

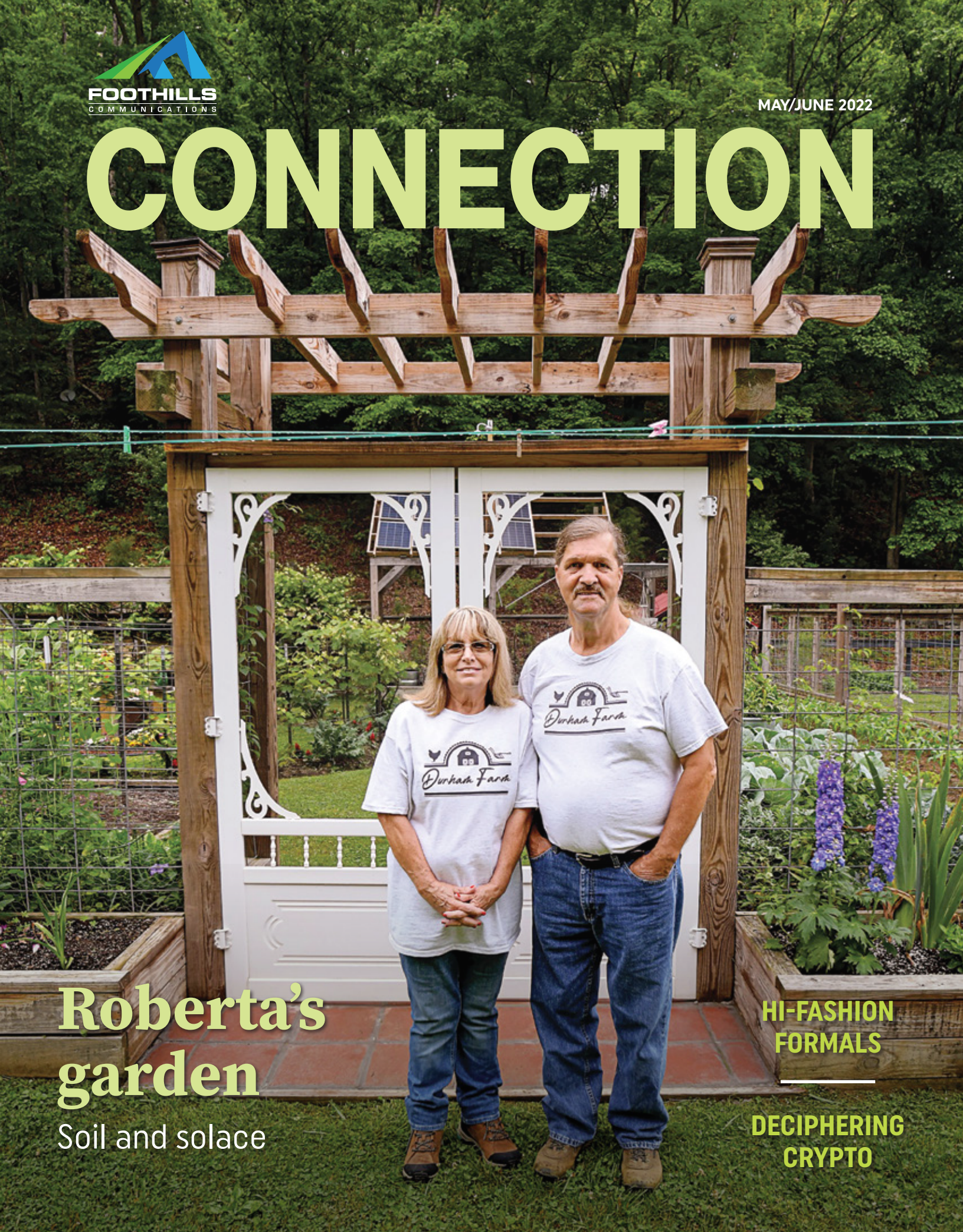
CONNECTION

Roberta's garden

Soil and solace

HI-FASHION
FORMALS

DECIPHERING
CRYPTO





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A partner to support RURAL AMERICA

The Foundation for Rural
Service makes a difference

Our members work hard to serve our nation's rural communities, but they do not do it alone. I'd like to shine a spotlight on an organization whose work I respect, appreciate and support.

The professionals of the Foundation for Rural Service, known as FRS, deserve praise for all the benefits they provide to thousands of people. Established as a nonprofit in 1994, they have made a positive difference for nearly 30 years.

Many of you may know their efforts to help educate young people in rural communities through scholarships and the popular Youth Tour trip to our nation's capital. FRS also annually takes key congressional staff out into our communities to see the challenges faced when deploying broadband.

In particular I want to give a special nod to the annual FRS Community Grant Program designed to benefit communities served by NTCA members. The goal is to support local efforts committed to improving and sustaining rural America. The grants have four areas of concentration: business and economic development, community development, education and telecommunications — the last is a chance to highlight a local plan to support broadband resources for telehealth, education and more. For more information about these programs, visit www.frs.org.

