

# CONNECTION

## STARS AND STRIPES

Kentucky couple creates  
American flag art

## SEEING IS BELIEVING

Louisa Eye Care ventures  
into aesthetics

## ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

Broadband extends art  
beyond the theatre



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Partnering to fend off cyberattacks

In recent years, we've learned even the biggest of corporations, including Microsoft, Target and Marriott, are vulnerable to cyberattack. Then, last year, the pandemic increased the number of remote workers, moving more technology from the office into homes.

"The pandemic gave cybercriminals the opportunity to discover new malware families, successful new tactics and 'double extortion' strategies," says Roxanna Barboza, our Industry and Cybersecurity Policy analyst. "And since then, they have further honed their skills to exploit fear, gather intelligence and attack."

If this sounds like the trailer for a horror film you have no interest in seeing, I promise you, the possible impacts of a cyber breach are much more frightening. So, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association is working to support the security efforts of internet service providers such as yours.

NTCA initiated CyberShare: The Small Broadband Provider Information Sharing and Analysis Center as a pilot project five years ago. We now have a robust team focused on the critical topic of cybersecurity, and NTCA members are encouraged to join the effort to recognize, analyze and respond to vulnerabilities, threats and other risks.

Also, CyberShare partnerships link us to the owners and operators of critical infrastructure like electric and water systems. More than 90% of CyberShare participants say the information received through the program enhances their ability to combat cyber threats.

It is through programs like CyberShare that we help organizations like your service provider protect consumers by creating a safe, secure digital experience. 📧



Convenience and a seemingly endless supply of options drives online shopping, which is safe as long as you take a few straightforward precautions. The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency offers a few straightforward tips to ensure that no one uses your personal or financial information for their gain.

### THE THREATS

1. Unlike visiting a physical store, shopping online opens the doors to threats like malicious websites or bogus email messages. Some might appear as charities, particularly after a natural disaster or during the holidays.
2. Vendors who do not properly secure — encrypt — their online systems may allow an attacker to intercept your information.
3. If your digital device and the vendor's systems aren't properly updated and protected, the risk increases.

### PROTECT YOURSELF

- Before providing any personal or financial information, make sure that you are interacting with a reputable, established vendor. In case of trouble, note phone numbers and physical addresses of vendors.
- When shopping, check the address bar of your web browser to be sure the address begins with "https:" instead of "http:" and that it has a padlock icon. These generally indicate a secure site.
- Remember, a legitimate business will not use email to request account information or ask you to confirm a purchase.
- Use a credit card for purchases, which limits your liability for fraudulent charges. Debit cards do not have the same level of protection.
- Keep a record of your purchases and copies of confirmation pages, and compare them to your bank statements. Report discrepancies immediately.
- Before providing personal or financial information, check the website's privacy policy to understand the storage and use of your information. 📧

# Summer reading on the go

**B**efore you jump online to order your top picks to round out summer reading, you might consider tapping into what could become your own personal librarian. And you might even keep more money in your pocket.

Most libraries offer free digital resources. So, all you need is a library card, an internet connection and a digital device. Here are a few other resources that could make the digital literary journey for you or the young reader in your family much easier.

## OVERDRIVE:

Most libraries buy the digital licenses to book titles they think you would enjoy. Then, you can use your library card to reserve those free e-books. OverDrive can work with apps like Libby so you can send your e-book to a Kindle or other reading device.

[overdrive.com](http://overdrive.com)

## LIBRARY EXTENSION:

If you're crunched for time and enjoy browsing for digital books, Library Extension offers a free browser plug-in so you can see your library's digital book offerings while skimming titles on sites such as Amazon.com.

[libraryextension.com](http://libraryextension.com)

## PROJECT GUTENBERG:

The oldest digital library features some of the world's most popular classic literary titles. With more than 60,000 e-books to browse, you can read your favorites online or download them to your device.

[gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org)

## TUMBLEBOOKLIBRARY:

This interactive reading program takes existing picture books and turns them into talking, animated e-books. It also offers read-along chapter books. And another neat feature is that each book is offered in English, Spanish and French. Many school and public libraries offer the service to students or card holders. There's also a new TumbleBooks app.

[tumblebooks.com](http://tumblebooks.com)

## SORA:

OverDrive's educational reading app offers students access to e-books and audiobooks in multiple languages through participating school and local libraries. The app allows teachers to track the amount of time students spend reading. Sora makes notes as students read and can share those notes with teachers and classmates.

[meet.soraapp.com](http://meet.soraapp.com)

## SCHOLASTIC SUMMER READING:

If your child needs a more structured summer reading experience, then you might want to check out the Scholastic Summer Reading Program. While mostly web based, it also offers some e-books. You'll have to create a Home Base account for your child through Scholastic. Home Base is a free, kid-safe, online digital community that offers fun reading-related activities.

