help is particularly important for making online programs accessible to out-of-state or international students.

“Throughout our nearly 20-year history with the school system, we’ve come to understand what each of the individual universities has to offer,” Leahy says. “Many of us have worked closely with the faculty and the administration on these campuses. So if a student has a specialized need for a certain class, we can tell them the best course is at this school, and often we’re able to put them in touch directly, whether they’re in Argentina, California or New York.”

VIRTUAL HIGH

College coursework isn’t the only level at which online programs are giving students more flexibility. Connections Academy, a nationwide program that offers tuition-free online K-12 public schooling in 28 states, launched a new online academy last fall in Tennessee. Since it opened, the academy has grown from about 750 students to 1,300 enrolled.

The Tennessee Connections Academy is authorized by Robertson County Public Schools, though it is available to students throughout the state. The system was already using a virtual curriculum from Connections Academy’s parent company, Pearson, to offer online classes to approximately 50 students. So it was a natural partnership to work together to bring that same experience to students across the state.

“It’s a unique learning environment with certified teachers in all subject areas for the kids,” says Derek Sanborn, principal at Tennessee Connections Academy. “The students are able to interact with their teachers and other kids with live lessons throughout the week. They receive textbooks and other materials at each level, and it’s all at no cost to the parent.”

The online academy is held to the same standards as any public school in the state, and students are required to attend for six-and-a-half hours each day. The program has been a good fit for kids who may be homebound, live in remote areas, or even be on traveling sports teams, allowing students to complete their hours in the evening or on weekends.

“We also have students who may have been bullied in their school or didn’t feel safe. Maybe the traditional setting wasn’t motivating for them,” Sanborn says. “I think giving parents that choice is really important because they get to decide what’s best for their kids.”

NEW ENGAGEMENT

Even with the increasing quality of online classes, there are still challenges educators work to overcome, including engaging students.

One way Tennessee Connections Academy attempts to address this issue is by scheduling in-person field trips, allowing families to meet and connect with their teachers and other students.

In her own classes, Zemrani has recorded live classroom sessions and used apps like Flipgrid to allow students to record short intro videos about themselves. While engagement continues to be a challenge for any online course, she believes finding new solutions is well worth the investment.

“We have students in the military who may be called to serve somewhere in the middle of their program,” Zemrani says. “The online course is a great opportunity for them to finish their program when they might not otherwise be able to. Broadband is so important to that.” 📺

SHARPER VISION

FOOTHILLS INSTALLER FINDS SATISFACTION IN MAKING KNIVES

Story by JEN CALHOUN | Photography by MELISSA GAINES

For James Griffith, the leftover bits and pieces of daily life can be treasures. Old car parts, a lone hubcap and a charred cooking grill are just waiting for their next assignment. Most things aren't really broken in his eyes — they're just waiting to be used for another purpose.

Griffith, an install repairman for Foothills Communications and the father of four boys, learned this lesson growing up in the hills. His family knew the land, and they knew how to keep the need away. They hunted for food, built what they could and took care of most things themselves. "I was only 13 when my dad passed away, so we grew up kind of rough," Griffith says. "We grew up poor, I guess you'd call it. But we always had what we needed. We never went without food."

Over the last year, Griffith has turned that self-sufficiency into a hobby that has brought him personal satisfaction — making knives. "Me and a buddy of mine who lives nearby had been talking about making our own knives for a while," he says. "I thought it'd be interesting. I collect knives, and I'm all the time making something. I just thought it'd be neat to make my own and use it to hunt with. Me and my boys hunt all the time, and it's just real rewarding to me to make my own knife and use it."

BUILDING A FORGE

Griffith didn't have his own forge to make the knives, so he made one from various parts and pieces he had on hand. "I took an old barbecue grill and cut the bottom out of it," he says. "Then, I put a piece of steel on the bottom of it and cut a hole in the center of it. I took a lawn mower rim and set it down on top of the exhaust pipe. Then, I put a hair dryer in the exhaust pipe for a blower, and it worked real good."

Griffith didn't need a book or an online tutorial for the creation, because he knew the basics of how a forge worked. "My papaw was a blacksmith," he says. "He had an old forge with one of those old hand-crank blowers. He didn't make knives, but he made a lot of tools and horseshoes, things like that. He ran a team of mules."

FINDING HIS EDGE

Since then, Griffith has made many knives, and so have his sons. They use them, too. He's made knives for gutting and skinning the deer, turkey and rabbit he hunts. And he's made butcher knives for cutting up and processing the meat. He's also made various kitchen and paring knives, and he makes the handles using wood or deer antlers.



James Griffith often uses wood and deer antlers as handles for his homemade knives.

“With the deer antlers, usually I’ll find a section of the horn that looks like it’ll fit the knife,” he says. “Then, I’ll cut it out and drill a hole through it, sand it down and make it look right.” The first few knives didn’t look very good, he says. But time and practice have changed that.

Griffith’s knives are also strong and slow to dull. “Once you make it and get it forged out, you have to quench it by dipping it in oil,” he says. “It’s got to be right. If it’s too hot when you put it in oil, it’ll crack your blade. If it’s not hot enough, it won’t quench it. And if you don’t get the metal up hard enough, it won’t hold an edge. It’ll sharpen, but it’ll go right back dull and won’t ever sharpen enough.”

