

CONNECTION

HOPE AND JOY

Local event helps
children



BIG TOYS

A colorful collection
of vintage tractors

NOVELS IN NOVEMBER

Broadband boosts
rural writers



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Committed to a fiber future

For several years, NTCA has encouraged policymakers to think with a hand in the present but an eye toward the future. But in Washington, D.C. — where every technology and every interest has lobbyists and political champions — that mission is easier said than done.

Many of the nation's internet providers believe in a fiber-or-bust approach. As long as it's physically possible, which is not always the case in rural areas, fiber should be the goal. As lawmakers weigh infrastructure investments, why should internet providers settle for less?

Many NTCA members are working diligently to extend fiber optic networks, despite challenges like slow supply chains limiting access to the materials needed to build these robust networks. They are making strides.

In our most recent broadband survey, 70% of NTCA members' customers enjoyed fiber to the premises. It's a technology that makes it possible for internet providers such as yours to easily scale their services to meet demand.

Fiber infrastructure is also a key component of building a better future that includes higher-performance services, real-time applications, smart communities, precision agriculture, 5G superiority and better access to health care and education. To achieve our goals as a nation, we need a strong foundation of fiber connectivity.

Connecting rural communities to the rest of the nation and to the resources they need to excel matters. Broadband matters, because its speed and capacity are the new baselines for working, learning and growing the economy — from wherever we might be. Investment in fiber optic internet ensures rural America will not be relegated to second-class status. It's more than a worthy investment in infrastructure development, it's an investment in our nation's future. 📧

SOS

FBI program helps keep kids safe online

The holidays often bring new gadgets and devices, as well as some free time for kids enjoying a break from school. This time of year is a good opportunity to remind younger technology users of the risks of being online and to share strategies to keep themselves safe.

The FBI offers tools to help build a digital defense to protect kids online. These tools include the agency's free computer literacy program, Safe Online Surfing, or SOS. Designed for children in grades three through eight, it's available to teachers, administrators and parents, who can introduce children to the concepts one-on-one.

The program engages children through a series of online games that mix fun with education on a variety of topics, including online etiquette, managing cyberbullying, the importance of strong passwords and double authentication, and more. Visit sos.fbi.gov to access the guide. 📧

The FBI offers a few additional tips for parents:

- Discuss with your children what kind of information, photos and videos are appropriate to post online — and what's not.
- Emphasize that kids should limit the information they post on social media platforms, such as their full name, date of birth and school information.
- Teach that, while free software and apps seem enticing, using them may open phones and computers up to malware or worse.



Tech the halls

GIVE GREAT GADGETS

Great tech gifts don't have to be expensive. There are plenty of options under \$50 that will make the holidays merry. We've got some suggestions, whether you're shopping for a more budget-friendly gift for that gadget-crazy person on your list or a fun stocking stuffer that won't break the bank.

\$29.99

MSRP at us.tomy.com



KIIPIX PORTABLE PHOTO PRINTER

This one's a neat gadget that reproduces images from your smartphone without the need for Wi-Fi or even batteries. You just place your phone on top of the KiiPix, and it takes a picture of your screen and prints a photo in minutes. Reviews point out that the device can be finicky with ambient light, and the quality will be closer to those instant Polaroid pictures from the '70s than a professionally printed photo, but the retro look is part of the fun. Available in pink, blue and black.

8BITDO SN30 PRO+

Any gamer would appreciate the SN30 Pro+, a customizable controller compatible with a variety of systems. Featuring rumble vibration, motion controls and 20 hours of play off a four-hour charge, the controller can also be used wired through USB or wirelessly via Bluetooth. Compatible systems include Windows, macOS, Android, Steam, Nintendo Switch and Raspberry Pi. Free software allows you to customize buttons, adjust stick and trigger sensitivity, and create macros with any button combination. The controller is available in black and in color combinations reminiscent of the classic Nintendo Entertainment System and the Super Nintendo.

\$49.99
amazon.com



POWERUP 2.0 PAPER AIRPLANE CONVERSION KIT

Even if your design skills are more Wright brothers than Boeing, you can still transform a regular paper airplane into a dream flying machine, while kids can learn about basic principles of physics and working with simple electronics. The POWERUP 2.0 kit includes two sheets of high-quality paper to get you started, a charger, a carbon fiber propeller shaft and an ultratough rear propeller — for those inevitable crash landings. The POWERUP 4.0 model, which is \$69.99, comes with stabilization technology and can be controlled with your smartphone. Either way, get ready to take to the skies!

\$69.99

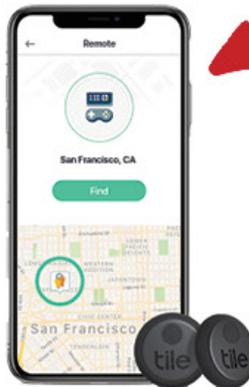
poweruptoys.com



TILE

The best Bluetooth finder on the market, the Tile line of products can be attached to your keys, backpack, purse or TV remote — anything that can be lost or misplaced. A free app for iOS or Android can then be used to find the missing Tile within 150 to 400 feet — depending on the Tile size — or you can ask Siri, Google Assistant or Alexa for help. When outside of Bluetooth range, the app will show the Tile's most recent location, which is updated whenever another Tile user comes within range of your device. You can also subscribe to Premium service, which includes free battery replacement and smart alerts that warn you when you've left something behind, or Premium Protect, which reimburses you up to \$1,000 if Tile can't find your things.

