

CONNECTION

Country cool

Ever After offers barn weddings

**GRUNTS
RUCKSACK**

MEATBALL MANIA



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Training broadband professionals

New NTCA partnership will make a difference

As rural communities like yours experience the life-changing benefits of fast, reliable internet service, the NTCA is proud to expand its support of the professionals making these innovations possible.

We are partnering with Northwood Technical College, which will offer remote workforce training opportunities exclusively for NTCA members. This agreement is one example of how we are pulling out the stops to help providers like yours bridge the digital divide.

Building a robust internet network requires a range of skills, but the work doesn't end after the first connections are installed. Maintaining the systems that power work-from-home jobs, telehealth and so much more demands highly skilled workers.

This new initiative with Wisconsin-based Northwood Tech will help NTCA members secure the expertise needed to not only accelerate broadband deployment but also sustain future-proof technologies.

Northwood Tech has several decades of innovative telecommunications and broadband training experience, but its Broadband Academy's focus extends beyond network systems, hardware and software. The consumer experience, and how communications professionals can better serve their customers, is also a priority.

Northwood Tech President John Will says the partnership with NTCA allows the school to reach and train more students and upskill employees who will gain industry-recognized digital badging credentials.

Also, the remote classes mean NTCA members and Northwood Tech will use broadband technology for broadband training. It's just one more example showing how fast internet service can make a difference in the nation's rural communities. 📶

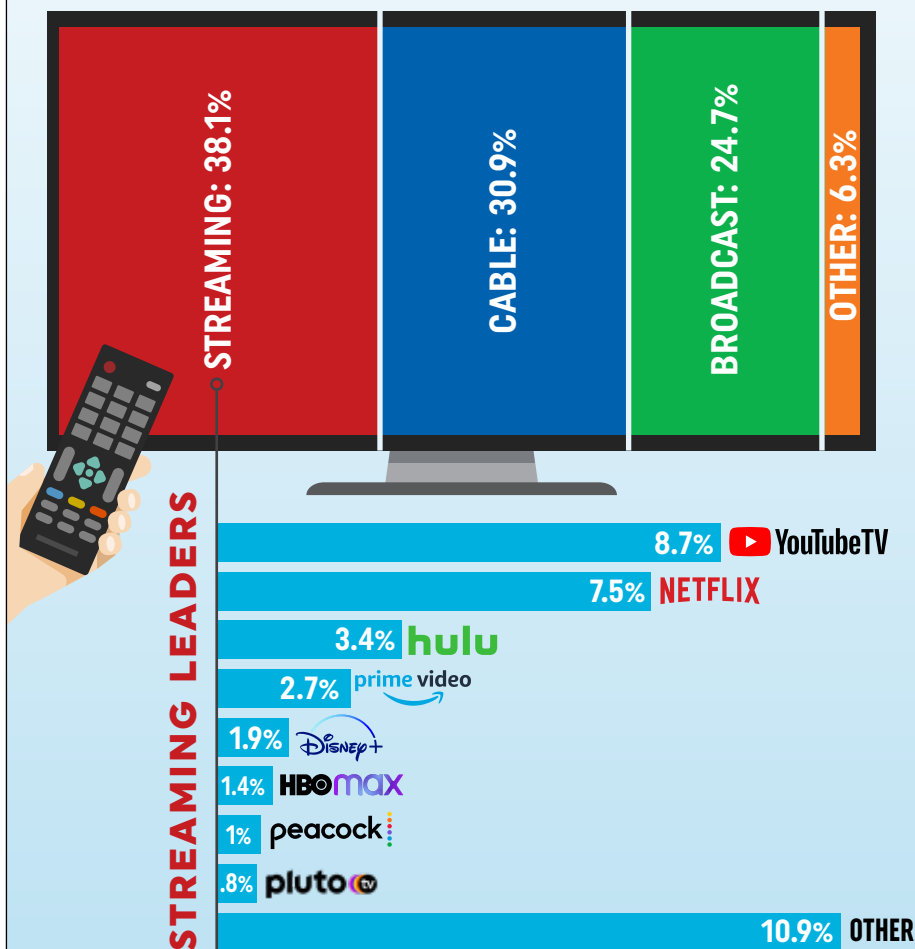
Entertainment riches

Viewers match their interest to the service

Whether you enjoy the predictable pace of a baseball game, catching a 30-minute comedy viewed when your schedule allows, watching a movie from your favorite genre — or just about any other entertainment choice — there's a wealth of options.

