

# CONNECTION

## Paws-itively purrfect

Creekside's Christmas  
photos with pets

**MOUNTAIN  
MUSIC**

**FORT BENNING  
MUSEUM**





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Rural broadband thrives in 2022

The commitment and professionalism of rural broadband providers creates lasting and substantive improvements, bringing essential services that bridge the gap in internet performance between rural and metropolitan areas. In many cases, NTCA members offer even more robust services than those available in larger cities.

In recent years, Congress has passed billions in funding for rural broadband. I was fortunate to attend a White House ceremony last year for the signing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which included over \$60 billion for broadband projects.

NTCA has worked to ensure this funding goes to communities that need it most, as well as to providers, such as yours, with a long history of servicing their neighbors with the highest-quality broadband.

While broadband expansion is a priority, we've continued our focus on advocacy, including working with the Federal Communications Commission to ensure the long-term viability of the Universal Service Fund. It's a program that helps Americans in hard-to-serve areas keep pace with services found in more densely populated communities.

We've also expanded our Smart Rural Community program to highlight the great things robust broadband access brings to rural America — it's not just cities that are "smart!" Over 240 providers are part of the program. Visit [smartruralcommunity.org](https://smartruralcommunity.org) for more information.

As we celebrate our wins from this year, we're looking forward to an even better 2023. 🍀

TO ALL WHO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

*Thank you*

FOR ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Fast internet access is essential for rural communities to thrive in a fast-changing, highly connected world.



*High-Speed Internet*



*Voice Communications*



*Videoconferencing*



*Telehealth*



*Business-level Data Tools*



*Online Education*



*Streaming Video & Music*

Professionals in your community make this possible — working daily to help you lead a better life.

*Thank you for all you do!*

# Business is booming

## Apps help small business owners thrive

**R**unning a small business is no easy task. There's a long list of things to keep track of, from inventory and sales to payroll and budgeting. It can get overwhelming staying ahead of the curve.

Thankfully, there's a wide array of apps geared toward making the life of a small business owner easier. Listed below are some of the best apps in 2022 for small businesses.

### POINT OF SALE SYSTEMS

These systems allow small businesses to complete sales and ring up customers. According to NerdWallet, restaurants require POS systems that provide coordination and table management, while a retail store requires inventory management features.

**Square** — The POS offered by the financial tech company Square meets all these requirements and much more. Square is easy to use, offering transparent pricing, live support and compatibility with iPhone, iPad and Android devices. The first magnetic stripe credit card reader is free, and there is even a free plan available for small businesses that don't require advanced functions. While many payment processors have hidden monthly fees, Square doesn't charge by the month. Instead, you pay 2.6% + 10 cents for each credit card transaction for unlimited devices.

### ACCOUNTING AND BUDGETING

Accounting software helps small businesses that may not be able to hire a full-time, in-house accountant. With these apps, you can track profit margins, revenues, expenses and budgets to understand the health of your business.

**Intuit QuickBooks** — Intuit QuickBooks is the industry standard and leader for small business accounting software in 2022, according to NerdWallet. It offers a multitude of service tiers, so it can easily be scaled to the size of the business it serves. It is accessible anywhere from QuickBooks online to the cloud-based version. Some of QuickBooks' best features include a full suite of reports, double-entry accounting, ease of accessibility and sharing with outside accountants, live service bookkeeping support and easy mobile access. Pricing is \$25 a month with other monthly payment tiers (\$50, \$80 and \$180 respectively).

### PAYROLL

Paying employees on time is essential to operating a business. Extra help tracking hours and payments can allow small businesses owners to give attention to many other daily aspects of running their companies.



**Patriot Payroll** — While there are lots of payroll apps on the market, a majority of them are so high-priced that the cost outweighs the benefit of extra help for smaller companies. Patriot Payroll has an affordable price point — \$10 a month, plus \$4 an employee — while offering the same services and benefits as its more expensive counterparts. These services include a one-month free trial, HR support and coverage for up to 100 employees.

### INVENTORY

Tracking inventory is a crucial part of staying ahead of the curve for any business. It is no easy task without help, which is why large corporations dedicate entire teams and extensive software programs just for inventory.

**Sortly** — With built-in barcode scanning that can track stock across multiple warehouses, Sortly has everything you need to manage inventory on the go. It offers both barcode and QR code scanning, giving you the flexibility to use what works best for your business. It even has an offline mode, so a signal interruption won't slow you down. Keep scanning incoming and outgoing items and seamlessly sync up once you're back online. 📶

# Annual reflections

## Together, we make our community better

**A**s the final days of 2022 unfold and we enter a season of celebration and remembrance, I enjoy the opportunity to reflect on this place we call home and what Foothills' purpose is here.