\$24.99
thetileapp.com



Giving thanks

Find reasons for appreciation

As the year winds down, this is the season when the pace of everyday life just seems to pick up. Family gatherings, special events, shopping — the list of chores and commitments gets long. It's always a whirlwind, and 2021 is no different. While time is at a premium during the holidays, I think it's important to find a few minutes for reflection, to make time to take stock and to give thanks.



RUTH CONLEY
Chief Executive Officer

There's plenty to be thankful for this year at Foothills. I could list the projects we've accomplished, the services we've provided and all the work we've done. I am thankful for all of those because they're all important parts of keeping our community current and connected. But this year, I'd like to offer thanks for the often unsung day-to-day interactions, people and services at the core of who we are as a company. Because when quality performance is the norm, it's easy to take it for granted.

For example, I'm thankful for our team of installers and repairmen, who you may see from time to time, even in your own home. As we have weathered this pandemic, many employees have been able to shift to working from home, but not our I/R teams. These employees have been on the front lines, working with customers in their homes amid the constant changes of the last year. They have

done so safely while still doing a phenomenal job of taking care of our customers.

I'm thankful for another team of professionals who are out in the field as well. On any given day, there's likely a crew hard at work somewhere near you, maintaining the physical infrastructure that allows us to provide the services you rely upon. They're also busy building new infrastructure to reach even more customers desperate for those same services. Often, these crews work in inclement weather and the most trying of conditions. After a storm, they lead the effort to restore service so you can get back to living your life and conducting business as quickly as possible.

I'm thankful for our team of customer service representatives, a group whose role is to make your lives and the business you do with us as seamless as possible. They answer questions, solve billing issues and initiate new services — seemingly basic tasks that are anything but basic, and make a big difference every day.

I'm also thankful for those with the IT and technical expertise needed to support our other teams and help make us what we are today. And at the office, for the various departments working hard behind the scenes to keep our house in order. It takes each and every one to make it all work. Thank you, Team, you and your efforts are valued and appreciated.

Now, let me ask you something. The last time you picked up the phone, did you consider all the miles of cable, the sophisticated hardware and human expertise needed to make that call happen? Or, when you connected your computer to the internet, did you think about the complexity of the network needed to link your home to the online world? Of course you didn't, and we wouldn't expect you to.

The services we provide should be out of the way, even invisible. They should just work, and all the people I've described make that possible.

Because everyone at Foothills performs well, it's easy to take our team's work for granted. Often, it isn't flashy and it's not going to make news, but every day, their work benefits those around them. When you're helping others, can there be a better reason to be thankful?

We here at Foothills are incredibly thankful for you who trust us with your internet, phone and TV service needs, and promise to give it our all every day to make sure you have what you need.

Finally, we would also like to wish you all a wonderful Thanksgiving, a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. 📺

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:



Faith Ferguson, left, helped inspire her father, Chris, to start the fishing tournaments, Casting for Kids and Casting with Kids. See story Page 12.

Free Movies!



Foothills Communications wants to bring a little peace and lots of joy to your home this season. Enjoy free premium channels on these dates.

Showtime
Nov. 25-28

Cinemax
Dec. 11-12

Enjoy all of the premium movie channels
Dec. 24-Jan. 2

HBO
Dec. 4-5

Starz/Encore
Dec. 18-19

PRIZE ALERT!

Signing up for select Foothills Communications services by Dec. 31 will make you eligible to win a special prize*!

- TV PRIZE** – Big Screen TV
- INTERNET PRIZE** – Nintendo Switch
- PLATINUM CUSTOMER** - \$250 Visa Gift Card

*Winners must claim prize within two weeks of being notified.



ENJOY AN EARLY
Christmas PRESENT
...on us!

Foothills Communications is offering FREE activation and upgrades between Nov. 1 and Dec. 31.



Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas to all!

All of us here at Foothills Communications wish our customers a happy, healthy and safe Thanksgiving and Christmas. In observance of those holidays, our office will close on the following days:

- THANKSGIVING:** Nov. 25-26
- CHRISTMAS:** Dec. 23 closing at noon and Friday, Dec. 24
- NEW YEAR'S DAY:** Friday, Dec. 31

Starry, starry nights

Story by ANNE BRALY

The evening sky over Clear Creek was speckled with clouds. But as darkness settled across Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau, the clouds parted and the Big Dipper came out, nodding to the moon as its halo crept closer to Orion and his belt.

This scene is played out regularly near Wartburg, Tennessee, at the Obed Wild and Scenic River, a 5,100-acre park with 45 miles of waterways snaking their way through canyons guarding the banks of the Obed River, Clear Creek, Daddy's Creek and Emory River. In 2017, the park was designated as an International Dark Sky Park by the International Dark Sky Association, making it one of only two in Tennessee and one of 69 in the United States.