And today, you can design the viewing experience you want.

Nielsen, a company that measures audiences to provide important research to advertisers, released a report earlier this year that gives a peek into our viewing habits:



GAMING FAVORITES

For many people, a little screen time means something more interactive than a show or movie — they play video games. Nielsen identified some of the top games from recent months, so here are a few to consider if you're looking for fresh options.

- ▶ Hogwarts Legacy
- ▶ The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom
- ▶ Resident Evil 4
- ▶ Diablo IV
- ▶ Minecraft



Home security

KEEP YOUR DATA SAFE
WHILE WORKING REMOTELY



Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Working from home is no longer uncommon. As access to high-speed internet and tools for remote collaboration become more widespread, employers are increasingly warming to the idea of letting people get out of the office at least a few days a week.

The comfort and accessibility of remote work mean it isn't likely to go away anytime soon. But it can also introduce new challenges like security concerns. Whether you're taking your laptop to the nearby coffee shop or setting up a work station at home, keep these guidelines in mind to make sure your work is secure wherever you are.

STAY UPDATED

When you see an alert about a new software update, don't wait to install it. Among other things, these updates often close security loopholes that malware can use to get access to your data. It's also important to have an antivirus program installed that can protect your devices from the latest viruses, spyware and phishing scams.

DON'T TAKE THE BAIT

Speaking of phishing scams, it's important to be extra alert when working remotely. Bogus emails can hit an office just as easily as your home computer, but it's easier to spot a fake when the co-worker supposedly asking for sensitive information is in the same room as you. Always make sure your devices are secure outside the office, and be sure to double check any suspicious requests directly.

PROTECT WORK DEVICES

Working from home often means exposing your work devices to kids or other family members who may not be as careful about security measures as you are. Take steps to make sure others

aren't using your work devices or accidentally seeing sensitive information. Also, try to avoid doing work on personal devices that may not be as well-secured.

KEEP YOUR VPN ON

Many companies use virtual private networks, or VPNs, to help employees communicate securely via an encrypted network. If your employer does the same, it's important to stay connected for as long as you're working. Dropping that virtual defense could open the door for someone to steal important information.


STAY IN THE CLOUD

Not only do cloud applications receive regular security updates, but saving your work to cloud storage creates a shared backup of all your work. That way, even if local files on your device are lost, corrupted or stolen, you'll still have access to everything.

MAKE VIDEOCONFERENCES PRIVATE

The popularity of videoconferencing apps like Zoom has skyrocketed in recent years as more teams collaborate from afar. But a digital meeting space comes with additional security considerations. To prevent unwanted visitors from listening in or even trying to intimidate people, consider requiring a password for calls or keeping any new arrivals in a waiting room.

UP YOUR PASSWORD GAME

Strong passwords are always important, but they're even more crucial when you're working remotely. A password manager can help you keep track of numerous strong passwords, which should generally be at least 12 characters and contain letters, numbers and symbols. If that's too much to keep up with, consider using favorite song lyrics, movie quotes or other phrases that are easy to remember but more complex than your dog's name. 

Ready to serve

There for you when needed most

One of the pleasures of my role at Foothills Communications is the honor of working alongside some of the most dedicated and hardworking professionals in our industry. We are blessed to have an experienced, committed staff devoted to serving you.



RUTH CONLEY
Chief Executive Officer

Their efforts are most visible — and most critical — when times are the hardest. Sudden storms, flooding and so much more can disrupt not only the services we provide, but also the lives of individuals and productivity of businesses. We know you depend on our communications tools, especially in critical moments such as the need to call for emergency help.

So, even in the most trying of conditions, our crews go into the field as our front line in the effort to keep you connected. They work tirelessly for as long as needed to restore service to you.

I'm always appreciative as these crews go out into environments most of us wish to avoid, including in the middle of downpours, high winds or extreme heat. The challenges change by season and

are as unpredictable as the weather itself. But our commitment to excellence means your service is as consistent and reliable as possible.

If you've ever wondered why someone would work so hard, the answer is simple. Each member of our crews — truly our entire staff — has roots in this area. We know we're working to help our friends, our families, our neighbors and our entire community. They genuinely care about those they serve.