THE REWARD OF A THING WELL DONE

The whole process has been a rewarding one, says Griffith, who also builds his own chicken houses, structures for dogs and other things. He likes being able to make use of parts from animals and automobiles that otherwise might have gone unused. “We don’t waste nothing around here,” he says.

For Griffith, the reward from making knives comes from the doing. He likes knowing he’s made something strong and useful. And like his papaw before him, he gets satisfaction from knowing he did it himself with all those parts and pieces that finally came in handy again.

But Griffith gets another satisfaction from his hobby. “I like giving them to other people,” he says. “It makes me feel good that they can use them and that I can give somebody something I’ve made. Of all the knives I’ve made, I’ve never sold a one.” 📺



Mystery and intrigue

High Point Restaurant chef shares secrets for a great steak

High Point Restaurant opened in January 2000, and Eric Gipson, executive chef, has been there since the second day of business. As a child growing up in Monteagle, Tennessee, he remembers the restaurant when it was a spooky old house — “the kind of run-down, ghost-infested mansion of campfire stories,” he says.

Legend has it that mobster Al Capone financed the 1929 home for his book-keeper/mistress and used it as a place to stop on his bootlegging travels between Chicago and Miami. This was well before Interstate 24 ran up and over Monteagle Mountain, so its hard-to-reach location made for the ideal hideaway. Supposedly, the floors had a lining of sand to muffle the sound of gunfire, and escape routes aided in getting the illegal hooch to its final destination during the days of Prohibition.

Today, it’s a place for an amazing meal along the road between Nashville and Chattanooga in a beautiful mountaintop location. But can you duplicate the restaurant’s wonderful steak at home?

It’s a familiar scenario: You take the family out to a fancy restaurant and order the steak, and there goes your budget for the week. It’s an amazing steak that sends your taste buds on a trip through culinary heaven — an experience you’re not likely to forget. So, you go home and try to reproduce it, and it’s an expensive disaster. It’s still less expensive than a night out at your favorite steakhouse, but the flavor is less than memorable.



Eric Gipson, executive chef of the High Point Restaurant, serves up great steaks and other dishes.

What went wrong? How do restaurants get their steaks so tender, so flavorful, so perfect? Gipson says making a great steak involves several keys. “I think it’s mostly attention to detail and knowledge of how best to prepare what you are given,” he says. “A truly good steak is first and foremost a good piece of meat. Proper seasoning and heat can turn it into something great.”

It all begins at the grocery store, but customers don’t always go for the best. You may go for the bright red cuts. They look appealing, but they have little fat, and the end result will most likely be a dry, tough piece of meat. Gipson says to look for cuts that are a little paler in color and have fine lines of fat running through

them. “The ones with the faded, almost pink hue are more tender,” he advises. “That may just be optics, as I also look for a cut that has fine white lines of fat that may make it appear less than red.”

And there’s one more thing. “People I have spoken to have the misconception that putting salt on the outside of a steak will dry it out,” he adds.

Not true.

“When heat is applied, the salt on the outside causes the outer layer to tighten up, creating something of a moisture barrier,” he says. “This traps more of the juice inside, making for a more flavorful steak all around.”

The steaks at High Point are a main feature on the menu. With nine different

options, the most popular are those that feature filet mignon, including filet mignon with Burgundy mushroom sauce, High Point Oscar, Black and Bruised Steak, Steak and Lobster, Steak and Shrimp, and Steak Diane.

And people come from near and far to order them — Chattanooga, Huntsville, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Tullahoma and everywhere in between, Gipson notes. Tennessee's partnerships with foreign corporations like Nissan and Volkswagen bring customers from around the world, and the nearby University of the South in Sewanee supplies guests from among its student body and their visiting families.

"We always strive to deliver an excellent meal at a reasonable price point. Also, our steak seasoning is unique to High Point," Gipson says. "So the seasoning, combined with fine sauces and compound butters, add to an already excellent cut of meat."

Gipson says grocery stores have improved on the cuts of meat they offer customers. "Of course, that is dependent on where you shop," he says. "For years, most grocery stores sold only the cheaper USDA grades of beef or meat that wasn't graded at all.

"What we serve is USDA Choice," Gipson says. "That means that it is closer to USDA Prime," which is only around 2% of all beef sold. "However, all of our meat has been aged a minimum of 21 days, which makes for a more tender, flavorful steak. I'm sure that with the multitude of high-end grocery stores these days, a comparable steak can be found."



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'Steakhouse' Steaks

This recipe is adapted from one by Food Network's Ina Garten.

- 2 (8-ounce) filet mignons
- 2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided

Set the steaks out on the counter at least 30 minutes before you plan on cooking them to take the chill off.

Heat the oven to 400 F. Pat the steaks dry and then brush each steak with the oil. Mix the salt and pepper on a plate, then roll each steak in the salt-and-pepper mixture, liberally coating all sides.

Heat a well-seasoned cast-iron skillet over high heat — as high as your stove will go. Open your window and turn on your fan. This is a smoky process. Once the skillet is very hot, add the steaks to the pan. Sear them evenly on all sides, getting a nice brown crust all over. It should take about 2 minutes per side to get a good sear.

Remove the pan from heat, place a pat of butter on top of each steak, and then transfer the skillet to the oven. Bake the steaks until their internal temperature reaches your preferred doneness — 120 F for rare, 125 F for medium-rare and 135 F for medium.

Remove the steaks from the skillet and cover them tightly with aluminum foil. Allow them to rest at room temperature for 10 minutes before serving. 🍴



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