Getting the designation was a five-year process, says Rick Ryan, an interpretive ranger at the park. "It required a lot of patience and persistence," he says.

The process involved, first and foremost, the obvious — being dark. That may sound simple, but a sky-quality meter was used to determine whether or not the park had too much ambient light from neighboring towns. It didn't. So the park passed that test. "It's not enough to be dark, though," Ryan says. "You have to be committed to preserving the night sky."

That's done through street lighting and lighting paths and parking lots using only dark-sky-friendly lighting fixtures, something that was easy for Obed Wild and Scenic River since there is no outdoor lighting.

A Dark Sky Park must also be committed to providing educational programs to teach visitors about the importance of darkness as a resource for plants and animals like owls and other night hunters.

A good place to stargaze at Obed Wild and Scenic River is the Lilly Bluff Overlook boardwalk found at the end of the Overlook Trail, a well-marked route once you pass through Wartburg. There's plenty of parking, and it's a short walk over to the bluff overlooking the gorge of Clear Creek. There are two boardwalks with platforms where you can set up your chairs and any stargazing equipment you may bring.

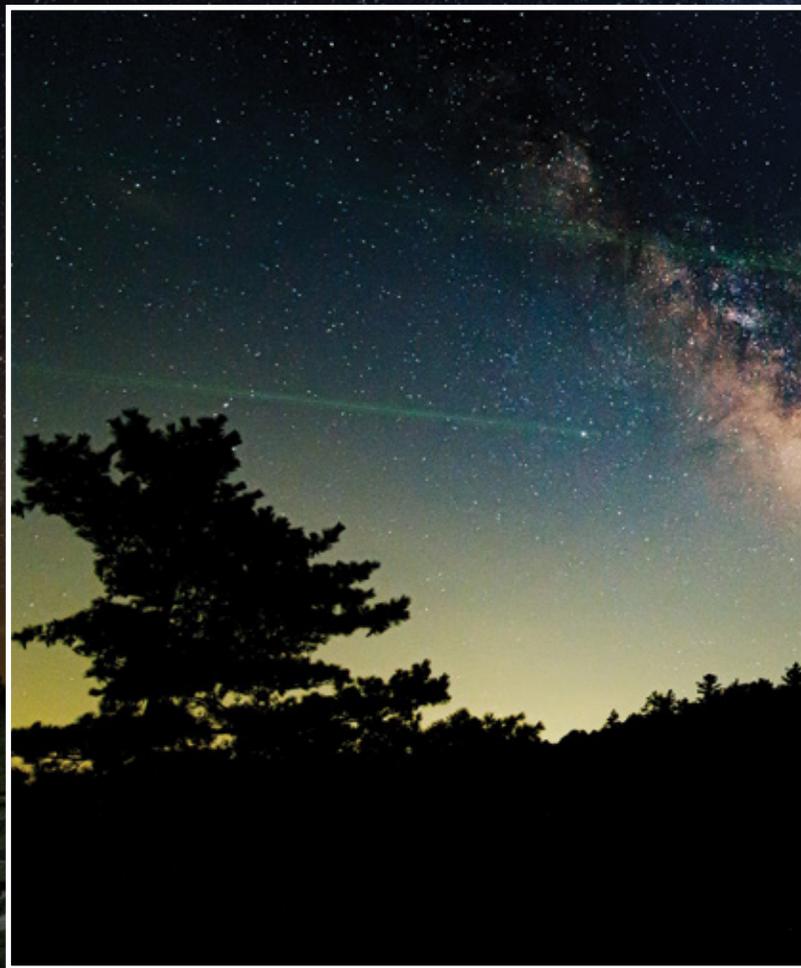
Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Ryan and a team of volunteers held regularly scheduled stargazing opportunities, providing telescopes and everything needed for visitors to see the universe up close and personal — craters on the moon that look as though you can reach out and touch them, rings

of Saturn so vivid you could feel as though you can make the planet spin, the "spot" on Jupiter brilliant with color.

COVID put a stop to that, but not permanently. Ryan says he hopes to get the programs up and running again as soon as possible.

Now, though, the park is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Stargazers can go on their own, bringing binoculars or a telescope and maybe a chair, blanket and some hot chocolate to keep them cozy as they marvel at the night sky.

The sky changes with the seasons, and winter offers a wonderland of stars and constellations, such as Orion the Hunter and Canis Major — the big dog. And Dark Sky Parks are the best places to see them due to their verified lack of ambient light.



In the West, dark skies are easier to find because there are more deserts and less urbanization. “You know, in places like Utah and Nevada,” Ryan says. “But in the Eastern half of the U.S., up and down the East Coast, you can look at a satellite photo and it looks like a big white blob with cities like New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia and D.C. It’s kind of sad, really.

“But when you zoom in a little bit closer, you see there are regional pockets of darkness,” he continues. “It’s important for people in the East to have Dark Sky locations so that those who don’t get to travel out West will have places like this here to experience.” 📱



Rick Ryan is the interpretive ranger at the Obed Wild and Scenic River.