[scholastic.com/site/summer/home.html](http://scholastic.com/site/summer/home.html)

## NOOK:

The Nook app is another option for finding free e-books for children. Just download it in the app store and look for the "Explore Kids" section. You can scroll through a range of topics to find free digital copies for download. 📖



# Uniquely rural

## Robust internet service helps us keep pace

The next time you are driving through our community, take a few moments to reflect on this place that we call home. If you are like me, you appreciate the breathing room we have, the natural beauty that surrounds us, our unique small towns and the possibility you might be able to get to know your neighbors.



**RUTH CONLEY**  
Chief Executive Officer

Much of this nation isn't so fortunate. In fact, our lifestyle is increasingly rare. About 83% of our nation's residents live in urban areas. That is up from roughly 64% in 1950, according to a 2020 report by the University of Michigan's Center for Sustainable Systems. If the projections are correct, nearly 90% of the nation could live in communities considered urban by 2050.

What does this mean for places like ours? Hopefully, not a lot. Our way of life is tried, true and much loved. We know who we are and why we live here, and most of us wouldn't have it any other way.

A couple of years ago, the National Conference of State Legislatures noted an uptick in rural population, with an increase of 33,000 residents for the entire nation. Also, the pandemic has some wondering if more people would consider leaving densely populated cities for places like ours. But it will take several years to know whether this is correct.

Meanwhile, we can't ignore the trends that seem to indicate our way of life is increasingly rare. After all, the money usually goes where the people are. Federal and state governments gauge the population to determine where to invest in infrastructure. Private businesses look at demographics to decide where to locate stores, restaurants and more. Where there are jobs, there is growth.

So, we need every tool possible to balance the scales. And that is where we are not only making up ground, but where we also have the potential to excel. Our one mission is to provide communications services to connect you to your neighbors and the world at large, all while enjoying the advantages of living in a small rural community. That's why we've focused so strongly on offering the highest-level of internet services, which form a bridge between you and a world of opportunities that rural areas simply never enjoyed until now.

So, as you enjoy these long summer days, please take a few moments to reflect and be thankful for all that we have, which is a great deal. 📺



# CONNECTION

JULY/AUGUST 2021

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The Foothills Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Foothills Communications, ©2021. 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, 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:



Frances and Joseph Tomblin, owners of Tomblin's Flags, started making unique and timeless American flags out of wood. See story Page 12.



*Rules:*

- Students in the Foothills Communication service area may enter one of the three divisions: entering kindergarten-second grade, third-fourth grade and fifth-sixth grade.
- Write a few words or sentences, then draw a picture that tell and show how you used the internet during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The drawing or story must be an original creation of the child.
- The entry form, signed by a parent or guardian, must be enclosed with the submission.
- Entries must be postmarked by Aug. 1.
- Only one entry per child is allowed.
- Winners will be notified by Aug. 15.
- The winners' names could appear in an upcoming issue of The Foothills Connection and other media.
- Three winners will be chosen from each category to win earbuds!

*Entry Form:*

To enter, please fill out the form below and submit with your entry to:

**Foothills Back-to-School Art and Writing Contest  
Marketing Department  
P.O. Box 240, Staffordsville, KY 41256**

**PARENT:** By signing this form, I give permission for identification of my child and his/her picture and art/writing sample to appear in The Foothills Connection and other forms of media. I attest that the artwork is the child's original creation.

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade in school for the 2021-2022 school year: \_\_\_\_\_





# GORGE-OUS

## The exquisite scenery of the Red River Gorge

Story by ANNE P. BRALY

Cliffs dominating the skyline, rushing mountain streams and a landscape chiseled by millions of years of wind and water erosion bear witness to the forces of Mother Nature in Kentucky's Red River Gorge Geological Area.

Nestled largely within Daniel Boone National Forest along the Cumberland Plateau, the gorge encompasses 29,000 acres filled with history, wonder, excitement and adventure.

Matt Vogt, information assistant at Red River Gorge's Gladie Visitor Center, has no problem identifying the No. 1 prominent feature of the gorge — the landscape. "It's the gullies, caves, rock shelters, arches, cliffs and all the natural, rugged, scenic beauty," he says. "And many are drawn to the gorge's naturally formed arches."

Vogt says the gorge has up to 150 such arches, the greatest number east of the Rocky Mountains.

Red River Gorge is a photographer's dream, a paddler's fantasy and a hiker's paradise.

Hidden waterfalls and rock houses — rocky overhangs once used as shelter by native tribes like the Shawnee — are the perfect backdrop for a photo to treasure.