Just like the NTCA member serving you, a remarkable community partner where you live, FRS combines the resources and visibility of all NTCA members to benefit communities like yours across the country. 📞



Get your free annual credit report Spot scammers early

A free credit report is one of the quickest ways to spot identity theft — someone taking your name, date of birth, address, credit card or bank account information, Social Security or medical insurance numbers.

Scammers can quickly drain a bank account, run up charges on a credit card, get a new credit card in your name and more.

What is a credit report?

A credit report is a summary of your personal credit history, including identifying details such as an address, date of birth and information such as whether bills were paid on time or someone has filed for bankruptcy.

Three national credit bureaus — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — collect and update this information.

The credit bureaus must:

- ▶ Make sure the information they collect about you is accurate
- ▶ Give you a free copy of your report once every 12 months
- ▶ Give you a chance to fix any mistakes

How do I order my free annual credit reports? The simplest solution is to visit AnnualCreditReport.com. It's fast and easy.

Cryptocurrency 101

A beginner's guide to the new currency

For many people, the idea of cryptocurrency, or digital money, is downright mysterious. Still, cryptocurrency has been around more than a decade, and a growing number of people are starting to use and invest in the world of virtual coins and tokens.

But what, exactly, is it? How does it work? And how do you get it?

CRYPTO BASICS

Put simply, cryptocurrency is digital money. There are no physical coins or paper dollar bills you can pull out and put in a billfold. But it's also not backed up by any asset. According to [bitstamp.net](https://www.bitstamp.net), cryptocurrencies are a tradable asset in and of themselves. Their price is determined by demand and the supply available.

Like gold, cryptocurrency's value is in its scarcity and its uses — or potential uses in crypto's case, according to an Investopedia article in December 2021. Bitcoin, which is the most valuable of the different cryptocurrencies, is limited to a quantity of 21 million bitcoins. And while gold is often useful for industrial applications and in valuable jewelry, crypto might be of service in a number of retail transactions one day.

HOW TO GET IT

Most people buy it online and store it in a virtual wallet. The easiest way to buy cryptocurrency is through one of many centralized exchanges that come up on an online search. There are several types of cryptocurrencies, including the three top ones: Bitcoin, Ethereum and Tether.

CRYPTO AND TAXES

The banking system and the government do not oversee cryptocurrency transactions. Instead, these transactions are supported by blockchain, a technology that tracks who owns what. But that doesn't mean cryptocurrency isn't taxable. In fact,

the Internal Revenue Service taxes cryptocurrency as either property, investment or earned income. Because of this, crypto dabblers should keep careful records of all their transactions.

UPS AND DOWNS?

Cryptocurrency is known for its volatile market. In one day in 2021, Bitcoin dropped by 30% — a huge fluctuation in any other trading market. As a new currency that's not legal tender and which any government can issue, crypto can move wildly up or down based on just about anything — perceptions, news articles or, most notably, a tweet from tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

RESEARCH AND START SLOW

To find out more about cryptocurrency, make sure to do your research. Seek out sources crypto advertisers or others with vested interests in particular products aren't backing. Those determined to try it out should invest conservatively while learning more about the market along the way. 💬

Crypto lingo

Knowing more about cryptocurrencies requires learning new words and phrases. Here are a few that are sure to pop up frequently:

FUD — FUD is an acronym that stands for "fear, uncertainty, doubt." In the crypto world, FUD is negative information that can deter investors.

HODL — HODL is an acronym for "hold on for dear life," but internet lore jokes that its origins came from a typo for the word "hold." Either way, cryptocurrency investors use it to caution others against selling when the market is volatile.

NFT — NFT stands for non-fungible tokens. NFTs are pieces of digital content linked to the Ethereum blockchain. Non-fungible basically means that the digital content is unique and cannot be replaced. Because of this fact, NFTs make digital works of art and other items into one-of-a-kind assets.

Sats — Short for Satoshi, sats are the smallest fraction of a bitcoin that you can send — 0.00000001 of a bitcoin. Hardcore bitcoin traders look at sats, not the dollar amount of bitcoin. Note: Satoshi Nakamoto is the made-up name of the person or people who created bitcoin.



Congratulations, graduates

A bright future awaits

Throughout our community, young adults are experiencing a milestone — they're about to begin their first post-high school summer. It's a moment that deserves celebration — a cap on 12 years of hard work and accomplishment.



RUTH CONLEY
Chief Executive Officer

Even if you're like me and the high school years have been in the rearview for a while, the memories can still seem fresh. After all, this is such a vivid time, one often filled with excitement, hope and, quite possibly, trepidation. Each of these young people will soon make choices, many of which have been years in the making. Some of them will go on to higher learning. Others may breathe a sigh of relief to leave school behind and enter the workforce, start families or explore countless other possibilities. All graduates must choose their own paths.

Some of our young people have already faced adult challenges, working jobs or carrying responsibilities that, in an ideal world, would have waited until they were older. Life isn't the same for everyone, and it's often difficult. We appreciate that the circumstances for each high school graduate are unique, and we hope we can offer one consistent thread of support to all members of the communities we serve. At Foothills Communications, we often discuss the principles that are the bedrock of what we do, one of which is concern for the community.