National Park Service

Stargazing Apps

Several good stargazing apps are available to download on your smartphone, as well. With most of these apps, all you have to do is point your phone toward the night sky and the app will demystify what’s in front of you, be it stars, planets, constellations or man-made objects like satellites, including the International Space Station. Many of them can even alert you to upcoming celestial events, so you’ll never miss another meteor shower again.

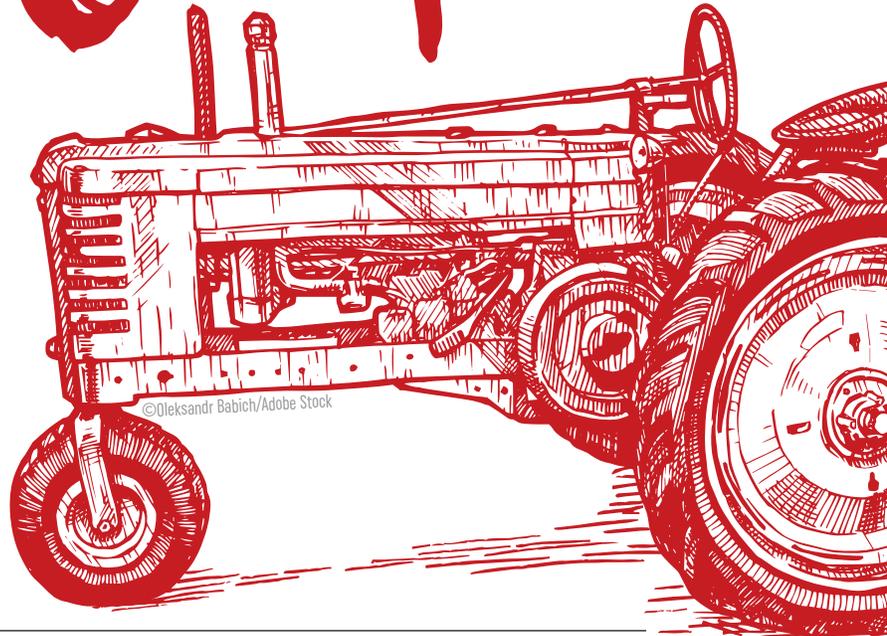
- ★ **NASA app:** Not only can you get the latest NASA photos, videos and features — and watch NASA events in real-time — you can look back down at the earth from the International Space Station.
- ★ **Star Walk 2:** This app uses your GPS to find the exact position of celestial bodies. Just point your phone at the stars and let it do the work. If you’re stargazing with young children, there’s also Star Walk Kids for iPhones and Android. Star Walk 2 is free for Android users but costs \$3 for iPhone users.
- ★ **SkyView Lite:** Track your favorite constellations as they move across the sky. This is a preferred app (free) for people who only want to see the major stars overhead and not the ones you can’t see.
- ★ **Star Chart:** Like the others, point this free app at the sky to see what’s above you. But then, when you’re done, point it down on the ground to get a view of the sky on the other side of the world. Pretty cool, huh?
- ★ **SkySafari:** SkySafari has all of the tools you expect in a stargazing app — and you can even control them with your voice. Tell it to find Venus and it will. SkySafari is free for Android users and \$3 for those with iPhones.

Reach for the stars

Stargazing programs will be held at Obed Wild and Scenic River as soon as groups are allowed to gather again. For updates on when this will happen, check the park’s Facebook or web page at facebook.com/ObedNPS or nps.gov/obed.

Big toys

Vintage tractor collection sparks joy



Story by JEN CALHOUN

Every so often, O'Dell Pyles gets to play Santa Claus. He doesn't wear a red coat or sport a white beard, but he still spreads smiles every time he displays his carefully restored vintage lawn tractors.

Ranging in age from about 50 to 60 years old, Pyles' seven tractors come in bright colors — John Deere green, classic Ford blue, candy apple red and bright yellow. He takes them to tractor shows, or he'll put them out by the road on July 4 loaded with American flags. People gather around the tractors, no matter where they sit. As an added bonus, his 3-year-old granddaughter,



O'Dell Pyles, who takes his vintage tractors to shows across the Southeast, is with his granddaughter, Harper Gibson.

Harper Gibson, smiles every time she sees them and asks for a ride.

“More people seem interested in these little tractors than the big farm tractors, because they look like toys,” says Pyles, a retired coal equipment operator from Oil Springs. “So many parents with little kids ask if it's OK to sit on them. I bet I've had thousands of pictures made on them. It makes people happy, and that makes it even more fun for me.”

RETIREMENT HOBBY

Pyles started collecting and restoring the tractors back in 2010 when a friend told him about an old farm tractor rusting away in a tobacco barn in Paris, Kentucky. The tractor, a 1970 International Harvester, sat on four flat tires, isolated from the newer, shinier equipment.

