



# CONNECTION

## TOMATO, TO-MAH-TO

Local growers  
discover hydroponics

## WORKS OF ART

Craftsman builds  
treasures for generations

## LONG-DISTANCE BONDS

Broadband makes  
connections across the miles



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Broadband matters now more than ever

Rural broadband providers are supporting two critical bills making their way through Congress. One would secure present efforts to keep you connected, while the other provides support for future broadband expansion.

The Keeping Critical Connections Act was introduced earlier this year by U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and Kevin Cramer, R-N.D. This bill would appropriate \$2 billion to help smaller broadband companies who worked with struggling customers during the pandemic and who did not disconnect those who couldn't pay.

As the health crisis and economic shutdown disrupted millions of lives, internet providers across the country took the Pledge to Keep Americans Connected by waiving late fees, opening community Wi-Fi hot spots, and not terminating service to customers because of their inability to pay their bills.

For all this good work, however, our members have seen uncollectibles rise. NTCA members have on average some \$80,000 in accumulated nonpayments by customers since the pandemic hit. These are significant amounts, as these broadband providers are often small companies with fewer than 30 employees. Keeping Critical Connections will help them continue serving their communities.

In terms of long-term deployment, NTCA also supports the Rural Connectivity Advancement Program Act of 2020, introduced by U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-S.D. This bill would set aside a portion of the proceeds from FCC spectrum auctions to fund rural broadband deployment.

These bills will help broadband providers like yours continue their work to ensure every American has access to the communications services necessary in today's world. 📶



Podcast listenership continues to grow as Americans increasingly turn to the audio format for news, entertainment and learning. “Podcasts now reach over 100 million Americans every month,” said Tom Webster, senior vice president of Edison Research, whose Infinite Dial research reveals that 37% of Americans listen to podcasts every month.

That's an increase from 32% just one year ago. That number has climbed steadily as more content becomes available to appeal to a wide range of interests.

Two new podcasts have been released this year that address a topic of growing importance: rural broadband.

Heading into 2020, rural broadband had become a major point of focus in the U.S., with an increasing number of state and federal programs aimed at solving the lack of broadband access in parts of rural America. When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted businesses, schools and health care delivery, the need for nationwide broadband access was amplified.



In February, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association launched its “**Smart Rural Communities**” podcast. The show takes a look at rural broadband providers who are bringing advanced digital infrastructure to small towns and regions through powerful fiber networks. These broadband networks are jumpstarting economic growth, igniting educational opportunities and improving health care in some of America's most remote areas.

“**Rural Broadband Today**” launched in June. This podcast tells the stories of those working to bring broadband internet access within reach of every citizen. The interview-style show presents conversations with elected officials, industry experts and business leaders at the forefront of America's efforts to solve the rural broadband challenge. It's produced by WordSouth — A Content Marketing Company. 📻

Both podcasts can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, or by visiting [www.ntca.org/smart](http://www.ntca.org/smart) and [www.ruralbroadbandtoday.com](http://www.ruralbroadbandtoday.com).

# Can you see me now?

Videoconferencing technologies empower remote work



If you've found yourself logging on for more video meetings at work lately, you're not alone. According to the 2019 Impact of Video Conferencing Report by Lifesize, 48% of business professionals say their use of videoconferencing at work has increased compared to two years ago.

And that study was before a global pandemic drove even more companies to work remotely. Videoconferencing isn't without limitations, but businesses and workers are finding it an essential tool for empowering remote work.

## FLEXIBILITY

With videoconferencing, employees and contractors can work from home while still collaborating with their teams and attending important meetings. The flexibility enables individuals in rural communities to not only have more control over their work-life balance but also "telecommute" to urban companies for better opportunities.

Companies also benefit from the ability to recruit talent from anywhere. Business owners have the freedom to set up shop in rural communities, for example, then employ or partner with experts from around the world.

## CONNECTION

Video teleconferencing not only empowers remote productivity but also helps workers overcome some of its challenges. According to Buffer's 2019 State of Remote Work Study, 19% of remote workers cite loneliness as their biggest struggle when working remotely. Video calls can help.

Compared to telephone conferences, video calls make it easier to form connections. The experience more closely reflects face-to-face

encounters. For example, participants can see facial expressions and body language to better identify how others are responding to their ideas as they collaborate on projects.

## SAVINGS

When teams work over videoconferencing platforms, everyone involved saves time and money. Cutting a commute across town — or in some cases, the globe — benefits people's schedules, companies' bottom lines and even the environment.

Plus, the work itself can be more efficient online. In the Lifesize study, 89% of respondents agreed that videoconferencing reduces the time it takes to complete projects or tasks. People may be more likely to enter an online meeting with an agenda and honor the scheduled start and end times. Plus, they can avoid the interruptions common to in-office meetings.

## OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

Despite its many benefits, videoconferencing isn't without challenges. Not all tech tools are secure, so companies must research available options carefully to protect their employees and data. Team leaders must make an effort to coordinate meetings ahead of time to ensure everyone is online and available. And if any employees lack access to fast, reliable internet, technical difficulties can bring meetings to a frustrating halt.

Despite their drawbacks, videoconferencing platforms are here to stay. In the Buffer survey, 99% of respondents agreed they'd like to work remotely at least some of the time for the rest of their careers. Thanks to the increasingly widespread use of videoconferencing technology, they just might. ☎

## Three options for effective videoconferencing

### 1 ClickMeeting

For interactive meetings and webinars, try ClickMeeting. Presenters can share their screen, run live Q&A sessions to engage the audience and collect valuable attendee data using polls. With an automated follow-up feature, this platform makes it easy to keep the momentum going after a webinar ends.

### 2 Microsoft Teams

For a platform that scales with ease, check out Microsoft Teams. Users can schedule video meetings with a single person or run large webinars and meetings of up to 10,000 participants. A long list of features and functionalities makes it a top choice for many businesses.

### 3 Google Meet

For fans of the Google Suite, Google Meet is a convenient choice that smoothly integrates with other applications like Google Calendar and Gmail. Participants can easily join in from their web browser or dial in to listen from anywhere. This platform has big-business capabilities without the big-business price tag, making it a great option for growing companies.

# Bringing people together when we have to be apart

The farmers, businesspeople and other residents who founded our cooperative knew technology could help them keep in touch with others near and far. For decades, technology has helped them create and maintain these essential human connections.



**RUTH CONLEY**  
Chief Executive Officer

Because of the telephone lines we strung across our part of Kentucky, parents could talk with children and grandchildren who had moved away. With that technology, sons and daughters serving their country at military bases from coast to coast had a lifeline back home. If bad weather rolled through, we could call and check on friends and family, and if trouble did strike we could reach help by calling first responders.

Building our phone network connected the people of our communities like never before.

Today, I think those founding members would be amazed at the ways we use the technology highlighted in this issue to stay connected.

Thanks to the broadband network Foothills Communications provides, we upload photos of our gardens, craft projects or baking creations to share with friends and families within our community or around the country.

We share videos of first steps, birthdays and graduations through social media platforms. Streaming video has allowed us to virtually attend classes or church. Video calls allow us to catch up with friends and families, hold meetings for work or participate in virtual Sunday school.

Even when we use cellular networks to make video calls, it's often the fiber optic backbone we've built that connects the cell towers.

The pandemic has significantly sped up our willingness to adopt such technology. I've seen experts suggest that in the last three to five months, Americans have used virtual meetings, video chat and applications at levels we weren't projected to reach for another three to five years.

Perhaps you've embraced new technology during this unusual year. Even if it's not virtual meetings, many members have, for the first time, tried paying bills over the web or online shopping.

I appreciate your patience and willingness to learn these new skills. I know I'm ready for things to get back to normal, but I'm proud to see the difference our cooperative makes in keeping our community connected — no matter how you choose to do that today or in the future. 📞

## OCTOBER IS NATIONAL COOPERATIVE MONTH

Every year, we take time to recognize National Cooperative Month, and I never pass up a chance to celebrate our cooperative story. I will always appreciate the bold decision by the local residents to band together to found Foothills Communications. No other company was willing to invest in a telecommunications network in our area, so they took it upon themselves to bring our region into the modern era. Their cooperative spirit lives on today through our board and employees who proudly continue the tradition of connecting our members through technology. Thank you to our members for your continued support!



# CONNECTION

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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."

Produced for Foothills Communications by:

**WORDSOUTH**  
— A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY —

## On the Cover:



Eddie Joe and Alycia Maynard, owners of Simple Harvest Homestead, turned their backyard garden into a feast.  
See story Page 12.

# The *speed* you need

Your internet connection from Foothills is fast, strong and reliable. However, if you don't have enough speed for your family's needs, you may find yourself frustrated by buffering delays, spotty video calls and lagging games.

Read on to discover the recommended speeds for typical work, play and rest activities online. Just remember — if your household uses multiple devices at once, you'll need to add up the activity happening on every device to determine the total bandwidth you'll need.



## Work

Working from home doesn't mean working in isolation. If you collaborate with clients or co-workers on group video calls, you'll need about 8 Mbps of download speed and 500 Kbps of upload speed for a smooth experience.

If you leave for work, you may want a smart security system to protect your home throughout the day. A video doorbell or high-resolution security camera operates best when you have 2 to 2.5 Mbps download and upload speed available for each camera.



## Play

Without adequate bandwidth, online gaming quickly becomes an exercise in frustration. While some gaming platforms list a minimum recommended speed of around 3 Mbps of download speed and 1 Mbps of upload speed, this is truly a minimum recommendation.

Many gamers prefer speeds of 15-25 Mbps to ensure minimum lag and seamless gaming experiences.