**RUTH CONLEY**  
Chief Executive Officer

Many of us lead lives where it seems the accelerator is always pushed to the floor. Between raising families, bustling careers, volunteering and embracing active pastimes, everyone is flying through life. But the holidays — while busy in their own way — are a chance to take solace and find respite in traditions like sharing past family memories while creating new ones, great meals and some belly laughs. We might even find a few quiet moments if we're lucky.

During these times of reflection, I appreciate a theme that runs through our community — neighbors helping neighbors. In so many ways, these connections are what make rural places like ours special. We rally together in hard times. We celebrate good times as a community. We also embrace the teamwork needed to build for

the future, which is at the core of Foothills' mission.

I will never forget this company's history or the role it plays, because it's far different than that of the for-profit businesses serving our nation's metropolitan areas. Rather than focusing on stock prices or maximizing profits, Foothills was created to support our hometowns. When larger national companies ignored us, calling our communities too rural and small to be a sound investment, our founders stepped up. It began with telephone lines connecting homes and businesses. But the work didn't stop there. Now, we provide a suite of modern communications tools and a fast and dependable internet network that would create envy in many of the largest cities.

This network is not something built only by our leaders. Instead, it's a creation made possible by you and the people you see every day at the grocery store or at school events. We are a company made up of people devoted to helping their neighbors. Few other communications companies can say the same.

Does that make Foothills special? Certainly, we're proud of the work we do because it benefits others. However, I fully appreciate that we're far from alone in having a goal of uplifting those around us. Our places of worship, schools, locally owned businesses, first responders and more bring that same spirit to their day-to-day missions.

It's this sentiment that also reminds me to appreciate those who served and sacrificed in the name of our nation. Veterans Day is Nov. 11. Please take some time to appreciate the sons and daughters of this community who made the choice to serve. Rural areas like ours have a long history of service to the armed forces, something we should never forget. Truly, are there any more profound examples of neighbors helping neighbors?

And during this time of celebration, I need to thank everyone who is part of the Foothills family. Every department — every individual — plays a vital part in bringing you the services you need in this fast-paced world, we have some of the very best here.

From everyone at Foothills, thank you for allowing us to serve you for another year and we wish you all a wonderful Thanksgiving and a very merry Christmas. 📺



# CONNECTION

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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.

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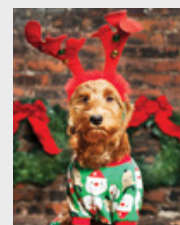
### Foothills Mission Statement

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

Produced for Foothills Communications by:



### On the Cover:



Creekside Stitchin' & Feed in Salyersville plans to offer pet photos with Santa for the second year in a row.  
See story Page 8.

Adobe Stock/Kathy images



# Explore premium channels for FREE



Foothills Communications loves to show its appreciation for our customers. So, sit back and relax with a great movie or original show from our exceptional premium channels for free. See below for channels and dates:

- **Showtime** — Nov. 24-27
- **HBO** — Dec. 3-4
- **Cinemax** — Dec. 10-11
- **Starz/Encore** — Dec. 17-18
- **Enjoy all premium movie channels** — Dec. 24-Jan. 3



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** — Laptop
- ★ **Platinum Customer prize** — \$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. For more information, call 606-297-3501, or visit our website at [foothills.net](http://foothills.net).

## *Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas to all!*

Everyone at Foothills Communications wishes 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. 24 and 25
- **Christmas:** Dec. 23 — closing at noon, closed on Friday, Dec. 24
- **New Year's Day:** Monday, Jan. 2



# Don't get your tinsel in a tangle

Story by ANNE BRALY

**D**ecorating the Christmas tree is a beloved holiday tradition, but before you can hang the ornaments, take photos of the grandkids beneath its boughs or open presents beside it, you've got to find one.

Visiting a Christmas tree farm can put you in the spirit of the season as you make family memories while supporting a local business. And you'll bring home the absolute freshest trees, wreaths and greenery possible, so everything will last much longer.

"The whole idea of starting a family tradition is about creating a fun environment that the whole family can participate in," says Greg Shell, who, along with his wife, Weeta, established Shell's Christmas Tree Farm in 1988 on their property in Tuscumbia, Alabama. "It gives people a chance to slow down and spend time together creating special memories."