Our communications network — our fast, reliable internet service in particular — can open doors that didn't exist just a few years ago. Online learning, work-from-home jobs, support for employers and so much more are now available. We are in a rural area, but we have an immediate connection to resources needed to thrive in a modern world. The playing field is more level than ever between cities and communities like ours.

One example of success is the young people leaving high school today and the link they have, not only to the online world, but also to real-world resources once unheard of in rural communities. Imagine moving away for school or a job and being able to use a video call to connect with family back home. No matter how far our graduates roam, there's a convenient link to the people who have supported them every step of the way.

We believe, however, that helping the community goes beyond the services we provide, and we know many other local businesses feel the same. Support for academic and athletic programs are just a few ways we work to help students attending our schools and this current group of young graduates about to strike out on their own.

While this is a time of celebration for the Class of 2022 and their families, I believe it's also a time for us to celebrate as a community. Life will bring hurdles and triumphs. Many of these former high school students will go on to become part of the fabric of our communities, and others will venture away, carrying the values and lessons they learned here with them for the rest of their lives.

I'd like to congratulate all of the graduates and their families. Thanks to you, the future is bright, exciting and filled with possibilities. 📺



CONNECTION

MAY/JUNE 2022

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The Foothills Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Foothills Communications, ©2022. 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.

Foothills Communications
P.O. Box 240
1621 Kentucky Route 40 West
Staffordsville, KY 41256
www.foothills.net
606-297-3501

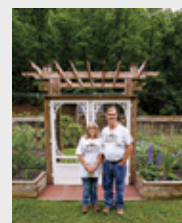
Foothills Mission Statement

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

Produced for Foothills Communications by:



On the Cover:



Roberta and Jerry Durham say their garden offers year-round blessings of food, flowers and fellowship. See story Page 12.

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

Kick back and relax with
free Showtime on
May 7 and 8.

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

Get more entertainment
with HBO on
June 18 and 19.



Congratulations TO ALL 2022 GRADUATES!

Foothills Communications
celebrates this milestone.
We encourage you
to embrace amazing
opportunities in a world of
possibilities.



★ MEMORIAL DAY! ★

Enjoy a long weekend
of free premium movies
with Starz/Encore on
May 28, 29 and 30.

Honoring those who served and sacrificed

Foothills Communications
will close on May 30 in
observation of Memorial Day.

Relaxing

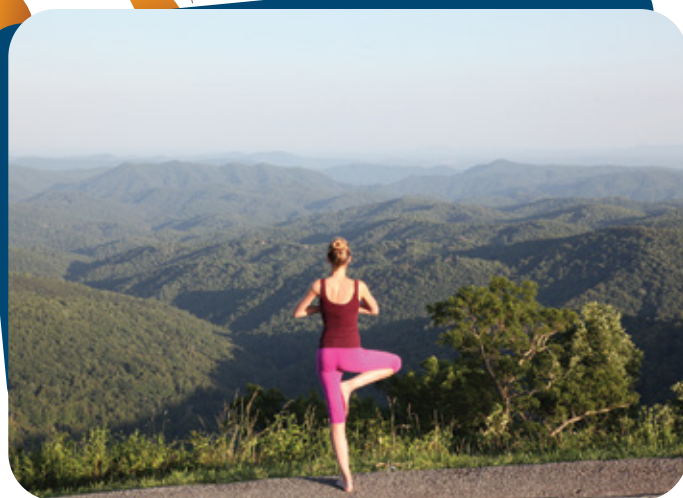
DESTINATIONS

Yoga retreats offer an escape from daily realities

Story by ANNE BRALY

When thermometers begin to rise, it's natural to think about a beach vacation, but during summer months, crowds are less than ideal. Instead, head toward the country and the mountains where you can get away from it all and reconnect with nature.

Here are five picturesque properties around the South to consider, each one far from your noisy neighbors and the stresses of everyday life. Some offer yoga, others a chance to hike new paths, while one is ideal for sitting back to catch up on your quilting or scrapbooking.



GRAND OAK RETREAT • SCOTTSBORO, ALABAMA

Grand Oak Retreat is located on a large stretch of land overlooking Lake Guntersville, cradled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. It's open to all, but caters to scrapbookers, quilters and other crafty folks.

The large lodge with a beautiful, wraparound porch has five bedrooms with multiple beds to accommodate most families or groups. There's a large work area where crafters can spread out and work while enjoying panoramic views of the lake. Snacks and drinks are available 24 hours a day in a well-stocked kitchen, and guests get three home-cooked meals with a menu that uses local ingredients depending on the season.

For a fully relaxed retreat, guests may arrange massages at an extra cost.

For reservations or more information, visit grandoakretreat.com.

TENNESSEE FITNESS SPA • WAYNESBORO, TENNESSEE

Think of a retreat to Tennessee Fitness Spa along historic Natchez Trace as a summer camp for adults. There's swimming, racquetball, a gym, sauna, hot tub and hiking trails around the picturesque Natural Bridge, a geologic formation thought to be the only double span natural bridge formation in the world. It's a short walk from the spa's dining hall and makes for a beautiful meditative experience.

The center places a strong focus on getting guests back in shape, whatever their goals: losing weight, quitting smoking, detoxing or simply relaxing by the pool. It's a good opportunity to shed that excess weight, whether it be physical or mental, through fitness training, yoga, meditation, water aerobics and more. Just let the staff know what you want, and they'll tailor a routine to meet your needs.