When an outage does occur — and no matter the preventive steps we take they sometimes will — we ask for your patience as our crews hit the road to restore service. Also, as you're driving please keep in mind to take note of repair vehicles on the roadside. Please slow down and give them a little extra space. They're working to help everyone, and in return you can help keep them safe.

While repair crews are some of the most visible members of the Foothills Communications team, others play equally critical roles. When problems arise, everyone helps. But I'd like to also mention a unique challenge unimagined when the first telephone calls crossed our lines.

The fast internet network we manage requires care, and our professionals work daily to keep it safe and secure. Foothills Communications is your local hub on the global internet, connecting you to resources needed for health, education, employment, entertainment and far more.

Our teams keep that connection solid, a highly technical, always-evolving role. After all, cyberthreats are real, and we follow industry best practices to secure our network. But the responsibilities extend to the needs of individuals and business users. If you have an internet problem, our customer-support experts and technical staff are committed to helping.

Whether it's the immediate recovery after an event such as a storm or the day-to-day aid to keep critical services like internet access working, everyone at Foothills Communications makes your needs the priority.

Thank you for letting us serve you and be a part of this wonderful community. 📶



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Foothills is a member-owned cooperative that has been serving residents and businesses in Eastern Kentucky since 1951. In the early days, we only offered telephone service over copper wires. Over the years, we have expanded our network and now provide broadband internet and cable TV services over fiber optic facilities to much of our service area, which includes Magoffin County and portions of Johnson County and Lawrence County. We love being part of the communities we serve. Our customers are our families, friends and neighbors.

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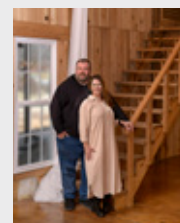
Foothills Mission Statement

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

Produced for Foothills Communications by:



On the Cover:



Greg and Trisha Giompalo started Ever After, a special event venue, when a friend asked to use their barn for a wedding. See story Page 8.

Photography by
John Michael Laney

eBill Mobile

Make your payments on the go



With the eBill Mobile app, you can pay your bill safely and securely online, enroll in automatic payments, and access a summary of your current or past usage anytime, anywhere. Download the **eBill Mobile** app now from the Apple Store for your iPhone/iPad or get it on Google Play for your Android device.

GETTING STARTED

- 1 Enter your zip code
- 2 Select **Foothills Communications**
- 3 Enter your account information
- 4 Start making payments!



Congratulations
to all 2023 graduates!



Foothills Communications wishes you the best in everything you do. We encourage you to embrace amazing opportunities in a world of possibilities!

Know what's below.
Call before you dig.



★ MEMORIAL DAY ★

HONORING THOSE WHO
SERVED AND SACRIFICED

Foothills Communications is grateful to those who gave their all for our country. Our office will close on Monday, May 29, in observance of Memorial Day.

ROAD TRIP

Revival

YOU'LL GET THERE, EVENT-UALLY!

Story by ANNE BRALY

From a celebration of Moon Pies in Tennessee to glorifying okra pods in South Carolina, the South is famous for the funk it puts in festivals.

“Funky festivals allow folks to do a deep dive into niche interests in a way that generalized, traditional festivals don’t allow,” says Jamie McCormick, operations manager for the Southeast Festivals &

Events Association. “Maybe you can get lucky and find shrimp and grits or banana pudding at your standard festival, but can you compare 14 different recipes and flavor profiles, or find strawberry banana pudding or shrimp and grits pizza? Offbeat festivals allow us to celebrate the weirdest things about ourselves — the things we think only we like — and in the process,

find out that quite a lot of other people like them, too!”

Here’s a look at festivals across the South that celebrate the love of offbeat fun.

Hula hooping is hard enough on its own, but have you ever tried it while eating a MoonPie and drinking an RC Cola? It’s not as easy as it looks, but you can give it a try at the annual **RC Cola-MoonPie Festival Festival** held the third week of June in the charming, historic town of Bell Buckle, Tennessee.

Folks have come from near and far — England and Australia and up to 17 states — to sample small-town life and see what this quirky festival is all about, says Jenny Hunt, public relations director for festival sponsor Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce. The event kicks off with marathons on certified courses before transitioning into a full day of fun for all, with a grand parade and the crowning of the RC Cola-MoonPie Festival King and Queen; hula-hooping; and a test of skill to see just how many cans of RC Cola



ABOVE: The RC Cola-MoonPie festival features a can-balancing contest.