It's a family business for Greg and Weeta, whose two sons, Aaron and Chad, have helped out on the farm since they were 8 years old. Now grown men, they bring their own families to help when the Christmas tree season is in full swing. With more than 3,000 trees growing on the 44-acre farm, would-be buyers have plenty of options. Available species include Virginia pine, Leyland cypress, variegated Leylands, Carolina sapphires and blue ice cypress. Also, the Shells bring in freshly cut Fraser firs from the Blue Ridge Mountains and sell them starting Thanksgiving Day.

Shoppers receive tags with their names, and the Shells provide bow saws for those looking to cut their own trees. Or participants can simply tie their tags to trees, which staff will cut and then measure and shake before drilling holes in their bottoms and netting them for transport. Prices start at \$8 per foot.

But don't stop with the tree. Enjoy a warm cup of apple cider, visit with Santa, let the kids play in their own area, and enjoy the bonfire. There are also food trucks and a huge room filled with holiday greenery. "We're all about offering something for families to do together," Greg says. "And we're now seeing fourth-generation families visit our farm. It's pretty cool to see families want to continue to the next generation."

For more information, visit [shellschristmastreefarm.com](http://shellschristmastreefarm.com).

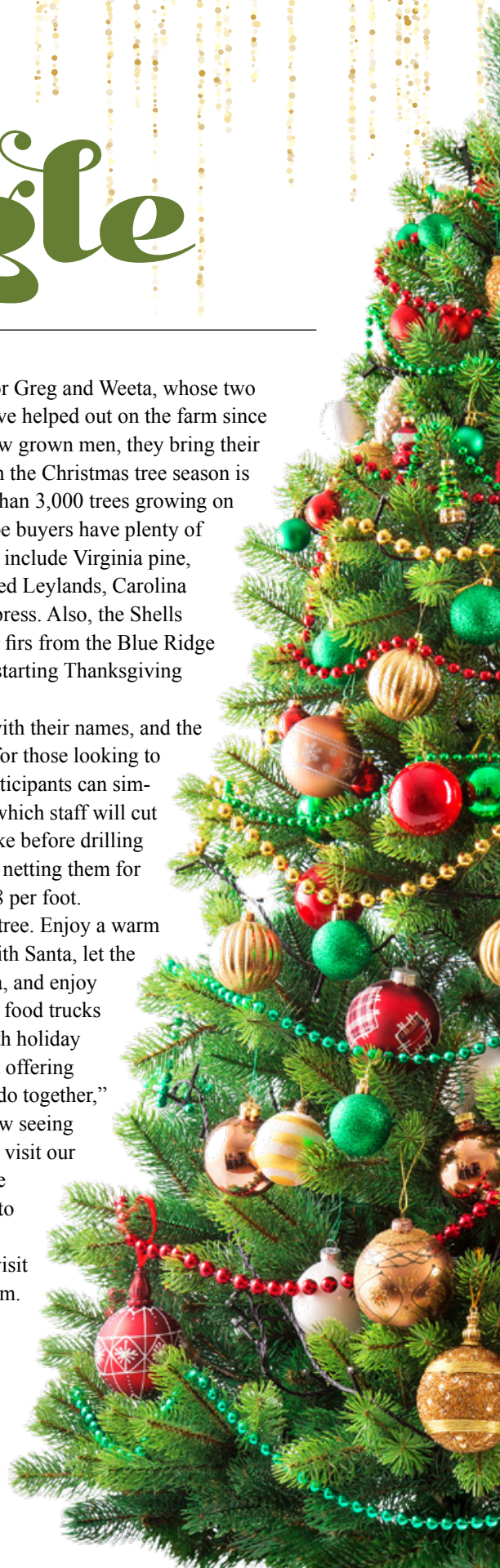
Get in the holiday spirit — visit a Christmas tree farm. You'll have a chance to make family memories, possibly sample tasty treats and return home with a fresh, beautiful tree.



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©Serilly Hirshey/Adobe Stock







## TREE FARMS ACROSS THE SOUTH

**Sycamore Springs Christmas Tree Farm, Jamestown, Tennessee** — White and Scotch pines, Norway spruce and Leyland cypress. Search the Gingerbread Trail through the forest for the runaway gingerbread men, explore the Tree Treasure Maze to find the real treasure of Christmas. Browse in The Treehouse gift shop and enjoy homemade cookies, hot chocolate and apple cider. Full details are online at [sycamorespringsfarmtn.com](http://sycamorespringsfarmtn.com).

**Roberts Family Farm, Guston, Kentucky** — White pine, Fraser fir and balsam fir, plus local crafts and Momma Rob's Bakery. Learn more at [robertsfamilyfarmky.com](http://robertsfamilyfarmky.com).