## Rest

Whether you prefer Disney+, Netflix, Apple TV+ or some other streaming video platform, the guidelines are roughly the same. In most cases, 3 to 4 Mbps is recommended for standard-definition video, 5 Mbps for high-definition video and 25 Mbps for ultra-HD (4k) video. These recommendations are always per device, so if you're streaming on multiple screens throughout the house, don't forget to add them all up for best results.

Once you identify the speed you need, make sure you have Foothills' best internet package to fit your family's lifestyle as you work, play and rest online.

## Happy Labor Day!

Foothills Communications offices will be closed on Monday, Sept. 7, in observance of Labor Day. We hope you have a relaxing day, so please enjoy this treat from us. Watch channels 400-492 for a weekend full of FREE entertainment from Sept. 5-7.

## BIG NEWS IS TRAVELING FAST

Foothills Communications will **reduce the monthly rate** for gig-speed customers by \$20. Also, customers with 500 Mbps service will receive a **free** upgrade to gigabit speeds.

### NEW LOWER RATES FOR HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

- 50 Mbps – \$69<sup>95</sup>
- 100 Mbps – \$79<sup>95</sup>
- 250 Mbps – \$99<sup>95</sup>
- 1 Gig – \$109<sup>95</sup>



# GET ORGANIZED

*It's easy and fulfilling ... really*

**W**alk into a well-organized home, and you experience a sense of freedom. Freedom from clutter, freedom from chaos and freedom from the claustrophobia that comes from a house in disarray.

People become frustrated when they can't find the things they need, says Liz Jenkins, a certified professional organizer and owner of A Fresh Space in Nashville.

"The visual distractions make it hard to be productive because everywhere you look, there is something that needs to be done," she says. "People who have disorganized homes are often very frazzled people because nothing ever seems to go smoothly for them, and that's caused by the chaos around them that prevents them from functioning properly."

The key to organization requires letting go of what is not used, loved or functional, says Houston-based Ellen Delap. She is past president of the National Association of Productivity

and Organizing and a certified professional organizer at [professional-organizer.com](http://professional-organizer.com).

"Work with a partner, and donate those items to a cause that is important to you," she says. "True editing means that you have decided that you have 'enough' and you only need to keep what is essential. This is for all types of organizing in your home, whether it is your kids' clothes or toys, your kitchen, your garage, or your closet. Think of decluttering as peeling the layers of an onion. Go layer by layer until you have what is needed and precious."

There are several areas around the house that are considered clutter "hot spots," according to Delap.

**The garage:** This is one of the biggest hot spots, because it's often the dumping ground for things people don't know what to do with, as well as the last spot anyone gets organized. Garages are commonly not where we park the car. That is where large items are placed before a final decision is made. Those items sit in the garage over a period of time.

When garage-cleaning day arrives, make sure you have plenty of heavy-duty trash bags, basic cleaning supplies, empty boxes for collecting items for donation and plastic containers in varying sizes to categorize and store tools and other items. This type of edit may create space so that you can actually park your car.

**The kitchen and pantry:** This is a challenging area that's the hub of your home. Get organized by creating zones to help you get meals and snacks easily prepared, such as a coffee zone and areas for keeping knives, cutting boards and bowls together. Create a baking zone with your whisks and other utensils in one drawer. Near your stove, store pots and pans.

Pantry organizing starts with editing and decluttering. Empty it all out. Then group items as grocery stores do, in categories like breakfast, snacks, beverages, baking and condiments. Place frequently used items at eye level for adults for easy access. For your kids, use open baskets with food at their level to help them independently access snacks. An organized kitchen and pantry make it a joy to prepare meals together.

**Master closets:** People don't go through their clothes often enough, so things tend to pile on top of each other. Your closet is where you create the start of a great day. Begin with letting go of clothes that are too big or uncomfortable or clothes you would not want to be seen wearing. This is more easily done with a "clutter buddy" who helps you decide if that's your best look, what you love or even what fits properly.



Creating a well-organized space means letting go of items that are not used often.

Edit out what you have seldom worn, and arrange your clothes in categories that work for you. Some of us prefer color to organize our clothes, while some of us prefer to organize outfits. You know what works best for you. If you have multiple closets, cull down to one closet for each season, or have two closets — one for dressy clothes and one for daily wear.

The laundry room: It's easy for things to pile up in a laundry room, such as clean clothes forgotten on a folding table. It's important to establish a laundry routine that sets up days of the week for completing a load, meaning that you get it from the dryer back to the closet in one day. If you stick to it, you'll find your life goes much more smoothly, with no last-minute searching for that matching blue sock.

The home office: This is the room in the house that often becomes a dumping ground for all things. Create a command center where you can triage incoming paper into categories: to do, to pay and to file. Next, organize your files by context, such as home, auto, financial and personal. Finally, create an archive section for papers you need to keep. This section could include taxes, legal documents and those papers you want to keep longer than one year. Move papers throughout your process so that there is a flow.