Accommodations range from standard rooms to penthouse suites and private cottages. Most people stay for one week, but guests can arrange for shorter stays, depending on availability.

For more information, visit tennesseefitnessspa.com.

THE RED HORSE INN LANDRUM, SOUTH CAROLINA

This hidden gem tucked into South Carolina's Blue Ridge mountains is an adults-only getaway offering an elegant escape from everyday routines. It's a chance to relax, recover and rejuvenate — all the things you want from a resort vacation. Leave the cooking, cleaning, kids and work behind. Disconnect from everyday life and reconnect with your partner.

Reserve a room in the inn or in one of a half dozen cottages, all with luxury bedding and other appointments. Breakfast is served daily, and afternoons can be spent on the terrace with a glass of wine from the award-winning wine bar.

The inn is located just north of Greenville, South Carolina, a town known for its food scene, and also an area folks looking for majestic waterfalls and nature trails visit.

For more information, visit theredhorseinn.com.

ART OF LIVING RETREAT BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA

Meditation and yoga are two powerful tools for bringing on health and happiness, and at Art of Living Retreat, high in the Blue Ridge Mountains overlooking Boone, North Carolina, you'll rediscover yourself. The center offers getaways focused on happiness and meditation, along with silent retreats. There's also Sri Sri yoga, an ancient, holistic method that integrates body, mind and spirit, targeting internal organs, circulation and body alignment.

Weekend retreats might also include artmaking and journaling or a girls-only time with nature trails, meditation and yoga. Packages at Art of Living include

accommodations at the center's Shankara Wellness hotel with meditation and yoga classes daily, along with one treatment like massage or relaxation therapy, and three meals a day. Snag a seat outside with views of the mountains if the weather allows.

For more information, visit artoflivingretreatcenter.org.

CLIFFVIEW RESORT CAMPTON, KENTUCKY

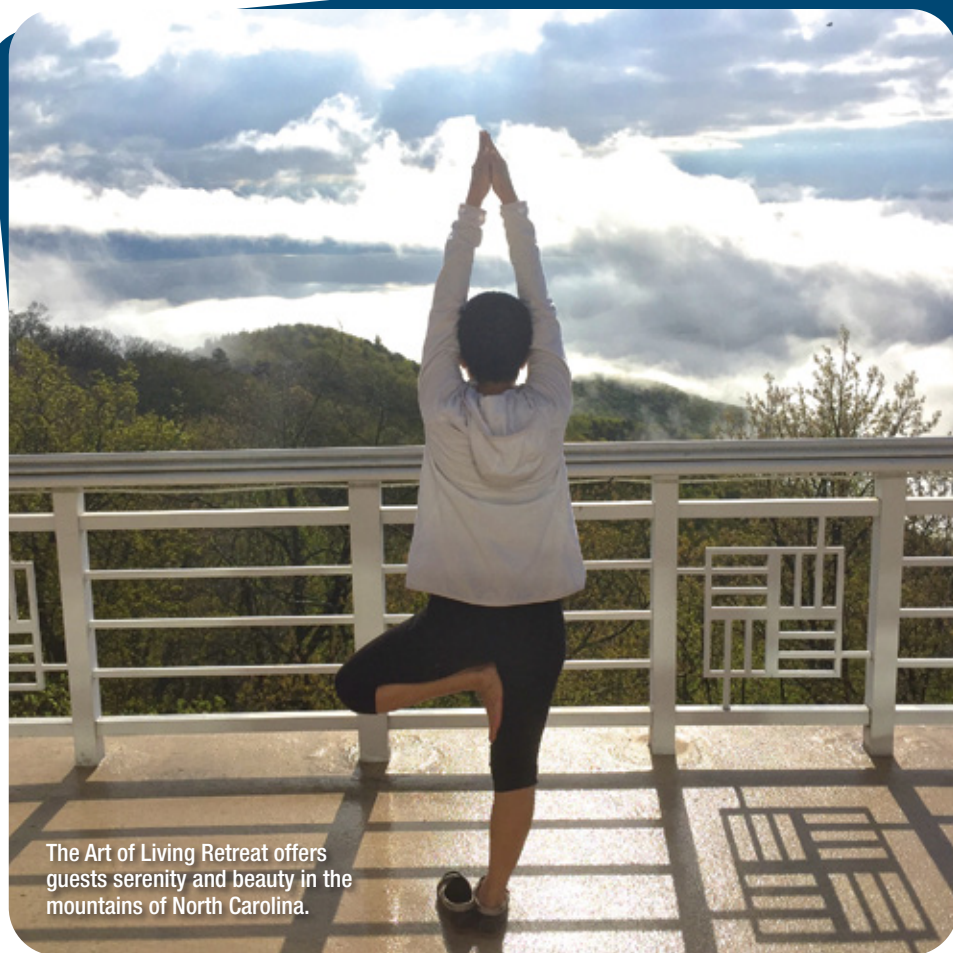
Come for stunning views of the Red River Gorge, and stay for the adventure you'll experience at Cliffview Resort.