The many natural features of the gorge can be found along its 77 miles of trails. Take a short day hike or pack your sleeping bag, food and other essentials and

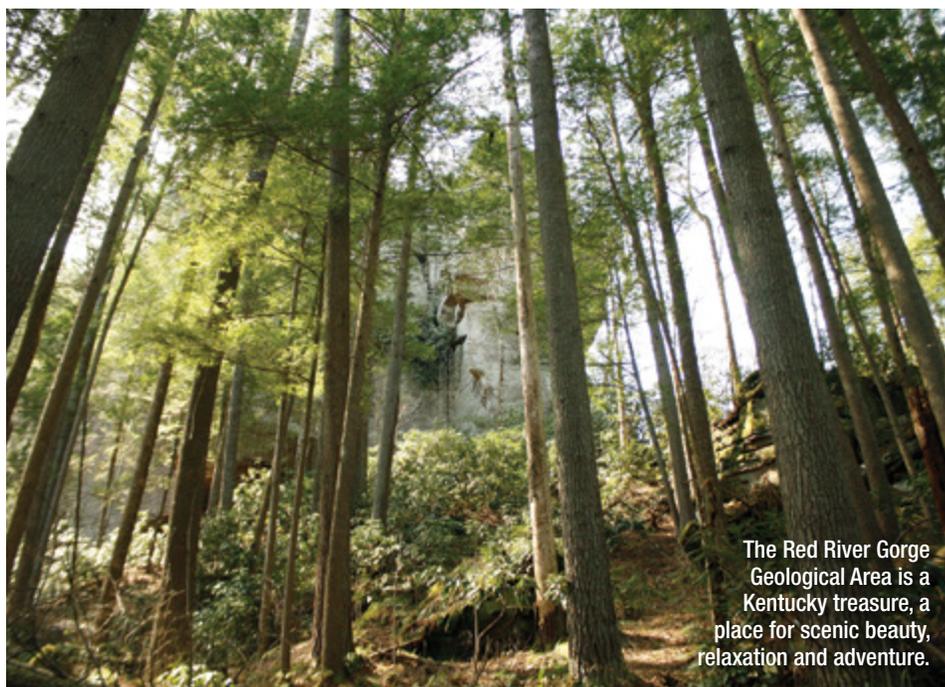
make an overnight, or longer, journey out of it as you explore the thousands of acres of hills and valleys. Campers must have permits for overnight stays, along with proper food storage equipment to keep black bears at bay.

Swift Camp Creek Trail is a good starting point for extended hikes. Descending from the top of the gorge to the lower areas, it's a 7-mile trek that follows Swift Camp Creek. The dramatic scenery includes cascading mountain streams rushing through dense stands of rhododendron and, at one point, flowing under one of the gorge's famous arches.

For even longer treks, the Sheltoewe Trace National Recreation Trail extends 319 miles, starting in Daniel Boone National Forest and ending at Pickett State Park in Jamestown, Tennessee.

At peak season the trails may be busy, but on weekdays and during the colder months you may not run into a soul. The quiet is only broken by a deer foraging through the brush or sipping from a nearby stream.

But there was a time when the raucous sounds of sawmills echoed through Red River Gorge. Early in the 20th century, loggers harvested its hardwood. Sawmills and logging camps sprang up on the hillsides. Railroads snaked through the valleys, and dams were constructed along the Red River and other tributaries to power the sawmills. It was a massive operation. That is, until the gorge was saved, enveloped in the arms of Daniel Boone National Forest in 1937.



The Red River Gorge Geological Area is a Kentucky treasure, a place for scenic beauty, relaxation and adventure.

Photo courtesy of Matt Vogt.

The area also includes Clifty Wilderness, named for its towering cliffs and added to the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1985. The section of the Red River that runs through Clifty Wilderness is a Kentucky Wild River, one of nine such river sections in the Bluegrass State.

Adding to the pristine charm are numerous creeks that rush through the canyons of the gorge and empty into the Red River. The Red River's upper reaches provide Class II and III whitewater canoeing. This Wild Rivers section is generally navigable from December to May, but the Falls of the Red River is a 3-foot drop. Unless you're an expert canoeist, portage your canoe or kayak around them.

Just below the falls is the Narrows of the Red River, which in some places is no more than 6 feet wide and littered with large boulders. This section can also be dangerous when water levels are high. As the Red River continues through the heart of the gorge, it levels out and provides gentle Class I paddling, ideal for



## Points of Interest

You'll find Mother Nature at her finest throughout Red River Gorge, but there are a few places where she really shines.