Remember your goal when you're knee-deep in decluttering your life: to restore the rooms in your home to their original use and intended function. 📧

## FIVE EASY ORGANIZING TIPS

Professional home organizer Liz Jenkins often finds that clients who are disorganized lead "frazzled" lives. "Nothing ever seems to go smoothly for them because of the chaos around them that prevents them from functioning properly," she says.

**Here are some tips for organizing your living space and, thereby, your life.**

1. Create "homes" for groups of items that belong together, ideally in the spaces where you use them.
2. Use containers to corral groups of items on shelves or in drawers.
3. Label everything!
4. Reduce what you bring into the house. The less you have, the less you have to store.
5. Dedicate time every day to getting and staying organized. Even five minutes tossing unwanted items away every day will make a huge impact in the long run.



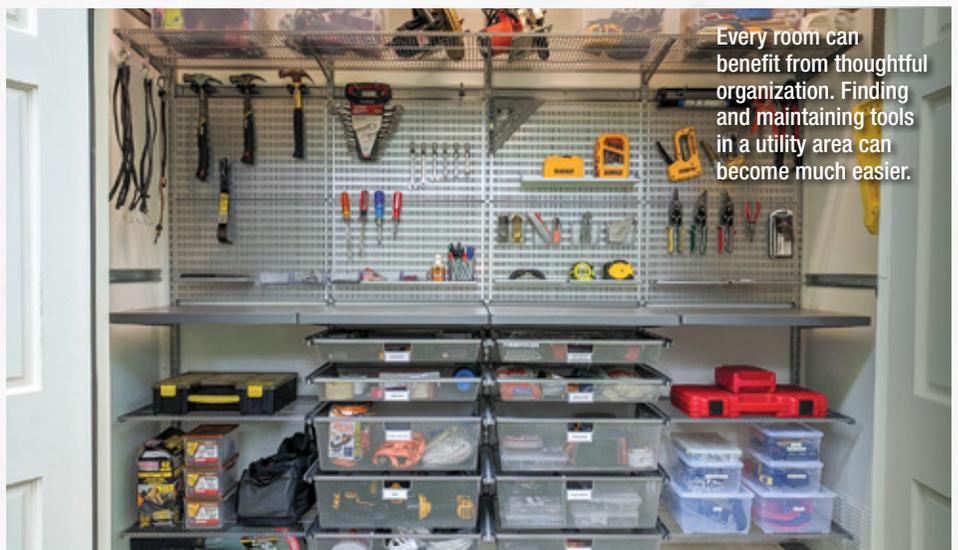
A neat pantry can simplify meal prep and reduce stress.



Group like items into well-marked containers.

### Looking for someone to help?

Consider hiring a professional like you would a personal trainer or other service provider to make your home a haven and place to relax. The NAPO website — [www.napo.net](http://www.napo.net) — has a directory that helps you find a local professional who can help with organizing, decluttering and even productivity.



Every room can benefit from thoughtful organization. Finding and maintaining tools in a utility area can become much easier.

# CRAFTING A LEGACY

## Irish Creek Custom Woods builds furniture for life

Story by JEN CALHOUN | Photography by JIM ARNETT



Neil Wilks, owner of Irish Creek Custom Woods, works on a custom design in his workshop.

Neil Wilks strives for perfection. He knows it sounds a little bold, especially in these days of high quantity and low quality. But for a craftsman like Wilks — a real-deal, American craftsman building heirloom woodwork pieces — it's the only way to think.

As owner of Irish Creek Custom Woods in Webbville, Wilks believes every piece he makes should last a lifetime or longer. "That's the thing with custom woodwork of any type," he says. "You build it to last. That's the quality I put in it. I hold myself to a higher standard, and that's why I expect perfection in my work."

### LOST ART

Wilks builds custom kitchen cabinets, bookshelves, fireplace mantles, bathroom vanities and more. He can do other things, too, like build caskets or re-create molding for a historic home whose trim can't be found at big-box hardware stores.

He knows his skills are rare these days. Wilks is one of relatively few craftsmen in this country, and it saddens him. In recent decades, America has become better known for its consumerism than its ability to produce goods. "There aren't many people who can fix or build things anymore," he says. "They don't even have the knowledge to do it."

Whether it's plumbing, carpentry, electric work or other skilled professions, Wilks has seen the decline. "When I was in high school, they were pushing us to go to college to become lawyers and doctors," he says. "Now, they're pushing people to go to trade schools because we're so short on people in those fields."



## LEARNING THE CRAFT

Wilks, 43, started learning woodworking at his family's business in Ashland not long after high school. Like many people in the trade, he learned on the job and gradually worked his way up the skill ladder. "At first, I did a lot of commercial stuff for hospitals and places like that," he says. "That's where anybody who comes into this business first starts. You learn to build drawers and medical cabinets. Everything's standard on things like that."

After about 10 years, Wilks moved up to the mill room where the custom woodworking took place. "My uncle helped train me," he says. "He was a really good teacher, but I also learned on the job."