There's plenty to do off the beaten track — a chance to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and connect with nature on a grand scale. Go rock climbing on the cliff high above, take a kayak and explore life in an underground cave beneath the gorge, or zip line above it to experience the magnificent Red River Gorge from a different perspective.

For a more relaxing retreat, take a leisurely walk on well-traveled paths, or wet a line and fish for your dinner from a stocked pond located on the resort property. Or venture over to the Red River and test your skill against smallmouth bass and sunfish.

Book a room in the lodge where you'll find a comfortable place to rest your head with breakfast the next morning. There are 16 rooms in the lodge, plus two cabins, each with 11 to 12 bedrooms and full kitchens to cook your own meals. Don't want to cook? You're on vacation, after all. Red River Gorge and nearby Daniel Boone National Forest have a number of restaurants with offerings ranging from pizza to hot dogs and barbecue to brew pubs.

For information, log onto cliffviewresort.com or call 606-668-5204. ☎



The Art of Living Retreat offers guests serenity and beauty in the mountains of North Carolina.

Dress to impress

Hi-Fashion Formals sells the fairy tale

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Brandi Ash doesn't exactly know how God works, but she definitely knows He's working. She's quick to point to her own experience as evidence.

For about 20 years, she and her mother, Mary Muncy, and her sister, Angie Evans, dreamed of owning a formal dress shop full of gowns, dresses, jewelry and tuxedos. Edgar "Hi" Hiram Muncy, Brandi and Angie's late father and Mary's late husband of 54 years, always wanted it for them, too. "He always saw us doing something like this," she says. "I think he knew we could make it something big one day."

Brandi, who had competed in pageants since she was a toddler, usually had to shop for gowns out of town, sometimes hours away. She and her family wanted a local shop to offer the highest-end selections at affordable prices. She also loved helping other girls find the perfect dress for proms, competitions and performances.

"You develop an eye for it," she says. "You know which designers have the best quality. I love being able to help people pick the absolute best dress for them and their personality and their features. We can really help them shine."

A DREAM COME TRUE

Still, as 20 years came and went, their dream stayed out of reach. "Then one day, my mom and I were shopping for a pageant gown for one of my own daughters, and we couldn't find anything," Brandi says. "So, my mom said, 'Why don't we just open a shop of our own?'"

With those words, the decades-long fantasy of owning a dress shop became a reality. "Everything happened very fast," Brandi says. "Things just aligned. We went from not even thinking it could happen to signing a lease and buying inventory in a matter of days."

In April 2021, Brandi, Mary and Angie opened Hi-Fashion Formals in Louisa. They used "Hi" in the name as a way to honor their late father and husband. "It's a tribute to him," Brandi says. "He saw our potential even when we didn't."



Hi-Fashion Formals offers dresses for all ages and budgets — from pageants to proms. It also sells accessories and rents tuxedos.

GOWNS, GOWNS AND MORE GOWNS

The shop offers a variety of prom and pageant gowns from toddlers on up, as well as shoes, jewelry and tuxedo rentals. They offer some of the harder-to-find names in gown design, including Sherri Hill, Portia & Scarlett and Giovanni. The shop's focus on quality brands has brought them to the attention of buyers all over the country. "We've shipped dresses to 30 states now," Brandi says.


But their focus on customer service continues to make Hi-Fashion Formals stand out. "We want to give each person a great experience," she says. "We always try to make sure they get the perfect gown to suit their personality and features."

The shop has also branched out to sell boutique items like Vera Bradley. A bridal wing on the second floor gives brides-to-be a place to shop the latest looks and try on dresses in private. With appointments, brides and others can have dressing rooms set up in advance with dresses picked out according to the wearer's size and style.

JUMPING IN

"We've thrown ourselves all the way into it," Brandi says. "We've sponsored Miss Kentucky and Miss West Virginia pageants, and we're hosting a local pageant to send a girl from our area to Miss Kentucky 2023. We also plan to start a teen advisory board next school year. We'll pick juniors and seniors from the high school to help us determine the most popular prom styles."

In doing the work, they've learned quickly to grow the business. They relied on Angie's and Mary's experience in restaurant operations and Brandi's knowledge of social media. "We use Facebook, TikTok, Twitter and Instagram," Brandi says. "It's an opportunity to get free advertising. As a business, you can't pass up that opportunity. It's what we need to reach our demographic of customers, which is mainly high school girls and young brides. Social media is a big part of their lives. It's a good way to reach our ideal customer base."

Hi-Fashion Formals has also produced fashion shows, complete with a runway and models. Brandi says they plan to offer more in the future. "We're just so excited about this," she says. 

From left, owners Brandi Ash, Mary Muncy and Angie Evans opened Hi-Fashion Formals in April 2021 in Louisa.



Photography by John Michael Lacey



Sparkle on

* Hi-Fashion Formals recently moved their shop to 164 Townhill Road in Louisa. The shop offers all the latest formal gown styles for adults and children for every size and budget. They can order dresses they don't have on hand, and dresses can start as low as \$49. While they don't offer in-house alterations, they can suggest services. Designers include Sherri Hill, Giovanni and Portia & Scarlett. The shop also sells shoes, accessories and boutique items from brands like Vera Bradley, and they rent tuxedos for special occasions. For more information, operating hours and sneak peeks at the latest offerings, visit them on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter. The shop offers appointments and they can ship across the country if necessary.