- ▶ **Chimney Top Rock** is easy to reach — a short, quarter-mile hike — and provides one of the most beautiful overlooks of the Red River as it passes through the gorge.
- ▶ **Sky Bridge** is a mile-long road open to vehicles. It offers several good overlook opportunities. The road ends at a traffic circle and parking lot, where you'll find good picnic spots and the start of a 1.5-mile hike to the largest arch in the gorge.
- ▶ **The Grays Arch Trail** is also very popular and leads to one of the most spectacular arches in the forest. It gets busy in peak season, however.
- ▶ **The Auxier Ridge Trailhead** follows a narrow ridgeline where it ends with views of several outstanding rock formations.



## Digging the past

Archaeologists have found a treasure trove of artifacts that reveal life as it was 13,000 years ago when Native Americans lived in the Red River Gorge, including pottery, seeds and tools.

In more modern times, the ruins of moonshine stills dotting the hills have been found.

Photos courtesy of Mark Vogt

# Clear vision

## Louisa Eye Care expands beyond optometry

Story by JEN CALHOUN

After Elaine DeSario started Louisa Eye Care in 2015, she noticed her patients were interested in more than just their eyesight. “I got so many questions about cosmetic treatments, so I recognized there was a need,” she says. “I wanted to fulfill that need.”

DeSario, an optometrist with degrees from Marshall University and the Pennsylvania College of Optometry, decided to take a chance. In addition to her practice, which serves children and adults and includes a showroom with a variety of eyeglass frames, she added a new machine that permanently minimizes fine lines and wrinkles on the face and around the eyes without injections or surgery.

“We apply jelly to the face — it’s like ultrasound jelly. Then, we massage the jelly with the equipment,” she says. “It uses radiofrequency technology. For the patients, it’s just like a warm stone massage on the face. It’s really comfortable. To do the whole face takes about 40 minutes.”



Elaine DeSario, owner of Louisa Eye Care, provides full-service eye care, a showroom packed with all types of eyewear, and a noninvasive cosmetic procedure that minimizes fine wrinkles.

Photography of John Michael Laney with Images by John Michael.

The majority of patients require about three or four treatments within the span of a year. “You’ll notice a difference in about four weeks, but you’ll get the full effect about six months after all the treatments,” DeSario says. “You’ll still produce new wrinkles, so we recommend a maintenance treatment once or twice a year.”

### NO PLACE LIKE HOME

But the new service won’t take away from her primary business of keeping the community’s eyes healthy and sharp, she says. “We manage all sorts of eye conditions, from glaucoma and macular degeneration to pediatrics,” she says. “We work with an ophthalmologist, who comes in from Ashland to evaluate cataract patients.”

Recently, Louisa Eye Care added electronic medical records, giving patients access to their records via an online portal. In addition, the practice started a system to email or text patients about upcoming appointments.

DeSario grew up across the river in Fort Gay, West Virginia, and had a lot of family and friends in Louisa, Kentucky. She moved to Louisa in 2009 after a few years away at school and work. She knew she wanted to raise her children here, and she loved the sense of community.

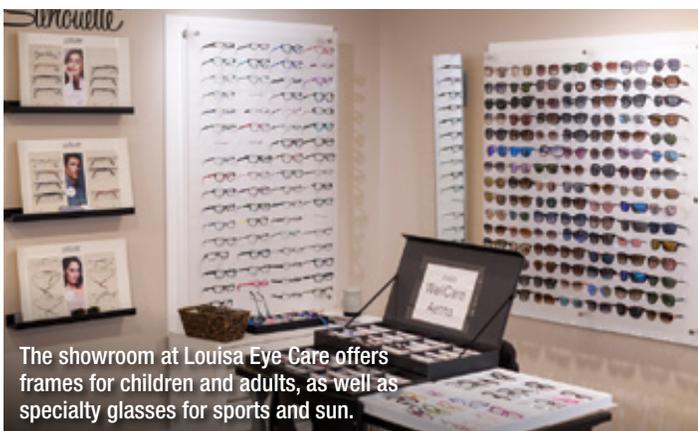
Since returning, she’s been an active member of the Kentucky Optometric Association, served as 2020 president for the Louisa chapter of the Rotary International Club and is an active member of the Lawrence County Board of Health. “It was important for me to give back to the community that had given me so much,” she says. 

### The eyes have it

Louisa Eye Care is at 112 S. Vinson Ave., Louisa. For more information or to make an appointment, call 606-638-4731. Visit the website at [louisaeye.com](http://louisaeye.com) or find them on Facebook and Instagram.



The crew at Louisa Eye Care.



The showroom at Louisa Eye Care offers frames for children and adults, as well as specialty glasses for sports and sun.