He continued at his family's business until branching out on his own a little over a year ago. Now, working out of his shop at his home in Webbville, he does the same trade his grandfather did after getting home from World War II. "It's nice to be able to work from home," Wilks says. "God has richly blessed me with plenty of work."

Custom kitchens like the ones he makes can be expensive, but Wilks is quick to point out they last a lifetime. "It's an investment," he says. "It really is. Most people don't always realize that. Not only are you paying for the materials, but you're paying for someone doing it perfectly. I hope that doesn't sound arrogant, but I work hard to make it perfect. I've actually replaced a few hinges on some cabinets my grandfather built. The hinges might wear out, but the cabinets themselves are in great shape."

Wilks loves the process, and he loves creating for people and helping them. He even builds caskets more affordably than some. "I kind of lean towards that idea that I can make something for someone in their time of need," he says. "Not everybody can do that. I can't do them for free, but I do try to help people as much as I can with caskets."

## HOME BASE

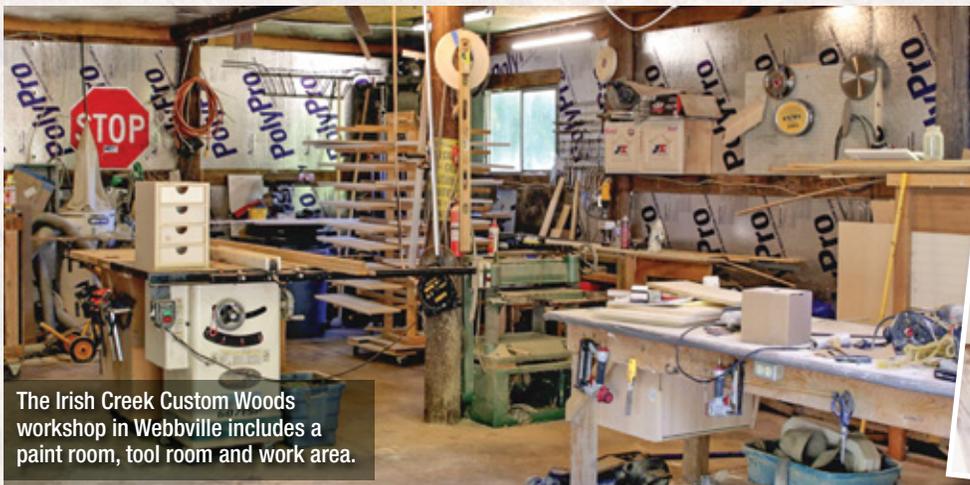
His shop is relatively small — 32 feet by 32 feet — but he can still build entire kitchen cabinet layouts, which make up a large chunk of his business. Within the shop is a small paint room and a tool room with a table saw and planer.

Wilks uses his high-speed internet service from Foothills Communications to field new clients. "My main source of contact with people is through my Facebook page," he says. "That's how most people get in touch with me. I depend on it."

During an ideal week, Wilks can start a new job on Monday with measurements already in hand. If it's a cabinet system he's working on, he'll lay it out and determine each piece for each cabinet. Then, he'll buy the supplies, cut the boards to size and start the long process of building. "The thing I love about it is being able to take a board and cut it and work it into a cabinet or a mantle and see that finished product," he says. "It reminds me of the way God sees us — an old, rough piece of wood. Then, he works on us and perfects us into what he wants us to be." 🗨️

## THINGS OF BEAUTY

To find out more about Neil Wilks' craftsmanship, visit the Irish Creek Custom Woods Facebook page. The shop is at 566 Right Fork Irish Creek Road in Webbville. For inquiries, message him on his company's Facebook page. You can also contact Wilks at 606-652-9829.



The Irish Creek Custom Woods workshop in Webbville includes a paint room, tool room and work area.





# Far from home

Broadband connects families across the globe



Story by KALEIGH COX

**F**or Joshua and Kate Baker of Minnesota, welcoming their first child in 2019 was a time of joyful celebration and anticipation. Joshua Baker's parents, however, weren't close enough to celebrate in person, as they still live in his hometown over 1,000 miles away in New York.

Fortunately, the Bakers had broadband internet, so when they found out they would be parents, they turned to FaceTime to share their news. "With FaceTime, you get to see their emotion," Kate Baker says. "They were very excited!"

The Bakers are not alone. With the arrival of fast, reliable broadband, people aren't just connecting to the internet. They're connecting to one another. When families find themselves spread across the globe, the ability to connect instantly is a particularly special gift.

When their son, Micah, was born, the Bakers continued to use online apps and tools to keep his grandparents involved in his life. Planning a trip to meet in person would take significant time, money and coordinated effort. But the internet makes it easy to spontaneously pop on and connect anytime, just as two families living in the same town might do.

The Bakers also invited his parents to join Cluster, a social media app that enables users to share photos, videos and other updates with a small, private group of family and friends.



Joshua and Kate Baker use broadband to keep in touch with distant family.