**Lebanon Christmas Tree Farm, Ridgeville, South Carolina** — Leyland cypress, Carolina sapphire, spruce pine and Virginia pine. Also, hayrides, a barrel train ride for the kiddies and more. There's also an on-site restaurant, The Farmer's Daughter. Learn more at [lebanonchristmastree.com](http://lebanonchristmastree.com).

**Thornhill Farm Christmas Trees, Pisgah, Alabama** — Leyland cypress and white pines. Enjoy hot chocolate or warm cider while they cut, shake and bag your chosen tree for you. Online: [thornhillchristmastrees.com](http://thornhillchristmastrees.com).

**Green Cedar Tree Farm, Nicholasville, Kentucky** — Freshly cut Fraser firs and blue spruce trees from the Blue Ridge Mountains available on Saturday, Nov. 26, for the farm's annual Green Cedar Christmas, a festival with free hot cocoa, lessons in making holiday wreaths, farm animal encounters and live Christmas music. Also, find the perfect spot to get your family picture taken for your photo Christmas cards. Any trees left over will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. Details online at [greencedarfarm.com](http://greencedarfarm.com).

**Turkey Creek Christmas Tree Farm, McCormick, South Carolina** — White pine, Virginia pine, Leyland cypress, Eastern red cedar, blue ice cypress and Carolina sapphire. Play area for the kids. Check out the farm's Facebook page for the latest offerings. Learn more at [turkeycreek-christmastreefarm.com](http://turkeycreek-christmastreefarm.com). 📱

## Tips for a fresh tree

Naturally, a newly cut tree is going to be fresher than one that's been on a lot for a while, but it still needs some TLC. Here are some tips to help your tree last the season:

- 🌲 Start with a healthy, vibrant tree. You're going to get that from a tree farm, but be sure to trim any lower or dead branches.
- 🌲 Make a clean, straight cut across the bottom. Most tree farms will do this for you and drill a hole in the bottom if you have the kind of tree stand that needs one.
- 🌲 Water, water, water. Get the tree in water as soon as you come home and continue to water every day.
- 🌲 Keep the tree cool and away from any heat source that will dry it out.
- 🌲 Use LED lights. They don't get as hot, though they won't give the traditional light you may desire.
- 🌲 After Christmas, recycle your Christmas tree. Many towns offer a free service that turns them into mulch.



# Picture Time!



## Unique feed store adds pet photos with Santa

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Avavan and Ricky Deaton started A&J Farm in Salyersville in 1996, they figured raising beef cattle would keep them busy enough. But that thought changed after a historic outbreak of deadly tornadoes tore through the region, leaving communities devastated and farmers in need of food and medicine for their animals.

"People from all over the state and the rest of the country started sending feed and supplies to these local farmers that got wiped out," Avavan says. "We had an excessive amount of cattle people from other areas coming in, and our farm ended up being a good place for drop-offs and pickups. We had the tractors and the storage area for it."

Once the crisis ended, the Deatons realized they could open their own feed store since they already had the equipment. "We saw a need for a local place to get all those things farmers just can't get at Walmart," Avavan says. "That's how we got started."

Nearly a decade later, the little feed store has grown into Creekside Stitchin' & Feed, a multipurpose shop that offers everything from animal feed and vet supplies to Kentucky Proud items and personalized embroidery services. "We try to be all-purpose," Avavan says with a laugh. "We've got a little bit of everything."

### SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN

But it's Creekside Stitchin' & Feed's latest venture that has caused a ripple of excitement to course through the community — pet photos with Santa Claus. The idea was the brainchild of Jenna Mullins, the Deatons' daughter and the newest owner-operator of the shop. The photo sessions started last year over two days in December, but the interest grew so intense that the family needed to add more sessions this year. They also decided to recruit two Santas. "We have a backup this time because Santa got dog bit last year," Avavan says. "It got a little hectic."

Store staff expects the pet photo sessions to take place over two weekends beginning after Thanksgiving. Each session is by appointment to keep people from waiting in line with their animals. "We don't want everybody's animals getting upset, and with COVID-19, we don't want anybody crammed in together, just in case," Avavan says.

Avavan says she was surprised at the popularity of the Santa pictures, even if it was the exact reaction they'd hoped for. "We had Great Danes and kittens," she says, laughing. "There was some other kind of furry animal, too, but I'm not real sure what it was. We're just always looking for ways to bring customers to the farm."