# Perfect image

Local photographer creates lasting memories

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Growing up, John Michael Laney loved photography. “Even as a toddler, I always had a camera in my hand,” says Laney, owner of Images by John Michael, a photography business in Paintsville.

But after high school, Laney drifted away from his photography dreams so he could climb the corporate ladder. After graduating high school in the 1980s, he started a career with SuperAmerica convenience stores, now called Speedway. He spent 21 years at the company, ultimately working his way up to assistant district manager.

It was a good job with good benefits. But Laney had a plan. He saved money, and he stayed focused. In his spare time, he took photography classes through the national organization Professional Photographers of America. For years, he entered contests, took courses and honed his craft.

## A DIFFERENT LENS

Around 2003, Laney took an early retirement and started his own photography business. Success came quickly, mostly due to his preparation. “While I was still working in retail, I would give out one business card a day,” he says. “I thought if I could do that every day for a year, people would start coming. I did a few portraits while I was still working, but I didn’t have much spare time.”

Now, he’s one of the region’s most popular portraitists. He photographs babies and toddlers, families and high school seniors — pretty much anyone who wants to capture a special time in life. He also offers engagement and wedding photos.



John Michael Laney offers senior pictures, wedding photos and more.

Photography by John Michael Laney with Images by John Michael

Through the Professional Photographers of America, Laney earned the degree of master of photography, which is awarded to photographers for superior skills demonstrated through challenging photo contests, as well as their advanced education and service to the industry.

## HIGHER POWER

Over the past 17 years, Laney traveled the country and even went to Mexico to take photos, living the dream that started when he was a child. “I believe in a higher

power, and I believe in the hand of God,” he says. “Without Him, we don’t really have anything, because he really is in full control.”

Laney continues to reach for new challenges and experiences. Good enough is never enough for him. “I always tell my wife we can sleep and rest when we’re dead,” he says. “I get up every day with the thought, ‘What can I achieve today? What can I do for someone else today?’”



## Capture the moment

Images by John Michael creates portraits for all ages, as well as engagement and wedding photos. For more information, call John Michael Laney at 606-367-0226. Visit his website at [imagesbyjohnmichael.com](http://imagesbyjohnmichael.com), or find him on Instagram under [johnmichaelphotography](https://www.instagram.com/johnmichaelphotography). He also keeps an active Facebook page at Images by John Michael.

# ON WITH THE SHOW

Virtual platforms keep performances going on and off the stage

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Less than a week before the Northeast Alabama Community College Theatre Department's virtual spring production of "Dear Edwina," the show hit a major snag. With just one dress rehearsal left before the musical's live debut, one of the lead actors had to drop out of the show, leaving assistant director Halle Huber to step in.

It was just one more twist in an already unusual season that saw NACC's Theatre Department in Rainsville, Alabama, put on two virtual productions. Much of the early preparation for "Dear Edwina" occurred over Zoom, an inconvenience that suddenly came in handy when Huber needed to brush up on her part fast.

"Because the video and choreography was already online, I was able to look at those and make sure I understood the correct movements," Huber says. "We even did the vocal rehearsals online, so we had some of those tracks to help me understand what part I needed to sing, as well."

Putting those remote practice sessions together was a challenge for performers used to playing off each other. For Director of Theatre Kayleigh Smith, it often required drawing the movements each

performer needed to make on the back of script pages and holding them up to the screen.

"It's crazy to block a show and do choreography without being on the stage," Smith says. "Once we did get on stage we realized one girl had learned everything backwards. So she had to flip everything around in her head on the fly."

## VIRTUAL ESCAPE

The cast's final performance didn't take place in front of an audience but in front of cameras. The entire show was filmed live and made available to stream on demand via the ShowTix4U platform. Additional learning materials for local middle and elementary school students and teachers were also available.

While the remote preparations were a challenge, they forced performers to take an even greater degree of responsibility for their parts. "One of the cast members told me they've never been in a show before where they were this ready and this prepared for the performance," Smith says. "I'm really hoping they carry that with them forever."

With one more virtual show on the schedule this summer, NACC



Photos courtesy of Trey Gilliland and Lauren Cantrell.

A production of "Dear Edwina" by the Northeast Alabama Community College Theatre Department went online to reach its audience.

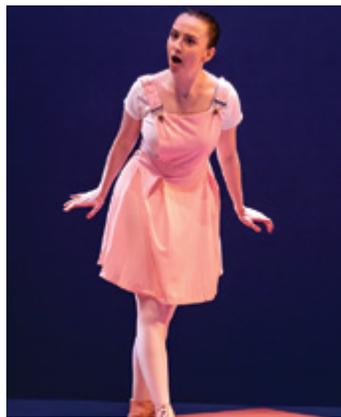
Theatre is on course for its first entirely virtual season. That wasn't the department's ideal plan for the last year but NACC President Dr. David Campbell is impressed with how creatively everyone involved has adapted.