Joshua Baker's mom, Faith Baker, was delighted. "We love to be as connected as we can," she says. "I can struggle with the separation and feel that we miss so much. I appreciate how they've found ways to overcome that."

Even 10-month-old Micah seems to appreciate the technology. “He recognizes his grandparents and understands who they are,” Kate Baker says.

She says being a new mom is busy, but staying connected online is worth the time and effort. “We’ll send pictures and keep communicating that way. It makes his grandparents feel included,” she says.

## STAYING CONNECTED

For Jess and Sarah Curry in Texas, broadband wasn’t available in their early days of starting a family. As a military family navigating deployments, it was hard to stay connected. Jess Curry has left on deployment nine times over the past 20 years, and during those times, he would have to wait in line for an opportunity to check his email every few days. Even when videoconferencing technology became available, the inability to use it at home complicated things.

“We’d get all dressed up and drive to post to do a scheduled 15-minute video call,” Sarah Curry says. “There was so much pressure, and it seemed the kids would inevitably be melting down during the call. I would drive away feeling like I was supposed to be grateful, but I was miserable knowing my kids had cried through the call — and that seeing their dad for just a few minutes would only make them cry more.”

Thanks to advances in technology and a stronger internet connection, the most recent deployment was nothing like those early years. “He has Wi-Fi in his room and office, so we can talk on FaceTime every few days,” Sarah Curry says. “In between calls, the kids love using Marco Polo to record and send video messages

for their dad to watch and reply to when he can. Before, it was hard for the kids to be put on the spot and think of all the things they needed to say to him. Now, they can send what they want to say when they think about it. Especially for my teenagers — that’s been really helpful.”

With the steady communication, each kid’s relationship with their dad feels more natural and ongoing, even during deployment. He’s more present for the little moments, like when their 15-year-old daughter’s dance class tried to teach a parent to dance.

“We called up Dad and used the screen on the computer,” says Sarah Curry. “She taught him this dance, and they did it together on a split screen. He was in his uniform doing plies and other ballet moves. He’s going to do what it takes to connect with his daughter, even if it means he has to pirouette in his room.”

## OPEN COMMUNICATION

In many families, the internet allows children to connect with people they may never have met otherwise. When Linda Martin of North Carolina adopted her son Max in 2008, people around her discouraged her from pursuing an open adoption.

“We wanted him to be able to ask questions and learn about his family history, but we had a lot of pushback,” Martin says. “People said that birth parents move on and lose interest.”

Thankfully, that hasn’t happened, she

says, and connecting online has helped. When Max was an infant, Martin shared photos and updates over email. As he grew, he began to pursue his own relationship with his birth mom, starting with phone calls with Martin present. Now, at 11 years old, Max likes using online apps to stay connected.

“We text a lot, and we use Instagram’s video call feature to talk face to face. I tell her everything, and I like to hear what’s going on in her life, too,” Max says. He shares pictures of his cat, gives updates when he loses a tooth and even made an excited video call when he landed the role of the Nutcracker in his ballet company’s production. He also gets to learn about his birth mom’s life. “She told me she went to Coachella the day after she found out she was pregnant with me,” he says. “So, technically, I can say I’ve been to Coachella.”

While Martin acknowledges that an open adoption isn’t right for everyone, she’s thankful for the ways her son has been able to know his birth mom. They met in person for his birthday last year, and the foundation of connecting online helped Max overcome any hesitations and enjoy the meeting. “It was really fun!” he says.

They hope to meet again when he turns 13, but in the meantime, he’s thankful for opportunities to share his life with her online. “We talk a lot now, and I get to tell her everything,” Max says. ☺



When Jess Curry was on deployment with the U.S. Army, broadband helped his family stay in touch.



After adopting Max, left, Linda Martin of North Carolina used broadband to help him stay in touch with his birth mother.



# GROWTH business

Farming family makes big strides  
with fresh and healthy food

Story by JEN CALHOUN | Photography by JIM ARNETT

When Eddie Joe and Alycia Maynard first started farming their 9-acre property in Louisa, they weren't quite sure what they were doing. They started small, hoping to grow enough fresh vegetables for their family and avoid the older, trucked-in produce in grocery stores.

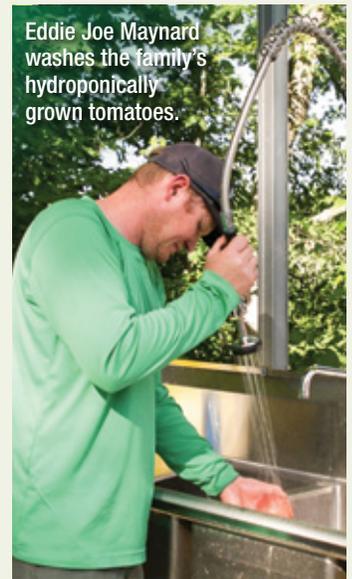
"We built a tiny greenhouse out of PVC pipe and plastic," Eddie Joe Maynard says. "We didn't really know what we were doing, but we still raised quite a bit of food. We were just lucky the wind didn't take that greenhouse off the ground."