GAMING on the GO

Sure, mobile games may be a distraction many of us turn to while waiting in line or during a slow episode of our favorite TV binge. But that doesn't mean they have to be bad. As our mobile devices have evolved into tiny computers in our pockets, the visuals and clever design of mobile games have grown right along with them. If you're burned out on Angry Birds and Candy Crush, try one of these games to keep your idle thumbs busy.

Good Sudoku

There are plenty of sudoku apps available but only one that puts goodness right in the name. The game's designers set out with the goal of helping players fall in love with the familiar Japanese logic puzzles. Clear difficulty levels, helpful hints and coaching for new techniques at each level make it the perfect entry for the sudoku-curious out there. If you're already a logic master, it also has more than 70,000 puzzles to be conquered and a global leaderboard to chase.

THREES

You'd be hard-pressed to find a better puzzle game than Threes. It's easy to pick up since there are only four directions a player can swipe. But the task of pairing numbers into ever greater multiples of three can quickly become a challenge requiring players to think at least three moves ahead. Whether you're looking to pass 5 minutes or chase high scores on the leaderboard, Threes is worth checking out.

Among Us

Among Us became wildly popular in 2020 in part because it's easy to understand. A group of players attempts to prep their spaceship for takeoff while one imposter tries to pick the others off while no one is looking. It's a simple premise that can lead to chaotic hijinks as players try to smoke out the saboteur. Lying to your friends has never been so fun.

DEVICE 6

Who knew your phone could be the perfect platform for a clever noir story? Device 6 puts players in the role of Anna, a woman with amnesia trying to figure out how she woke up on a mysterious island. The game infuses the classic text adventure genre with modern style and engaging visuals as words move around the screen in unexpected ways. If you're looking for something a little different from the typical mobile experience, Device 6 is bound to have a few welcome surprises in store.

NYT CROSSWORD

Sure, you could pull out the newspaper and pen to fill out your crossword the old-school way. Or you could save yourself the ink stains and errors by tackling the daily crossword on your phone. The app offers Mini and Midi puzzles for a challenge you can knock out in minutes. Or take on the full crossword each day, along with the archive of over 10,000 puzzles. Now there's no excuse not to stay sharp.





Make the CONNECTION

The video game industry remains scorching hot, and not just because people turned to a virtual distraction during the pandemic. Certainly, they did. However, the trajectory of the gaming industry continues a yearslong trend of increased popularity.

Nielsen, a company tracking how various audiences use media, provided some insight last year into video game usage.

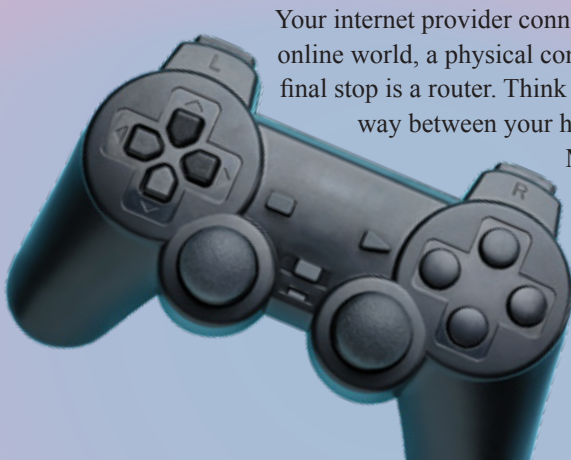
At one point during the pandemic, 55% of U.S. consumers reported playing video games. In fact, people were buying games at a fast clip, with sales rising about 14% during 2020.

There's a twist with modern gaming, too. People use it to connect with each other. The game Fortnite became famous for in-game live events, and more and more people began using services like Twitch to watch others play games, according to Nielsen.

Simply, gaming goes beyond, well, just a game. It's an experience, one made possible by fast, reliable internet.

But are you maximizing your connection for how you experience gaming?

THE CONNECTION



Your internet provider connects your home to the online world, a physical connection where the final stop is a router. Think of this as the gateway between your home and the internet.

Most modern routers allow two types of connections: Wi-Fi and Ethernet.

BENEFITS OF WI-FI

Wi-Fi uses radio waves to connect the router to your devices, eliminating the clutter of cables. Devices ranging from televisions to refrigerators can use this technology to connect online.

Gaming-related benefits of Wi-Fi include:

- Convenient for mobile games on phones and iPads.
- The ability to connect multiple devices without cables.
- Most devices, including computers, set-top boxes and more, have Wi-Fi connectivity. The same can't be said for wired Ethernet connections. Even some laptops lack the option for an Ethernet connection.
- For watching streaming content such as Twitch, Wi-Fi wirelessly takes devices ranging from TVs to tablets online.

BENEFITS OF ETHERNET — WHEN GAMING GETS SERIOUS

An Ethernet connection is a physical link between your device and router. With modern online gaming, success can depend upon how fast the twitch of a finger on a controller can be translated into actions in an online world living on a faraway computer server.