"They have done some outstanding virtual productions that have given our students experience and a way to display their talents, while at the same time, keeping everyone safe through all the COVID-19 prevention techniques," he says.

In addition, the digital format opened the doors to greater accessibility to shows and new opportunities for students interested in film. Smith also hopes that it has provided a respite during the pandemic for people who haven't had the same access to the live experiences they enjoy.

"We were able to provide a little bit of art, and hopefully a virtual escape, safely," she says. "Theater has been healing for us doing it, but also for audiences. I do think it's an escape from what everyone's going through right now and it can be a healing thing." 🗨️

The NACC production of "Dear Edwina" is available to stream on demand through April 19, 2022. Visit [showtix4u.com](http://showtix4u.com) and search "NACC" for more information.



Photos courtesy of Trey Gilliland and Lauren Cantrell.

## NEW HORIZONS

For Texas Ballet Theater, digital performances provided an opportunity to expand the horizons of ballet beyond the traditional stage. In its two-part "The Poetry of Expression" series, company dancers choreographed their own pieces specifically for the digital medium, using the entire Dallas-Fort Worth area as their backdrop.

Dancers and choreographers collaborated with local businesses and nonprofits to bring community landmarks and locations with personal significance into the performances. The result was an innovative showcase filmed at familiar locations like downtown Fort Worth, Firestone & Robertson Distilling, the Benbrook Dam and the Kimbell Art Museum. The prerecorded performances were available for streaming in March and April in lieu of the nonprofit dance company's traditional spring lineup.

For more information, visit [texasballettheater.org](http://texasballettheater.org).

"We hope audiences enjoy a new kind of performance experience through these productions," executive director Vanessa Logan says. "They show us all how the beauty and art of ballet can be found anywhere, even in unexpected places."



Digital performances gave the Texas Ballet Theater a new outlet for expression.



## SOMETHING NEW

For more information, visit [mnopea.org](http://mnopea.org).

More than a year after it put live performances on hold, Minnesota Opera continued to find new ways to connect with its community with the premiere of "Apart Together" in April. The free virtual program featured original performances from members of the opera's Resident Artist Program and the orchestra, ranging from spoken word to piano pieces.

The goal of the project was to give artists a chance to step outside their traditional creative roles within the opera. Resident artists who typically perform pieces composed by others were given the opportunity to pursue their own visions, while audiences could see orchestra musicians perform in a more intimate capacity.

"I really think the future is on the internet, video and how you connect with people through this form we're not used to," says Joey Leppek, resident tenor. "I think getting these kinds of skills in how to create something that's effective on screen is helpful for us, and I hope all artists out there feel permission to get out there and try something new."



Frances and Joe Tomblin created Tomblin's Flags, which offers customizable handmade wooden American flags.

# STAR-SPANGLED BANNERS

## Couple's unique American flags build a cottage business

Story by JEN CALHOUN

A little more than a year ago, Frances and Joseph Tomblin never imagined they would become artists, much less create a business making handcrafted U.S. flags on wood.

Art was never really their thing, after all. The two were far too busy — he had a full-time job and she ran their vacation bus-tour company, Tomblin's Tours — to add artisanal design to the lineup. A former medical-billing specialist, Frances Tomblin started the bus-tour business as a side job in 2011. After the business took off, she expanded the tours from short trips from Louisa to New York City to destinations all over the U.S. and Canada.

But when the coronavirus pandemic struck in 2020, the buses Tomblin hired for tours stopped running, creating an unwelcome lull in both their lives.

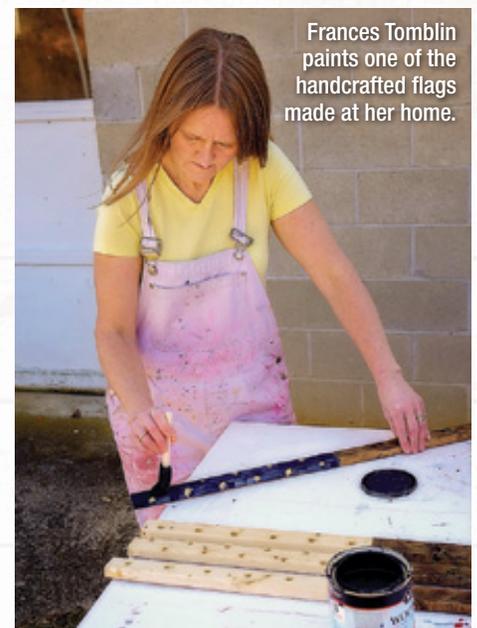
"We're so used to working a lot and being busy," she says. "We wanted to get

something else started. With everything being shut down, we had all this time on our hands."