LEFT: Hula hooping while eating a MoonPie and drinking an RC Cola isn’t as easy as it may look.

Photos courtesy of Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce

you can stack on your head and walk across the festival stage.

The festival culminates with the cutting of the world's largest Moon Pie to be shared with all.

► Date: June 17

► Information: bellbucklechamber.com

The Original Gullah Festival in Beaufort, South Carolina, celebrates the history, customs, cultures and accomplishments of African Americans who carved remarkable lives in the Lowcountry. The festival is like none other, highlighting the culture and history of the Gullah people — their art, crafts, music, dance and yes, their food. This isn't your typical festival fare — it's platters of fried catfish, bowls of shrimp and grits and soul food by the plateful. It's a family-friendly weekend that brings in travelers from around the world.

► Date: May 26-28.

► Information: originalgullahfestival.org.



Don't want to commit to an entire day or week of festival fun, but still want to experience the unusual? Here are some places around the South that offer something a little different from your typical sightseeing experience.

It's not often a restroom is a major attraction, but such is the case for the men's room at **Nashville's historic Hermitage Hotel**. The restroom features a spectacular and memorable design, with lime green and black glass tiles, lime green fixtures and a shoe-shine



Photo courtesy of Town of Irmo

No town celebrates okra the way Irmo, South Carolina, does. In fact, there's no other okra festival in the world, other than **Irmo Okra Strut**, a chance for townsfolk and others to showcase the often-unappreciated pods. The festival has been growing strong for more than 50 years and commences with live bands on Friday night. Then the fun begins Saturday morning with a parade — the largest in the state — before opening up to thousands of festivalgoers who come for magic shows, demonstrations and the okra-eating contest.

► Date: Sept. 29-30.

► Information: okrastrut.com.

Whether you call him Bigfoot, Sasquatch or Yeti, the **Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival** in Townsend, Tennessee, is the



Photo courtesy of Blount Partnership

ABOVE LEFT: Celebrate okra at the annual Irmo Okra Strut.

ABOVE RIGHT: Live music is part of the fun at Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival.

place to celebrate the big guy. There's Bigfoot wrestling, Bigfoot calling, a wood-carving challenge and other Squatchy competitions. Visitors will also find food vendors and live music, along with Bigfoot hunters and researchers. Do you believe?

► Date: May 6.

► Information: exploretownsend.com/event/smoky-mountain-bigfoot-festival-2023. 🗨️

station right in the middle of the room. The men's room has been the setting of many business deals in the past, as well as movies and music videos in current times. Note to families: Have a man check it out first to make sure the room is empty.

► Information: thehermitagehotel.com

Clayton City Cemetery in Clayton, Alabama, is home to a tombstone with a story. Both the headstone and footstone are shaped like whiskey bottles, designed by an extremely frustrated woman who reportedly told her husband, William T. Mullen, that she'd make him a tombstone shaped like a whiskey bottle if he didn't stop drinking. It seems as though she kept her word.

► Address: 41 N. Midway St.

Read my lips. Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, is home to the world's only museum

dedicated to the art of ventriloquism, the **Vent Haven Museum**. If you love little wooden people, this museum is a must-see. Renovations to the museum are near completion, and it will reopen on May 9.

► Information: venthaven.org

The Harry and Harry Too restaurant in Bishopville, South Carolina, takes most of its interior decor cues from pop culture — The Three Stooges, Elvis and Tomb Raider, among others. What sets it apart is its colorful handmade outdoor sign promoting its connection to a local monster, the terrifying, car-chomping Lizard Man. The restaurant displays replicas of the monster's footprint casts — the originals are in the town museum — and serves Lizard Man sandwiches.

► Online: Check out the menu and more on Harry and Harry Too's Facebook page.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

New event venue creates happy buzz in Louisa

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Trisha and Greg Giompalo built a barn on their farm in Louisa about 25 years ago, they only planned for it to hold heavy equipment and serve as a storage facility.

It wasn't until a friend of the family offered to pay to rent the barn for her wedding that Trisha realized what she had. "Our friend wasn't getting married for another year, but she told me that every place she looked was already booked," says Trisha, whose full-time job as a physical therapist still feels miles away from the wedding industry. "I had no idea that barns were such popular wedding venues. It's just crazy."