### COMMUNITY CONNECTION

The family started the shop as a way to fill a void in their community, but they realize businesses like theirs are rare these days. "Our customers come from other counties because we have





**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Santa sits with a boy and his puppy during a Creekside Stitchin' & Feed Christmas photo session for pets. A customer gets a Christmas photo with her Great Danes. Creekside's Santa doesn't mind posing with stuffed animals.



Photos contributed by Jenna Mullins

unique products,” Avavan says. “A lot of people like the idea of getting a personalized belt or wallet for their dad — in real leather.”

Avavan, Ricky and Jenna also make it their mission to keep farming alive for future generations. Each fall, they join forces with the local extension agency to hold a farmers’ field day. “It’s an educational and fun day on the farm,” Avavan says. “We try to hold all kinds of events for all different ages, so everyone can enjoy it.”

A&J Farm also continues to be a gathering place. “Customers can come in and get free coffee and free doughnuts,” Avavan says. “We also have a big table for people to sit around and do their trading. They can sell cattle or hay, or whatever they want to do.”

Headed by Jenna, the store also started offering delivery and drive-up services for customers’ convenience. “We’ve grown so much,” Avavan says. “We’re taking our small farm to the next level by using the resources that we already have.”



The Creekside Stitchin' & Feed family keeps growing the business. Pictured from left, Jenna Mullins, her son, Weston Mullins, Ricky Deaton and Avavan Deaton.

# Have yourself a merry little Christmas

Creekside Stitchin' & Feed is at 6203 Bear Branch Road in Salyersville. The store sells animal feed, vet supplies, pet products and gifts, as well as an array of Kentucky Proud items like raw honey, fresh sorghum and goat milk soaps. In addition, the shop personalizes hats, jackets and leather items and offers delivery and drive-up service for customers. To find out more about the shop's latest offerings and events, visit and like its Facebook page. Pet photos with Santa are set to take place over two weekends sometime after Thanksgiving. To learn more or book an appointment, call 606-349-2697.



# Your *connected* gift guide

## 6 gift ideas that make the most of your high-speed internet

The holiday shopping season is here, and there has never been a better time to find the perfect gadget that takes advantage of your high-speed internet connection. From tools that make working from home look good to devices to unwind with, high-speed service will help these gifts shine for the techie in your life.

### 1. Google Nest Hub, \$50

Give the gift of better mornings with the Google

Nest Hub. Designed for the bedside, it can track sleep quality, update you on the weather and your calendar, stream music and video and control any smart home appliances you might have. It even has a built-in light sensor to make sure the screen is never too bright. Let's see an alarm clock do that.

### 2. Sonos Roam, \$180

The Roam is the perfect portable speaker for anyone on the move. Stream music, podcasts and more with great audio quality and take them from one room to the next with ease. Roam's Wi-Fi support automatically joins any other Sonos speakers around the house and also works as a smart speaker, connecting to Amazon's Alexa or Google Assistant.

### 3. Kindle Paperwhite, \$140

For the bookworm in the family, the Kindle Paperwhite is still the best e-reader around. The glare-free display is just like reading on real paper, while the 2021 model adds a warm light option to make reading at night easier on the eyes. Purchase new books or download old favorites in seconds without ever leaving your

favorite reading chair.

### 4. Logitech C920S Webcam, \$74

More people are working from home than ever before, so help the remote workers in your life look good while being productive. This Logitech webcam will offer a big upgrade over any built-in camera. It's also ideal for the livestreamers, offering great video quality at an affordable price.

### 5. Xbox Game Pass, \$9.99/month

If you're giving or receiving an Xbox Series X, Game Pass is a no-brainer. Essentially Netflix for games, the service offers hundreds of games on demand, from the biggest Xbox exclusives available on launch day to creative indies from your favorite developers. Download games in minutes with a fiber connection and discover something new.

### 6. Apple AirTag, \$30

Know someone who's always losing their keys? These tiny Bluetooth trackers are here to help. Attach them to your keys or anything else you're prone to misplacing, and the AirTag will leverage the network of nearby Apple devices to locate it — in some cases, within inches. For the Android user, the Tile Mate is just as handy. ☑





# Tasty app-etizers

## 6 digital tools to level up your kitchen skills

Even the most experienced home cooks can use a little inspiration now and then. Fortunately, it's never been easier to find. The wide variety of cooking apps and websites available today make it easy to plan meals and even eat healthier. Whether you're looking to ditch the stacks of faded recipes, make something new or find video instructions to walk you through every step, these tools will bring a little extra flavor to your kitchen.



**SideChef** — If you're just starting out in the kitchen, SideChef is great for learning the basics. A cooking novice created the app for beginners, and it does away with fancy culinary terminology and instead offers dynamic guidance through recipes, providing step-by-step photos, hands-free voice commands and built-in timers. There are over 18,000 interactive smart recipes to try out, so pick your favorite and get cooking.