### BORN IN THE USA

The flag business took root late in the summer of 2020 after the couple saw a flag painted on wood that had been purchased by a family member. "We said, 'We can do that,'" Tomblin says. "So, we went back home and made our own flag out of some wood. Joe cut it and did all the woodworking part of it, and I painted it, stained it and burned the edges to get the right weathered look."

At first, they planned to keep the flag for themselves. But after Tomblin posted it to her Facebook page, the response was immediate. Friends and family offered to buy more flags, some asking that they be personalized for police, firefighters, military and even a Jeep enthusiast. She



Frances Tomblin paints one of the handcrafted flags made at her home.

Photography by John Michael Laney with Images by John Michael.

also received requests for certain causes — flags with ribbons signifying cancer awareness or suicide prevention.

The Tomblins make flags in various sizes, and they often use spent ammunition for the stars unless a customer wants something different. They can personalize flags for any cause or client. The artists also sign, date and number each piece. “We sign it with a cross and both our initials,” Frances Tomblin says. “It was something my husband came up with before we even made our first flag.”

### **SALUTE!**

By spring they had created at least 80 flags, with more orders on the way. Most of their business comes directly from their Facebook page, Tomblin’s Flags, which has become a popular site. At one point, an organizer for a crafts fair in Mount Sterling saw the couple’s work on Facebook and asked them to join the event. Even though the fair ended up being canceled due to the coronavirus, the organizer kept in touch, encouraging the Tomblins to keep at it.

She also encouraged them to apply for Kentucky Proud and Appalachian Proud status, both of which they were accepted into in April. “To be alongside all these farmers and artists and artisans is humbling,” Frances Tomblin says. “My dad was a farmer, and it’s what Kentucky is all about.”

Frances Tomblin, who tends to make strong connections as she moves through life, says she loves the emotional effect the flags can have on people. The couple once saw a veteran get tears in his eyes when he saw his own flag. Another woman, known among friends and family for her patriotism, placed her flag in a prime spot in her home. “It just blows my mind,” Tomblin says. “I’m just so humbled, because that’s something she’ll enjoy and pass down to her family. They’ll always have that. You’ve given them something that’s priceless.”

### **UNIQUE BY DESIGN**

Based on the public’s reactions, Tomblin says she believes the flag business will continue to grow. She and her husband hope to attend some festivals this year while continuing to run Tomblin’s Tours,



Joe Tomblin handles the power tool side of the business, his wife jokes.

which they expected to start up again over the summer. “Most of the tours happen on weekends, so I really hope I can make flags during the weekdays,” she says.

But whatever happens, Tomblin refuses to change the handcrafted way the flags are made. Each flag can take up to two weeks to build and design. It may be time-consuming and detailed, but it’s a process she insists upon. “When we got started, someone told us we could set it up and start making them faster in a production-line way,” she says. “But I don’t want that. I want each flag to be different and special.”

When a customer asks for a flag that looks like a particular one shown on the Tomblin’s Flags Facebook page, Tomblin always provides a disclaimer. “I tell them each flag will be a little different, because it’s handmade,” she says. “That’s what I want for people. You can go buy a flag in Walmart, and every flag will look the same. I don’t want that. I want them to have something different and special.”

In fact, the company’s motto is, “Our uniqueness is what makes us special.” But those aren’t just words relating to the flag business — they apply to Tomblin herself. Long ago, she says, she learned to embrace her own quirks, as well as the quirks of other people.

That uniqueness is what makes people shine, she believes. “I think you have to accept your goofiness and silliness or whatever, because that’s exactly what makes us special,” she says with a laugh. “If you don’t, you’re never going to be happy.”



## **CAPTURE THE FLAG**

To see all of Joseph and Frances Tomblin’s flag designs, or to commission one of your own, visit the Tomblin’s Flags Facebook page. You can also reach them at 606-686-3362. Each flag is signed, dated and numbered. Visit the Tomblin’s Tours Facebook page for information on inexpensive, guided and safe bus tours to destinations such as New York, Niagara Falls, and many other places.



# A fresh angle on catfish

## Catch the secret to a wonderful meal

**C**atfish holds a special place in the heart of a Southerner, but take a little care to make sure you get the tastiest results.

Bad catfish can be mushy and have a funny, almost metallic flavor. Good catfish is sweet, with firm, flaky flesh. But, go ahead and give your fillets a bath in some buttermilk before cooking to help neutralize any fishy odors. And to ensure even cooking, choose fillets that are meaty with an even thickness from end to end.