After talking with her husband and studying the wedding and event business, Trisha and Greg founded Ever After, a special event venue that combines the rustic appeal of the country with elegant design and modern amenities. The 40-by-80-foot barn includes seating for up to 250 people, as well as bridal and groom suites, restrooms and a warming kitchen with a double-door, stainless refrigerator, ice maker, sink, microwave and stove. The space also includes a storage unit for



Photo by John Michael Laney

Greg and Trisha Giompalo converted the barn on their Louisa farm into Ever After, a wedding and special events venue.

wedding parties to use before events.

By the beginning of 2023, the venue had hosted about 15 weddings. About 18 more have been booked throughout the coming year. "Two of the weddings we just had included wedding parties from West Virginia," Trisha says. "So, they're coming from all over."

BUILDING THE DREAM

As soon as the Giompalos decided to go for it, they set to work. First, they had to remove everything that had piled up

over the past two decades. And while the barn had never housed livestock, it did hold plenty of junk, along with a few nice pieces that could be restored and reused. "You cannot imagine how much stuff you collect and forget you even have," Trisha says with a laugh. "It just about took me out."

They also painted to give the venue a more sophisticated look. "The barn before we started was red and tan, and while I wanted the rustic feel, I thought the red was a little too much," she says. "I painted it black and used some of that on the inside."

Greg, who works in the concrete business, designed the intricately painted concrete floors that make guests feel like they're walking on water. They also poured concrete on top of barrels to serve as bistro tables and sinks. Other accents include live-edge wood shelving, chandeliers, strings of lights, rough-cut wood paneling and shiplap. "My mother had an old sewing machine, and I used it for one of the sinks," Trisha says. "I wanted to keep some sort of nostalgia, but I also





Photo contributed to Ever After

FINDING EVER AFTER

Ever After, a chic barn rental in Louisa, is at 759 Highway 2565. The 40-by-80-foot barn can accommodate parties of up to 250 people and includes restrooms, a warming kitchen, a bridal suite and a groom's suite. For more information on rentals, visit the venue's Facebook page, email at EAWeddingVenue@gmail.com or call 606-240-0057.

ABOVE: The venue can seat up to 250 people for an elegant, yet rustic, event.

RIGHT: The bridal suite offers a beautiful place for the bride and her party to get ready for the big day.

wanted to use what we already had. I want to be a good steward with what God gave me. Let me say this: I don't buy furniture for my home unless I'm going to keep it. My stepmother once said to me, 'Only rich people can afford to buy cheap furniture.'"

ONLINE SHARES MATTER

Trisha says she was a little surprised at how fast word spread about her venue. The Giompalos advertised only a little in the very beginning. It's the Ever After Facebook page powered by her Foothills Communications broadband connection that really does the work, she says. "Word of mouth is really how it gets out," she says. "People who've had their weddings here or have been to weddings here will post pictures. That's how I've booked 18 weddings without spending any money on advertising."



Photos by John Michael Laney

FUTURE PLANS

As Ever After grows, Trisha hopes to host annual bridal events to market vendors and venues and other wedding services. She doesn't worry about competition too much because she's learned there's plenty of business to go around. She also plans to rent the venue for other types of special events. This year, she's planning a weekend Christmas event for children, which will include a visit from

Santa Claus, a hot chocolate station, letter writing stations and more.

These are ambitious goals, but Trisha knows they are doable. "There's a learning curve here, but I've always worked with the public. We haven't had any negative feedback so far, but I do tell people up front that we're new at this," she says. "Right now, we like to underpromise and overdeliver. But the fact is that we want to do everything we can for their day." 📧

HOW DOES YOUR ONLINE GARDEN GROW?

Digital communities revolutionizing backyard agriculture

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

Starting a garden in your own backyard isn't something you have to do alone. While you're unlikely to find help digging holes, putting in plants or moving mulch on the internet, you can find countless friends online to offer advice and support.

Online communities have revolutionized gardening, according to Adriana Copaceanu, whose 2016 gardening blog grew into the website backyardgardenlover.com. More than 100,000 gardeners also turn to its Facebook page where they can exchange tips and experiences. "By making it easier for people to find information and connect with others online, gardening communities have made gardening more accessible and appealing to a wider audience," Adriana says. "In the last few years, the amount of information online on gardening and resources has absolutely skyrocketed."