**Food Network Kitchen** — Craving something you just saw on the Food Network? The Food Network Kitchen features recipes from fan-favorite personalities and food writers, along with prep time, cook time and difficulty level.

Any fan of the network will feel right at home in the app, which lets you search more than 80,000 recipes for categories like grilling, baking, kid-friendly and dairy-free.



**Cookpad** — For those looking for a more social cooking experience, Cookpad offers a community of home chefs around the world. Discover new ideas, share photos, ask questions and exchange advice. You can even take part in cooking challenges or online cooking classes. And since Cookpad's user base is global, there are plenty of international recipes to satisfy an adventurous palate.



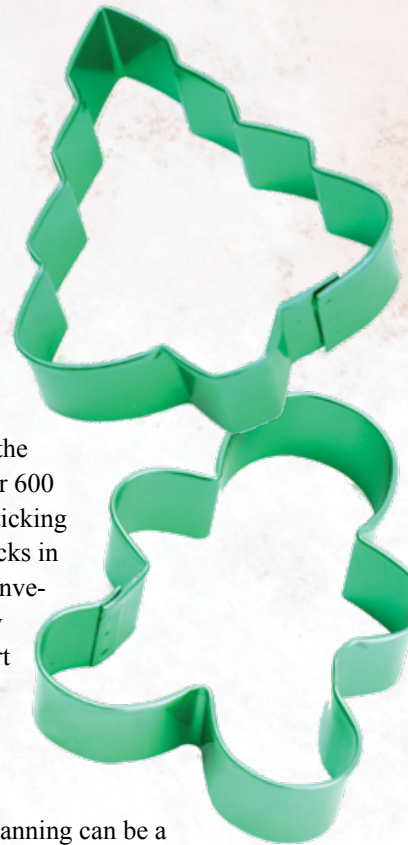
**Forks** — From vegan lifestyle site Forks Over Knives, the Forks app offers over 600 recipes for anyone sticking to a plant-based diet. What the app lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality, convenience and ease of use. There are new recipes each week, and you can export your favorites to have a ready-made shopping list for your next grocery trip.



**Mealime** — Meal planning can be a headache, but Mealime makes it easy. The app curates recipe suggestions based on your preferences to help you find healthy new favorites. They're all guaranteed to take 30 minutes or less to cook, but you can also import recipes from the web to add more options.



**Cook with Amber** — Teenage cook Amber Kelley has been encouraging kids to get in the kitchen since 2012. Today, college keeps her pretty busy. But her YouTube channel, Cook with Amber, still features years' worth of videos that walk kids through their own healthy and delicious kitchen adventures so you can make dinner and memories together. [📺](#)





# *Sounds of the* **MOUNTAINS**


## Local musicians create album that celebrates Appalachia

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Tyler Johnson had just come home from an Avett Brothers concert when he announced to his wife and his sister he was going to learn more about the history of Appalachian music and also how to play the banjo.

The North Carolina band's style combines everything from bluegrass and country to rock 'n' roll and blues. It felt like Appalachia itself — a melting pot of sound and cultures that signified a microcosm of America. Starting at the root of that sound inspired the Boyd County native.

"I said, 'The banjo is a Kentucky instrument. I love Kentucky, and I love the sound of the instrument,'" Tyler remembers telling his family. "I've been to a lot of places in the U.S., and this is the most beautiful place there is. I think it's the closest thing we have to looking at heaven."

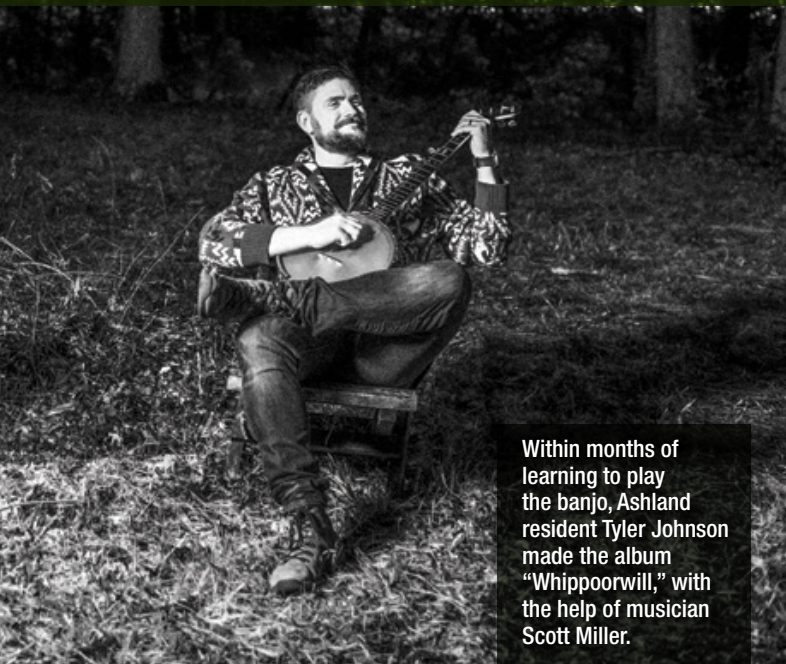
A photograph of a man, Tyler Johnson, standing in a forest. He is wearing a patterned sweater and playing a banjo. The sun is shining through the trees, creating a warm, golden light. The man is looking off to the side, and the background is filled with the soft, out-of-focus light of the forest.