Now, they own and operate Simple Harvest Homestead, supplying fresh farm-to-table produce to several companies, including some health care facilities and the Masterpiece Cafe in Louisa. They also supply weekly boxes of fresh produce to individual customers who sign up for it, and they welcome scheduled visits to their farm. "We don't really have to advertise now," Maynard says. "Our name is getting out there. People come to us."

When the couple first started growing food a few years back, Maynard says, they had "zero" farming background. "When I say 'garden,' I didn't know what a potato beetle was or an aphid," he says.



Alycia Maynard checks the pH and nutrient content a hydroponic watering system.



Eddie Joe Maynard washes the family's hydroponically grown tomatoes.

But facing health concerns, all that changed. In 2013, Maynard, who was in his late 20s at the time, had received a warning from his doctor. "My liver was really fatty," he says. "The doctor told me I could reverse it with my diet. That's when I started dieting like I was dying. I lost 25 pounds just eating what I grew or caught on a hook or killed with a rifle. I could tell a change in my attitude and my thoughts. I had more clarity, and my blood pressure went down. There's something to be said about natural food."

## HYDROPONICALLY SPEAKING

As they worked on their health, the couple also learned more about farming. They joined their local farmers market to meet new people, exchange ideas and make a little money off the extra produce they had grown. Whenever they saw a nice, healthy patch of dirt, they'd pull over and ask the farmer a few questions. "Most of my friends are over the age of 65," Maynard says. "That's no joke. I pick their brains all the time."



The Maynards show off their greenhouse with their children Emma Jo, 7, and Keaton, 9.

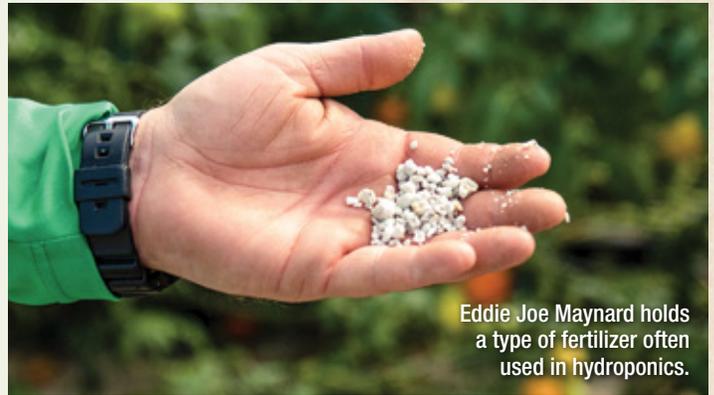
Things changed even more when they met a high school ag teacher from West Virginia. That's when the Maynards learned about hydroponics, a farming practice that uses water instead of dirt to transport mineral nutrients to plants. The plants grow in a greenhouse and take up far less space than they would in soil. Supplemental lighting and a natural gas well on the property provide heat for the plants. "He took a sophisticated process and dumbed it down for me," Maynard says. "He was willing to get started in it and was able to simplify it to where the average small farmer could pick it up."

In addition to its regular crops, Simple Harvest Homestead is producing thousands of pounds of tomatoes in and out of season. What's more, the tomatoes are fresh and full of taste, unlike many of those found in grocery stores that have been picked green, filled with gas and trucked across states. "They still taste really, really good because they're ripening on the vine," Maynard says. "They don't have that watery taste that some of those grocery store tomatoes have. When I deliver my tomatoes to these different facilities, they've just been picked. They're looking at the guy who grew them from seed to finish."

Maynard continues to work full time for CSX, while his wife, a culinary arts graduate, tends to the crops and their two children. They plan to start growing cucumbers hydroponically this year in addition to the tomatoes. They also like being self-sufficient.

"So many people are just so dependent on a food supply chain that's so fragile," Maynard says. "We've kind of devolved as hunter-gatherers. If Walmart doesn't stock it, or if you can't order it from a meal kit, people are just out of luck."

Last year, the couple donated about 1,150 pounds of produce to a rescue mission. They want to continue giving back in other ways, as well. In particular, they hope to help 30-somethings like themselves learn to grow and can their own food. "We want to show people that they can be more self-reliant," Maynard says. "They can depend on what's under their feet, which is really good ground in our area." 📱



Eddie Joe Maynard holds a type of fertilizer often used in hydroponics.

## Farm FRESH

To find out more about Simple Harvest Homestead and its products, call 606-483-0318 or text 606-483-9466. Customers can sign up for weekly boxes of available produce, bread and eggs. You can also visit the Simple Harvest Homestead Facebook page for more information or to send a message. The farm is at 402 Colorado Drive in Louisa. Visits are available by appointment.



Eddie Joe and Alycia Maynard.