Pyles had retired, and he was looking for a hobby. Fixing up old tractors seemed like a good project, considering he grew up helping his late father, a former paint and autobody instructor, fix up old cars. “Even though I was a coal miner, I still had that background,” he says. “I had done it as a side hobby with cars and a lot of trucks. So, I had the knowledge.”

But it wasn't until he caught an RFD-TV show called “Classic Tractor Fever” that he realized people actually gathered at events to show their tractors and possibly win prizes for them. “They were showing all these fixed-up old tractors, and I said, ‘Well, my tractor looks as good as any of those,’” he says. “I said, ‘I'm going to see if I can show my tractor at some of these shows.’”

RARE FINDS

The first few tractor shows he attended got him interested in the smaller, residential-use tractors — the kind people use to mow lawns, till gardens and plow snow off driveways. “I just liked them better,” Pyles says. “I told my wife I was going to sell the big one and buy some smaller ones.”

His wife, Bettina “Tina” Pyles, started searching for the smaller tractors on the internet. She found a few on sites like Facebook Marketplace, but the couple soon realized the lawn tractors were rare. “Most probably ended up in scrap yards,” Pyles says. Then the search turned up a yellow 1962 Cub Cadet in Sevierville, Tennessee.

From there, Pyles added six more tractors, including his oldest, an orange 1961 Jacobson Chief.

He refurbished some of the tractors himself. Others he bought show-ready. “I usually have to go to other places to buy them and to show them, because they come from flat areas of the country,” he says. “You

don’t see them around here as much because of the hills and hollers.”

TAKING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD

These days, Pyles’ awards take up a chunk of space in his garage. He’s earned trophies, medals and plaques from various tractor shows, about half of which are judged events. “Most of the contests with prizes judge on whether the tractor is restored to its original condition,” he says. “They want it looking like it did when it rolled off the assembly line, with its original color and the decals.”

In general, the original decals can be hard to find. They’re also the next most expensive item after the tractors themselves and can cost around \$200, he says. But Pyles has gathered dozens of phone numbers of collectors from visiting tractor shows over the years.

Most of the events he attends are in Indiana, Tennessee, Kentucky and other locations within a five-hour drive or so. If a show is within a two-hour drive, his family might come with him. But on the longer trips, he goes it alone with his Chevy truck and a 24-foot enclosed trailer filled with tractors. “It’s a truly fun hobby,” he says. “I get to meet people from all over the country with similar interests.” 📞



Pyles’ collection of tractors range in age from 50 to 60 years old. He restored a few of them himself.



O’Dell and Tina Pyles, as well as their granddaughter, Harper Gibson, enjoy a vintage tractor from his collection.

John Michael Laney

Learn more about vintage tractors

O’Dell Pyles started restoring and showing vintage tractors back in 2010. After starting with an old farm tractor left behind in a tobacco barn, his interest swerved to some of the smaller vintage tractors he saw on the cable TV show “Classic Tractor Fever.” The show airs on RFD-TV network through Foothills Communications at 12:30 p.m. on Saturdays and 1 a.m. on Mondays. Parts of some episodes are available online at classictractorstv.com.



NaNoWriMo

November challenge helps writers write

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Growing up in rural East Tennessee, Dani Honeycutt dreamed of writing for a living. She devoured books and wrote poetry as a teen. She'd even study the encyclopedia to pack as much knowledge into her brain as she could. Writing was the natural next step. It was a place to put all her thoughts — a place to create.

Then she learned about NaNoWriMo, a nonprofit organization that grew out of an international creative writing event of the same name. Short for National Novel Writing Month, NaNoWriMo gives participants a goal of writing a 50,000-word manuscript during the month of November.

"I liked the challenge," says Honeycutt, who grew up in the small town of Rogersville and now lives in Greeneville, Tennessee. "Even though 50,000 words is more like a novella, I liked the challenge of saying, 'OK, you have 30 days to do this.' I felt like there was an accomplishment there."



Writers gather at a local NaNoWriMo write-in at a Florence, South Carolina, coffee shop.

Dani Honeycutt and Ashley Long

For a few years, she participated in the event but couldn't quite reach the 50,000-word goal. Until she did. So far this year, Honeycutt has published three nonfiction books through Amazon Self-Publishing.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

NaNoWriMo events primarily take place online — especially during

pandemic times — but official subgroups are generally paired off regionally within states in the U.S. Honeycutt volunteers as a municipal liaison for one of NaNoWriMo's East Tennessee groups. In that role, she markets the program regionally, organizes in-person and online events, and generally serves to support other writers in her group.

Ashley Long, another municipal liaison who lives in a small community near Morristown, Tennessee, says she first tried the NaNoWriMo challenge in 2010. “I wasn’t very successful,” she says. “I didn’t go to meet-ups, and I didn’t take advantage of all the resources the nonprofit offered.”

But in 2011, things changed for Long. “I was able to write 50,000 words in 30 days,” she says. “It wasn’t a full novel, but it was a good beginning.”

Since then, Long has written two rough drafts for two different stories, she says. “NaNoWriMo helps with motivation,” she says. “Writing is a very solo thing. But with this, there’s a collective energy when you do a virtual or in-person event.”