Tyler Johnson says he was inspired by the beauty, the history and the people of Appalachia when he made his album, "Whippoorwill."



**“I’VE BEEN TO A LOT OF PLACES IN THE U.S., AND THIS IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PLACE THERE IS. I THINK IT’S THE CLOSEST THING WE HAVE TO LOOKING AT HEAVEN.”**

**— TYLER JOHNSON, LOCAL MUSICIAN**



Within months of learning to play the banjo, Ashland resident Tyler Johnson made the album “Whippoorwill,” with the help of musician Scott Miller.

Photos by Christy Morgan Photography

wrote the songs, but Scott helped me balance them,” Tyler says. “I think the world of that guy. If more people were like that, the world would be a better place.”

The title of the album and its first song, “Whippoorwill,” comes from the sound Tyler associates with evenings on a porch in the woods of Lawrence County where the bird’s song fills the air. “I wanted to try and capture that feeling I get when I hear it,” he says. “For me, that song embodies Appalachia and being out in the woods.”

Other songs on the album include an ode to Tyler’s wife, Brooke, his renditions of “Cripple Creek” and “Cold Frosty Morning,” and “Brynlee,” a song he wrote for his niece when she asked if it was hard to write a song.

## CONVENING

Since picking up the banjo, Tyler has grown to appreciate the culture and history of Appalachia more than ever. He tells the story of some Hungarian musicians who visited Morehead State to learn about old-time music. “When I first heard the Hungarians play, I could almost feel the pain and oppression in their music,” Tyler says. “It’s the same with a lot of our fiddle tunes. You can feel the emotion. It’s almost like a time capsule that goes back to the poor farmer or the coal miner. But there’s happiness, too.”

He’s also gotten involved with the Elliott County Fiddler’s Convention, a two-day event that takes place every July in Sandy Hook. “I fell in love with the Fiddler’s Convention,” he says. “Everybody who comes just loves music. They tell stories, have a good time, and there’s just this appreciation of people and how much they put into their craft.” 🗨️

## FORGING A FRIENDSHIP

The only problem was he didn’t know how to play any instrument, much less the banjo. But he needed to follow his gut. “I’ve always tried to do a little bit of everything,” says Tyler, whose day job is with a petroleum company out of Ohio. “I’ve only got one life, and I want to do as much as I can with this one life I have.”

Soon after declaring he would learn the banjo, Tyler found Scott Miller, a celebrated Catlettsburg musician and educator with the Kentucky Center for Traditional Music at Morehead State University. People around the world know Scott for his knowledge and teaching of old-time instruments. He is the 2021 recipient of a fellowship from SouthArts, one of six not-for-profit regional arts organizations with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. He has also recorded and toured with some of the best musicians in the country.

## MAKING MUSIC

When Tyler met Scott, he assured his teacher he planned to actually learn the banjo, not just make the attempt. “Scott said, ‘If you do exactly what I tell you, you’ll learn it,’ and I did,” Tyler says.

He learned so fast and so well that, only months into his training, he decided to make “Whippoorwill,” an 11-song album, which Scott produced, arranged and recorded. The songs feature several musicians, including Scott.

Scott used money from a grant to buy equipment to record the album, in addition to mentoring Tyler and offering support. “I



The cover of Tyler Johnson’s album, “Whippoorwill”

## Want to know more?

You can find and listen to “Whippoorwill” on Spotify, Amazon and Apple Music. YouTube videos are also available, and you can visit Tyler Johnson’s Facebook page for more information. The Elliott County Fiddler’s Convention takes place at the Little Sandy Lodge in Sandy Hook every July. To find out more about the event, visit its page on Facebook or go to [littlesandyldodge.com](http://littlesandyldodge.com).