# Apples

## *in abundance*

A Tennessee sustainable orchard offers many choices

**A**pple season around the South turns mountaintops and hillsides into beautiful shades of reds, greens and golds. Through the years, winds have swept across the Cumberland Plateau and deposited minerals into the land, creating topsoil perfect for growing fruits of all kinds — apples, specifically, at Wheeler’s Orchard atop Tennessee’s Fredonia Mountain.

It was 1974 when Wade Wheeler and his wife, Ann, left their home in Chattanooga, traveled north to Dunlap, Tennessee, and then on up Fredonia Mountain to settle with their children. Their land was perfect for farming — 50 acres in a gorge where cooler air protects plants from the scorching heat of summer and warm air from the valley guards tender vegetation in early spring. “Dad talked to some old-timers who told him that the man who once owned the property grew the best fruits on the mountain,” says his daughter, and the farm’s manager, Jane Wheeler Mauldin.

In 1978, the Wheelers planted their first apple trees — familiar old varieties like Granny Smith, Gala, Red Delicious and Golden Delicious. Fifteen years later, a second planting of newer varieties — Braeburn, Mutsu and Fujis — resulted in 10 acres of apple trees.



Jane Wheeler Mauldin manages Wheeler’s Orchard in Tennessee.

The Wheelers also lease land near Fall Creek Falls along the Cumberland Plateau where they grow Pink Lady and Arkansas Black apples, as well as a couple of heirloom varieties, Black Twig and Limber Twig.

Wheeler’s Orchard, one of the only sustainable orchards in the Southeast, grows 22 varieties of apples, and a third planting is scheduled. The orchard will soon bring some of the latest apples to market, including Harvey Cumberland and Ginger Gold.

Braeburn, though, is Mauldin’s favorite. “They’re an amazing apple for cider, to

cook with and to eat,” she says. “I like to pick them a little early — before they’re fully ripe — so they have a little bit more tang to them.” Every apple variety has a slightly different flavor. Some are better for eating, while others are best suited for baking. But some, such as Braeburn, pull double duty. These also include Granny Smith, Jonagold, Honeycrisp, Mutsu and Pink Lady.

Visit the orchard and pick your own apples, or buy them pre-picked in the orchard’s apple shop where shelves hold everything apple — fruit fresh from the orchard, homemade cider, apple butter, apple jelly and more. There are also local crafts, teas, soaps and honey here. And jelly made from the orchard’s grapes is a favorite each autumn.

Bring a picnic, spread out a blanket, and enjoy the cool mountain breeze.



FOOD EDITOR ANNE P. BRALY IS A NATIVE OF CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE.



## OLD-FASHIONED APPLE CRISP

- 6 medium Braeburn or other crisp cooking apple, peeled and chopped
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 3/4 teaspoons ground cinnamon, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 3/4 cup old-fashioned oats
- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup cold unsalted butter, diced into small cubes
- Pinch of kosher salt

Heat oven to 350 F. Butter an 8x8" baking dish. Set aside.

In a mixing bowl, add apples, sugar, 3/4 teaspoon of the cinnamon and lemon juice. Stir to combine, then transfer to the prepared baking dish.

In a separate mixing bowl, add brown sugar, oats, flour, remaining cinnamon, salt and diced cold butter. Use a pastry cutter or two forks to cut the butter into the oat mixture until it resembles pea-sized crumbs. Spread this topping over the apples in the baking dish and gently pat to even it out. Bake 40-50 minutes or until golden brown and bubbly. Serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream, if desired.

## HOMEMADE APPLESAUCE

*This applesauce is delicious with oatmeal for breakfast or as a side to roasted pork for dinner.*

- 3 Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored and quartered
- 3 Fuji apples, peeled, cored and quartered
- 1 cup unfiltered apple juice
- 2 tablespoons cognac or brandy (or for a nonalcoholic substitution, apricot juice)
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

In a large saucepan, combine the apples and remaining ingredients. Bring to a soft boil and continue cooking until the

apples are soft, 20-30 minutes. Using a hand blender or potato masher, blend to desired consistency. Serve warm immediately or chill for later use.

Note: For a sweeter applesauce, add 2 tablespoons sugar. And you can use whatever apples are available, although combining two different varieties provides a richer flavor.

## FRIED APPLES

*This is an easy go-to dessert. The Wheeler family especially enjoys it around the holidays.*

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 10 tart apples, peeled, cored and sliced
- 1-2 teaspoons cinnamon

- 2/3 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup water or apple cider

Melt butter in a skillet, then add the remaining ingredients. Simmer over medium heat, covered, until the apples are tender. Remove the lid from the pan and continue to cook until the liquid has reduced to a thick syrup, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes. Delicious over vanilla ice cream. 🍷

## If you go

**Where:** Wheeler's Orchard  
956 Wheeler Road  
Dunlap, Tennessee

**When:** The farm is open through December.

**Information:** [wheelersorchard.com](http://wheelersorchard.com)



P.O. Box 240  
1621 Kentucky Route 40 West  
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