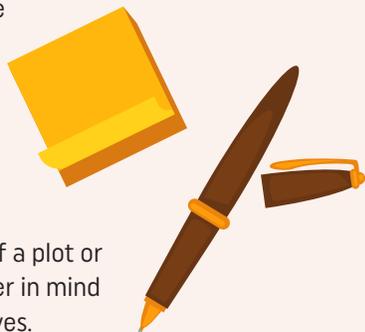
THE BENEFITS OF TRYING

While writing 50,000 words in 30 days sounds like it could be difficult, Long believes the event itself can be freeing for burgeoning writers. “NaNo is about getting the words on the page,” she says. “You write as much as you can in those 30 days. It’s about getting something that’s valuable in front of you that you can actually work with instead of having it run around your brain.”

NaNoWriMo is also a great way to make lasting friendships, Long says. She and Honeycutt became friends after meeting through the organization. “You get to meet like-minded people with the same goals and interests as you,” Long says. “Some of my best friends now are people I’ve met through NaNo over the years.” 

Writing tips for National Novel Writing Month

- **Just write** — Don’t worry about editing, reading and rereading your words. Just get them down.
- **Don’t listen to THAT voice** — You know the one — that overly critical voice of doubt that tells you nothing’s good enough. While constructive criticism is important, there’s no place for THAT voice.
- **Read** — Reading what other writers write can help you structure and build your own words. It can also free up your imagination and allow you to see how they develop characters and move a plot.
- **Prep** — Whether you’re what NaNoWriMo calls a “plotter” or whether you’re a “pantser” who flies by the seat of their pants, it’s generally best to have a scrap of a plot or even a vague character in mind before November arrives.



Finding the muse

NaNoWriMo and the Great American Novel

Writing is hard. It’s time-consuming and solitary, and it can fill a person with more doubt in their intelligence and abilities than they’ve ever known. But it can also help stretch the limits of the imagination and bring a sense of accomplishment like nothing else.

Chris Baty, the founder of NaNoWriMo, realized this after struggling to write his own book. So, back in 1999, he and a group of friends with similar goals decided to focus on getting words on the page. They gave themselves one month to write a novel. “That was the genesis of the movement,” says Tim Kim, programs director at NaNoWriMo. “Then, word just spread.”

Internet spreads the word

As the internet grew, so did NaNoWriMo. In 2006, the annual writing event also became a nonprofit, Kim says. “We were seeing so much energy behind National Novel Writing Month, and so many people wanted to give back. So, we started thinking about how we could do so much more.”

Now, in addition to National Novel Writing Month for adults, the nonprofit offers a Young Writers Program that serves about 100,000 students and educators across the world in about 2,000 classrooms. In addition, the organization offers Come Write, which helps libraries, bookstores and community centers to double as creative writing centers.

Since its beginning, many books that got their start during National Novel Writing Month have gone on to become bestsellers, including “Water for Elephants” by Sara Gruen, “Fangirl” by Rainbow Rowell and “The Forest of Hands and Teeth” by Greenville, South Carolina, native Carrie Ryan.

One of the things the NaNoWriMo organizers are proudest of is how it’s helped writers from all walks of life to find their voices, Kim says. “In places like New York City or Los Angeles, there are so many resources for people being creative and writing novels,” he says. “But we’ve seen with our programs that writers are coming from all over the U.S. — urban places and rural places, and across the world, as well.”

Getting started

National Novel Writing Month challenges people to write 50,000 words in 30 days. Some finish, some don’t. But everyone involved makes more progress than they may have otherwise. It happens every November and is open to everyone. Find more tools, pep talks, help with structure and a writing community near you at nanowrimo.org.

FISHING FOR HOPE

Casting for Kids tournaments raise money & spirits

Story by JEN CALHOUN

About nine years ago, Chris Ferguson woke up with a start. It was the middle of the night, but an idea had come to him, and he couldn't get back to sleep.

"It was as strong a feeling as I'd ever had," says Ferguson, a Wittensville man who owns Ferguson Excavating & Construction and competes in semipro fishing tournaments across the Southeast. "I could tell it was something bigger than me. I know God put it on my heart."

The idea, he says, was to start Casting for Kids, a fishing tournament that would

raise money for Shriners Hospitals for Children. More specifically, he wanted to directly help the children in the region who visit the organization's hospital in Lexington. "I wanted to do something special to give back to a child who doesn't have the resources to get to the hospital, or to help them financially while they're there," he says.

For Ferguson, it was the perfect way to give back. As a longtime angler, he knew everything that went into organizing a fishing tournament. He knew the ins and outs of finding sponsors, and he



Chris Ferguson competes as a semipro angler.

understood the importance of generating publicity through social media and internet traffic.

BECAUSE OF FAITH

While Ferguson wasn't a Shriner himself at the time of his dream, his daughter, Faith, now 18, had been a patient at the Shriners hospital a few times. She was born with hydrocephalus, an abnormal buildup of fluid in the cavities deep within the brain that puts pressure on the brain's tissues.