When speed matters, an Ethernet is often the right option.

- Consistency: Unlike Wi-Fi signals, which can be affected by walls or even signals from other devices, the wired connection's speed should remain consistent with that provided by your internet service.
- Lower latency, which is the time it takes a bit of data to leave your device, reach its online destination and then complete the round trip. With gaming, lower latency is critical, and Ethernet is a difference-maker.
- Simple and secure: Connect an Ethernet cable to your device and to your router and get playing. It's that simple. Unlike with Wi-Fi routers, you typically do not need to enter a password to connect.
- The downside is that cable clutter is real. Serious gamers in particular, though, will benefit from devices connected via Ethernet.

DIRT TIME

Local gardener finds blessings in the soil

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Valentine's Day or a birthday rolls around, Roberta Durham won't ask for candy or jewelry. And she doesn't need a bouquet of cut flowers from a florist or a fancy gift from a boutique.

No, the path to this Horse Cave woman's heart winds directly through her acre of gardens. "For my birthday this year, my husband actually ordered me a truckload of river rock. It was exactly what I wanted," says Roberta, whose passion for growing things has resulted in a four-season cycle of produce and flowers.

In addition to her lettuces and greens, potatoes, tomatoes and corn, Roberta, a longtime nursing instructor at Big Sandy Community & Technical College in Prestonsburg, raises squash and pickling cucumbers, beans, grapes and flowers. She tends to rows and raised beds, planters and even a small greenhouse.

"I could send you a list," she says. "I know what plants work in my soil, and I have heirloom seeds I save from year to year."

HERITAGE, HEALTH AND PURPOSE

But there's more to gardening than just growing food, she says.

For one thing, it's a way to connect with her roots. Growing up in Morgan County, her parents always kept a traditional garden full of rows of beans and corn, tomatoes and greens. "It was our way," she says. "We gardened through the summer so we could eat through the winter. We harvested and canned. Now, I know the nutrition aspect of that can't be beat."

As a nurse, Roberta knows the health benefits of gardening go beyond the nutrients in her pesticide-free plants, as well. "As people get older, they can develop arthritis. The key to that is to move, move, move. With gardening, you're moving those joints. You're also using your mind and you're relieving stress."

GRATITUDE AND FELLOWSHIP

In addition to the connection she feels to the garden itself, Roberta has built a strong fellowship with a local community of gardeners. She also shares her love of



Roberta Durham and her husband, Robert, spend most of their free time tending to their plants.

gardening and various tips through videos and other posts on her personal Facebook page. "We all share our seeds, our plants, our produce, and our knowledge," she says. "We give each other whatever we can spare, and we're willing to give it to anyone who needs it. In our area, people have that generosity."

But the most important aspect of gardening for Roberta is the peaceful feeling it brings her. "It's just a blessing to kneel down in the dirt. I call it my dirt time," she says. "Every time I plant something, I pray for the Lord to bless it, and he does. Being in that garden — it's just a great place to fellowship with him and thank him for everything He does in your life." ☞



Above, Roberta Durham's garden is nothing less than a work of art and includes flowers and produce. Right, Roberta and Robert Durham.



Photography by John Michael Laney



HEALING HOBBY

Health care researchers already know that gardening offers dozens of direct and indirect benefits for physical and mental wellness, including everything from lowered blood pressure to staving off dementia.

Studies the National Institutes of Health cites note that one of the greatest benefits of gardening is simply getting gardeners out of the house and into the sun. "Sunlight lowers blood pressure as well as increasing vitamin D levels in the summer, and the fruit and vegetables that are produced have a positive impact on the diet," according to a report from the NIH website.

But it's not just about the sun. An active hobby also makes for an active mind. Figuring out different soil mixtures, making mental notes on how to get better produce or flowers and researching various techniques can activate the brain and keep it functioning for years to come.

In addition, all that digging, raking and tending helps restore strength and dexterity, not to mention offering up a little aerobic exercise. With all these benefits, what's not to love about gardening?

Studies have shown that a gardening hobby is good for the body and soul. Here are a few of the great things gardening can do, according to research:

- Gardening combines physical activity with social interaction and exposure to nature and sunlight.
- It makes a positive impact on diet and nutrition.
- It is a sustainable and effective way to get exercise and burn calories.
- It is mentally and emotionally therapeutic to nurture plants and watch things grow.

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Containers for the win

Some people might worry they don't have enough space or even the right tools to get started. Lifelong gardener and nursing instructor Roberta Durham disagrees. "You can start a garden anywhere," she says. "If you want to start out small, you can grow something in an old water bucket with a hole in the bottom. Any kind of container will do."

For more information on getting started with container gardening, thespruce.com offers these simple tips for starting a container garden. You only need a container, plants, soil, water and maybe a trowel. Here are a few reasons to get behind container gardening:

- » **Controlling the soil mixture.** Figuring out the best types of soil for each plant might take a little time and research. But with some knowledge, you can grow just about any plant whether or not it's native to your region.
- » **Mobility.** Container gardening offers the option of moving plants around to the sunniest spots. You can also move them indoors if conditions outside grow harsh.
- » If you have little to no outdoor space, containers still offer a great way to get all the benefits of gardening.