# A tasty tradition

Celebrate the season with sweet holiday treats

**B**aking is a time-honored tradition in so many households this time of year. Kids love sprinkles, and holiday hosts appreciate having sweets on hand for unexpected guests and tasty gifts for neighbors and friends.

There are a few important tips that can make your holiday baking a stress-free experience and perhaps a little more rewarding for those who will be enjoying the results of your efforts. Many of us have had baking disasters that weren't funny at the time but made for entertaining stories later. That doesn't need to be the case, though, if you:

► **Organize** — Make lists of all the things

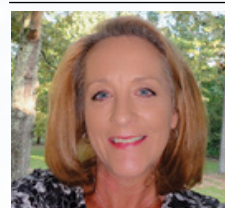
you want to bake and the ingredients you'll need. Do this a couple of days ahead of time so you can decide what will need to be frozen and used in coming weeks, such as cookie dough.

► **Check your pantry for the essentials** — Make sure you have plenty of sugar, flour, butter, eggs and the all-important extracts of the holiday season: vanilla, almond and, oh, yes, peppermint. There's nothing more aggravating than getting halfway through a recipe only to open the sugar bag and discover it's nearly empty. Don't forget cooking spray and parchment paper, too. You'll be needing them.

► **Make sure you have plenty of room in your refrigerator** — Some baked goods need to be chilled. This is a good time to throw out what's been in the fridge a little too long or to use up any leftovers.

► **Ponder presentation** — Check your closets and cabinets for decorative cookie tins. You'll need them for more than just cookies, they're also great for caramel corn, fudge, brownies and bars. A colorful holiday tin is so much more festive than a zip-top bag with a stick-on bow.

Now, get baking. It's almost Christmas!



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## HOLIDAY CARAMEL CORN

*One word of caution: be sure to weed out all of the unpopped kernels so there are no unexpectedly hard bites in this delicious, sweet-salty snack.*

- 3 quarts popped popcorn (about 2 bags microwave popcorn, popped)
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter (no substitute)
- 1 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1/4 cup dark corn syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups mixed nuts

Heat oven to 250 F.

Place popped popcorn into a large, 4-inch-deep buttered baking pan, and place it in the oven to keep warm. In a large saucepan, melt the butter over

low heat. Stir in brown sugar, corn syrup and salt. Bring to a soft boil, stirring constantly. Boil without stirring for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and quickly stir in the baking soda and vanilla.

Remove popcorn from the oven. Slowly pour syrup mixture over popcorn, and add nuts, mixing well. This may prove a bit difficult at first, as the caramel mixture hardens quickly once removed from the heat. But as you stir it while it's baking in the oven, it will soften and get much easier to stir.

Butter a large cookie sheet, and turn the popcorn mixture into the pan. Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. You don't want the popcorn to get overly browned. Remove from the oven and cool completely. Break apart. Store in tightly covered tins.



## CRANBERRY ORANGE HOLIDAY NUT BREAD

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 cup butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel
- 3/4 cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- 6 ounces chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease the bottom of a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan and set aside.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Stir in the butter until the mixture is crumbly. Stir

in the orange peel, orange juice, vanilla and eggs, just until the batter comes together. Be careful not to overmix. Fold in the fresh cranberries and nuts.

Transfer the batter to the prepared baking pan. Bake until a wooden toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean: about 50 minutes to 1 hour. Cool in the pan for 5 minutes before loosening the sides of the loaf from the pan. Transfer the loaf to a rack to cool completely before slicing. Let cool completely and wrap with plastic wrap.



## PEANUT BUTTER STARS

*A classic holiday cookie. These freeze well, so make plenty to enjoy throughout the season.*

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup peanut butter
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar

- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- Chocolate kisses or stars

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

In a large mixing bowl, beat shortening and peanut butter with an electric mixer on medium-high speed for 30 seconds. Add 1/2 cup of the granulated sugar, along with the brown sugar, baking powder and baking soda. Beat until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in egg, milk and vanilla until combined. Beat in as much of the flour as you can with the mixer. Stir in any remaining flour.

Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll balls in 1/4 cup granulated sugar. Place 2 inches apart on an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake for 10-12 minutes or until edges are firm and bottoms are lightly browned.

Immediately press a chocolate star or kiss into the center of each cookie. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool. Store in airtight containers. Makes 54 cookies. 📺



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WISHING YOU AND YOURS  
A BLESSED HOLIDAY!