During Faith's surgeries, Ferguson walked the halls of the hospital and sat in its waiting rooms. He knew the power of the place, and he knew the comfort it gave. "It's more than a hospital," Ferguson says. "If you ever have to go there, it will change your life."

The mission at Shriners Hospitals for Children is to provide the highest quality of care to children with neuromusculoskeletal conditions, burn injuries and other special health care needs, regardless of their ability to pay. The hospitals also train doctors and other health care providers, while conducting research.

"I think hope lives there," Ferguson says. "You'll see a little fella in the hall, and he has a kind of hope he can't get anywhere else. For a lot of these kids, it might be the last place they could turn to. But once they get there, they have a hope that they're going to get fixed. That's what's magical about it — seeing a child with hope."



Ferguson with his daughter, Faith; his wife, Jennifer; and his son, Donovan.

John Michael Laney

© Rangizz/Miche Stock



Casting with Kids, an annual fishing tournament for children, provides a day of fun and a chance to win prizes.

CASTING FOR – AND WITH – KIDS

When Ferguson approached the Big Sandy Shrine Club about the event, the group was excited. They also convinced him to join their chapter. Since then, Ferguson, along with nearly 100 volunteers, have hosted Casting for Kids, a two-day adult fishing tournament at Paintsville Lake.

A few weeks later, the group hosts another fishing tournament, this one for children ages 4 through 12. The event, Casting with Kids, gives children a chance to enjoy a day of fishing while they're treated to ice cream, snow cones and other goodies.

"Every kid gets a brand new rod and reel, a T-shirt and a medal," Ferguson says. "On top of that, we have first-, second- and third-place prizes for each age group. This past year, my company donated a kayak to the winner of the 12-year-old age group. It was that fella's first-ever boat, so it was pretty special."

The event not only raises money for Shriners hospitals, but it has also helped Big Sandy Shrine Club buy wheelchairs for children and a van that transports families to the hospital in Lexington.

The funds will also pay for a concrete walkway to be installed at Paintsville Lake. The walkway, which has been approved by the state and the Army Corps of Engineers, will allow children who use wheelchairs to access the shore more easily. "It lets them sit at the water level, so they can do the same things other kids do," Ferguson says.

As the events grow in popularity, Ferguson hopes they might gain momentum throughout the country. In the spring, he coordinated a similar tournament on Douglas Lake in Dandridge, Tennessee, and he recently received a call from an event organizer in Louisiana asking about Casting for Kids.

But it doesn't really surprise Ferguson. After all, fishing is a universal sport that can bring happiness to people of all ages. It's a great way to bring people together and make some memories. "Everybody is running with their pants on fire, and we don't know when to stop," he says. "We need something to slow us down, and fishing can do that." 📧



HELP CHILDREN BY HAVING FUN

Casting for Kids is a two-day fishing event for anglers to compete, have fun and raise money for children being treated at Shriners Hospital in Lexington. The event generally takes place in May, and entry forms are mailed to the previous year's participants in December for priority consideration. Open enrollment starts in February. Check the website castingforkids.net and the Casting for Kids Facebook page for the latest updates. Casting with Kids is a daylong event that offers a youth fishing tournament, food, prizes and fun for children ages 4-12. More information can be found on the Casting for Kids Facebook page.

Ferguson took his experience with fishing and used it to create Casting for Kids and Casting with Kids.



John Michael Laney

A tasty tuber

Sweet potatoes offer a holiday treat

Sweet potatoes evoke strong feelings, bringing back tasty memories for some and not-so-good memories for others. It all depends into which camp you happen to fall — pro-marshmallow or anti-marshmallow.

Those white, fluffy confections are the go-to topping for many cooks. But have you tried a savory version? Sweet potatoes aren't necessarily sweet until you begin adding all that sugar and butter to the mix. Instead, consider some recipes that take your holiday sweet potatoes in a different direction.

Try adding cream cheese and chipotle peppers to your sweet potatoes, along with onions and celery. Or jazz them up with garlic, herbs and a sprinkling of parmesan. And don't forget to bake a couple alongside your turkey — mashed and mixed with the turkey drippings, they make an incredible, gluten-free gravy.

No matter the recipe, sweet potatoes are one of nature's superfoods, loaded with an alphabet of vitamins — A, C, B1, B2, B4 and B6 — not to mention fiber, potassium and other minerals important to our diets.

Here are some recipes for putting savory into your sweet potatoes this season. 📖



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

Roasted Parmesan Sweet Potatoes

- 2 1/2 pounds (about 3 medium) sweet potatoes, peeled and diced into 1-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3-4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme leaves
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 1/3 cup finely grated parmesan cheese
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place diced sweet potatoes on a baking sheet. In a small mixing bowl, stir together olive oil, garlic and thyme. Then pour the mixture over the potatoes. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and toss to evenly coat. Spread into an even layer.

Roast in the oven until tender, tossing once halfway through, about 30 minutes total. You may want to broil the potatoes during the last 1-2 minutes for more golden-brown, crispier potatoes. As soon as you remove the potatoes from the oven, drizzle and toss them with the melted butter, sprinkle them with parmesan and parsley, and serve. Makes 4 servings.