No fish dinner screams Southern flavor more than a platter of fried catfish, complete with sides of coleslaw and hush puppies. No well-rounded collection of recipes is complete without a good catfish option, such as this one from Whole Foods Market.



## FRIED CATFISH

- 3/4 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 teaspoons ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 4 catfish fillets
- Canola oil, for frying

### Tartar sauce:

- 1/2 cup mayonnaise (store-bought or homemade)
- 1 small dill pickle, chopped very small (3 tablespoons)
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice, plus more to taste
- 1 tablespoon capers, chopped, optional
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill or 1 teaspoon dried dill
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- Hot sauce (optional)

Combine the cornmeal, flour, paprika, salt and both peppers in a shallow bowl or pan.

Coat the fillets with the mixture on both sides, shaking off excess.

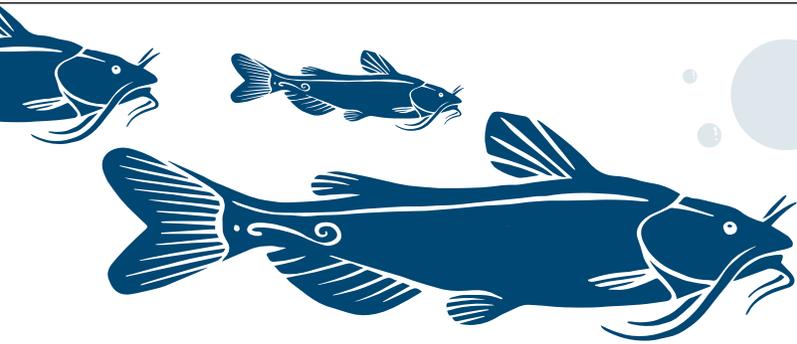
Fill a heavy skillet or large frying pan with about an inch of oil. Heat the oil to 350 F (ready when a small piece of the fish will bubble and rise to the top).

Add the catfish fillets, two at time, and fry until golden, 5 to 6 minutes, turning once. Remove and drain on paper towels. Serve with tartar sauce and a dash of hot sauce, if desired.

**To make tartar sauce:** Combine the mayonnaise, pickles, lemon juice, capers, dill, Worcestershire sauce and mustard in a small bowl and stir until well blended and creamy. Season with salt and pepper. Taste, then adjust with additional lemon juice, salt and pepper.



FOOD EDITOR  
**ANNE P. BRALY**  
IS A NATIVE OF  
CHATTANOOGA,  
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## CATFISH WITH LEMON PASTA

### Lemon pasta:

- 1/2 pound fettuccine pasta
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1-2 teaspoons lemon zest
- 1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, chopped (or 1 tablespoon dried)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper



### Catfish:

- 4 catfish fillets
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon dried, crushed red pepper flakes
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1 cup dry white wine (or chicken broth)
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 3 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley (or 1 tablespoon dried)
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil (or 1 tablespoon dried, crushed)
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano leaves, crushed

Cook the pasta in salted water until tender but still firm. Meanwhile, whisk oil, cheese, lemon juice, lemon zest and basil to blend. Drain the pasta, but reserve 1 cup of the water. Toss the pasta with the lemon blend. If needed, add some of the reserved pasta water. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Season the fish with salt and red pepper flakes. Heat 3 tablespoons of oil in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add the fish and saute, rounded side down, for 3 minutes; turn and saute 3 minutes or until cooked. Transfer the fish to a plate and set aside.

Add the chopped onion to the same skillet and add 1 to 2 tablespoons olive oil. Saute until translucent.

Add the undrained can of tomatoes, wine (or chicken broth), garlic, parsley, basil and oregano. Simmer until the sauce is reduced slightly, about 10 minutes.

Gently return the fish and any juice to the tomato mixture to absorb the spices, then spoon it over the pasta. Makes 4 servings.



*Catfish With Lemon Pasta*

## SPICY CHIPOTLE CATFISH SANDWICH

- 4 catfish fillets
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, minced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 regular or multigrain sourdough rolls
- 4 slices sweet onion
- Chopped cabbage or Romaine lettuce

### Chipotle mayonnaise:

- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon capers
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- Half of chipotle mix

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Mix the lemon zest, lemon juice, garlic and chipotle pepper. Divide equally into 2 bowls.

Rub a small amount of olive oil on the fish. Top the fish with half the chipotle-lemon mixture, then sprinkle it with salt and pepper.

Bake for 8 minutes or until done.

While the fish is baking, make the chipotle mayonnaise by combining the mayonnaise, capers, paprika and half the chipotle-lemon mixture.

Assemble sandwiches with fish, chipotle mayonnaise, onion and lettuce or cabbage. Makes 4 sandwiches.

— Courtesy of Catfish Institute



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