For more tips and tutorials about gardening, visit these YouTube channels, or find your own with an online search:

- The Gardening Channel with James Prigioni
- Next Level Gardening
- CaliKim Garden & Home DIY
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So *fresh* and so

A unique technique locks more flavor in your veggies

The profusion of fresh vegetables coming our way this spring means it's time to learn a bit about blanching, a technique that brings out the beautiful flavors that only fresh produce can bring — a taste explosion.

Blanching can be a cook's best friend. It destroys enzymes that make green veggies turn brown and mushy, so it's ideal when you want to add green vegetables, such as peas and asparagus, to your risotto. Blanching also removes bitterness from some of our more bitter vegetables, like broccoli rabe. It's also a great way to skin tomatoes, as blanching loosens the skins without cooking the fruit, something that also works for peaches and plums. And if you're planning to prepare and serve a veggie platter, blanch the carrots, broccoli, pea pods and cauliflower. The veggies will retain their color, but your guests will find them much easier to chew.

Blanching is nothing more than boiling vegetables until they're just crisp-tender, then plunging them in an icy bath. It sounds like a simple process, and it is, but there are just a few steps to follow to bring out the best of spring and summer's bounties.

If you're a vegetable gardener, think ahead for the cold days of winter when the flavor of fresh vegetables is just a memory, that is, unless you've blanched in advance of freezing them. Not only does blanching preserve the color and texture of your vegetables, it will also preserve their nutrient content.

Now that you know why you should blanch, here's how:

In order to stop the enzyme action that breaks vegetables down, the food must reach 180 degrees.

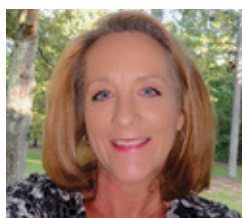
The time spent in boiling water and time spent in ice water should be roughly equal. If you're not able to prepare a cold immersion for your vegetables, putting them in a colander under cold running water will work.

Adding salt to your boiling water will help make green vegetables even greener. Steer clear of lemon juice or other acids, though; these will react with the

chlorophyll and turn your greens brown. And don't use baking soda — it will damage the nutrients found in vegetables.

Use 1 gallon of water for each pound of food to be blanched. If you overload the water with vegetables, it will lower the water's temperature and slow the cooking process, defeating the purpose.

Once the vegetables are crisp-tender, move them from the boiling water and into a large container of ice water. This will stop the cooking process. Then you're ready to bag them for freezing or use them right away in your spring and summer meals. 🍷



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

clean

SALAD NICOISE

- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- 1/2 pound of small potatoes
- 1/2 pound of green beans, blanched
- 1/2 head of green lettuce, washed and torn into bite-sized pieces
- 1 (7-ounce) can of tuna fish
- 4 ounces of tomatoes, diced, or cherry tomatoes
- 10 black olives
- 2 tablespoons of capers
- 1/2 cup of vinaigrette dressing (your favorite)

Cook the potatoes until tender and let cool.

Build each salad starting with a layer of lettuce, then add half the vegetables, including potatoes, tuna, eggs and olives to each plate. Sprinkle with capers. Serve with vinaigrette dressing. Makes 2 servings.



RISOTTO WITH BLANCHED ASPARAGUS

- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed, cut into 2-inch lengths
- 5 cups canned or homemade chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1 1/2 cups arborio rice
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 3/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (about 3 ounces)

Blanch asparagus pieces in a large pot of boiling, salted water for 2 minutes. Drain. Rinse asparagus under cold water. Drain asparagus well.

Bring chicken broth to a simmer in a small saucepan. Reduce heat to low and keep broth hot. Heat olive oil in a heavy large saucepan over medium heat. Add chopped onion and saute until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add rice and stir for 3 minutes. Add dry white wine and cook until liquid evaporates. Continue cooking until rice is tender but still slightly firm in center and mixture is creamy, adding chicken broth 1 cup at a time and stirring almost constantly, about 20 minutes. Add blanched asparagus pieces and stir until heated through, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Add 6 tablespoons butter and stir until incorporated. Stir in grated Parmesan cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Makes 4-6 servings.

WALNUT BROCCOLI SALAD

- 2 pounds broccoli florets
- 1/2 cup toasted walnuts
- 1/2 cup jumbo mixed raisins
- 8 strips bacon cooked and crumbled
- 1/2 red onion thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Bring a big pot of water to a boil and season it liberally with salt. It should taste like the ocean. Add the broccoli florets to the water and cook for 60 seconds, until they're bright green in color. Immediately drain the broccoli florets, then rinse with cold water for 2 minutes or place in an ice-water bath until the broccoli has cooled down.

Transfer the broccoli to a salad spinner, and spin the broccoli dry or drain well if you don't have a spinner. Then blot dry further with a kitchen towel to prevent any excess water from diluting the dressing.

Combine the broccoli with the toasted walnuts, raisins, bacon, onion, mayonnaise, vinegar and salt and black pepper, to taste. Stir well. Chill for at least 30 minutes, preferably an hour, before serving to allow the flavors to marry. Makes 6 servings.



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