SAVORY MASHED SWEET POTATOES

- 1 stick butter
- 2-3 stalks celery, diced
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese
- 1-2 chipotle peppers, chopped, or to taste
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 6-7 sweet potatoes, peeled, cooked and mashed

Melt butter in a skillet and add the celery and onion. Saute until tender. Add cream cheese and stir until melted. Add chipotle peppers a little at a time. You don't want the mixture too spicy. Add salt and pepper to taste, then combine the mixture with the mashed sweet potatoes. Serve warm. Makes 6-8 servings.



TWICE-BAKED GOAT CHEESE & BACON SWEET POTATOES

- 4 large (about 3 pounds) sweet potatoes, scrubbed and halved lengthwise
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 8 ounces bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons evaporated milk or heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon each salt and pepper
- 5 1/2 ounces fresh goat cheese, divided
- 3 tablespoons maple syrup, divided
- 1 tablespoon chopped chives

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Prick the cut side of the potatoes with a fork in a few places. Rub the potatoes all over with oil and put them on a baking sheet, cut side down. Roast the potatoes until they're tender when pierced with a fork, about 45 minutes. Let them cool until you can handle them easily — about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a large frying pan over medium-high heat, stirring often, to very crisp. Drain the bacon on a paper towel, and then roughly chop half of it.

Scoop the sweet potato flesh out of the skins and into a bowl, and reserve the skins. Mash the flesh with a fork until smooth. Add the chopped bacon, milk or cream, salt, pepper, half the goat cheese and 1 tablespoon maple syrup to the mashed potatoes. Stir just until blended. Spoon the mixture into the reserved sweet potato skins, dividing evenly and using all of it. Chill.

When ready to serve, bake the potatoes at 350 F until they are warm in the center, 15 to 20 minutes. Sprinkle the warmed potatoes with the unchopped bacon, crumbles of the remaining goat cheese, drizzles of the remaining maple syrup and the chives. Makes 8 servings.



Sweet potato rolls

- 1 cup mashed sweet potatoes, unseasoned
- 3/4 cup milk, divided
- 2 1/4 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 1/2 teaspoon plus 1/4 cup granulated sugar, divided
- 4 1/4 to 4 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 2 large eggs
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, partly melted
- 2-3 tablespoons melted butter (for brushing)

If using a whole sweet potato: Peel the potato, chop it into 1-inch cubes and put the cubes in a small saucepan with water to cover. Cook over medium-high heat for 20-30 minutes or until fork-tender. Drain. Mash the potatoes with a few tablespoons of milk. Measure out and set aside 1 cup of the mashed sweet potatoes.

Heat the rest of the milk to 115-120 F. Dissolve the yeast and 1/2 teaspoon sugar in the warm milk. Allow to proof for 5 minutes.

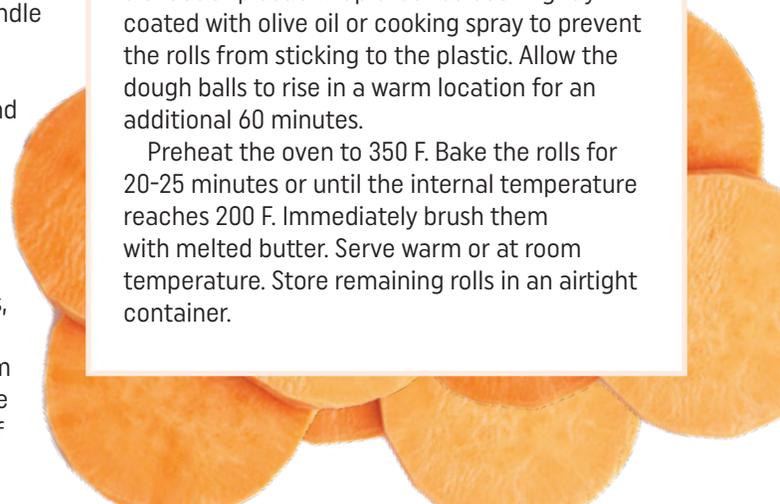
Meanwhile, combine 1/4 cup of sugar, 4 cups of flour and the salt in the bowl of a stand mixer. With the dough hook attachment in place, turn the mixer on low. Add the eggs, one at a time, followed by 6 tablespoons of butter, the mashed sweet potatoes and the yeast mixture. Increase the mixer speed, mixing until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl. If necessary, add up to an extra 1/2 cup of flour.

Transfer the dough to a lightly greased large bowl. Cover, and allow the dough to rise in a warm location until doubled in size, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch pan. Set aside.

Divide the dough into 12 equal portions and shape each portion into a ball, pinching the seams together. Place each ball, seam-side down, into the prepared pan. Cover the rolls with a sheet of plastic wrap that has been lightly coated with olive oil or cooking spray to prevent the rolls from sticking to the plastic. Allow the dough balls to rise in a warm location for an additional 60 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Bake the rolls for 20-25 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 200 F. Immediately brush them with melted butter. Serve warm or at room temperature. Store remaining rolls in an airtight container.





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