More than half the country — 55% of American households — gardens, according to findings by Scotts Miracle-Gro. The average garden measures 600 square feet, and tomatoes are the most common plant grown, appearing in about 85% of U.S. gardens. In addition to providing produce for a healthier diet, gardening has many other positive impacts including stress relief, promoting exercise, fighting dementia and staving off loneliness, to name just a few.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES

While gardening has always offered opportunities for interactions at garden centers and at farmers markets, the online gardening community now presents limitless forums for collaboration. "I get daily emails with questions," Adriana says. "Sometimes, it's a quick answer, and other times I need to do some research because I'm not familiar with their specific location."

More than 5 million gardening enthusiasts have forged connections with other green thumbs through Reddit, a website that's home to thousands of online communities where users can anonymously discuss their interests and hobbies, seek support and share tips. They can also post photos and find immediate answers to questions like "I just pulled this dead squirrel out of my garlic patch, can I still eat the garlic in the summer?" or "Is this snake dangerous?"

"As the size of the gardening community has grown, there are more dumb and wrong answers; unfortunately, that's the nature of a platform that encourages participation," Reddit contributor [kirbs2001](https://www.reddit.com/user/kirbs2001) says. "The flip side is that more people are gardening and want to share what they know, or think they know, with others, and that's cool."

Still others just want a place to enjoy the outdoors in a community setting. "The gardening season is pretty short where I am, so



Photo by dprod/Adobe Stock

Photo by DriedovStock/Adobe Stock

ONLINE RESOURCES ARE IN FULL BLOOM

Gardening apps

- * **From Seed to Spoon Gardening** — Created by new gardeners struggling to find all the right information for growing their first gardens, this covers it all.
- * **SunCalc** — This is a sun-finder for garden placement. Enter an address and the app will tell you where to plant.
- * **Homegrown with Bonnie Plants** — America's most-trusted vegetable company provides all the answers to questions about what to grow for specific conditions.
- * **Planty** — Not sure what you've grown? This cute, simple app will identify and offer care tips for plants.
- * **Garden Answers** — This extensive identification app provides garden and horticulture experts at your fingertips. The app identifies more than 20,000 plants and answers more than 200,000 commonly asked care questions.

Websites

- * The National Gardening Association's **garden.com** offers courses, gardening guides, a database and much more.
- * The Old Farmer's Almanac has tips, daily facts and information, and other tried-and-true suggestions at **almanac.com**.
- * Through its website **ahsgardening.org**, the American Horticulture Society promotes healthy, sustainable gardening practices and the critical role of plants.

“In the last few years, the amount of information online on gardening and resources has absolutely skyrocketed.”

— Adriana Copaceanu, founder of backyardgardenlover.com

I like to live vicariously through other people's gardens to get me through winter, lol,” says Calamity 0o0, another Reddit member who's active in the site's garden community.

Other gardening websites — including gardening-forums.com, gardenweb.com and gardenstew.com — offer all kinds of answers to all kinds of questions. Gardeners can also find like-minded friends on Twitter, and if it's easier to learn from videos, YouTube is for you.

The holy book of gardening and all things outdoors-related, The Old Farmer's Almanac, now offers a comprehensive website, almanac.com, full of valuable tips, along with a daily newsletter. The National Gardening Association formed in 1971 simply to promote gardening, and is now the largest

social media website dedicated exclusively to gardening. The group's garden.org offers online tools “to help gardeners connect, teach, share and trade with each other.”

Websites are great resources, but apps truly can be a gardener's best friend. First-time gardeners will find everything they need to start their plots through the Seed to Spoon app. Based on a home address, the SunCalc app designates the perfect location for plants to thrive, and Homegrown with Bonnie Plants has a “Help Me Choose” section to help gardeners determine which plants to grow, as well as one to help schedule tasks like sowing, watering, weeding and fertilizing.

So, while you may be on your own physically, you'll never lack for company along your gardening journey. 🌱

SURPLUS STYLE

Grunts Rucksack reports for duty

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Photography by John Michael Laney



Doug displays his own Army uniform at the shop.



Doug Salyer opened Grunts Rucksack in Paintsville in September 2022.

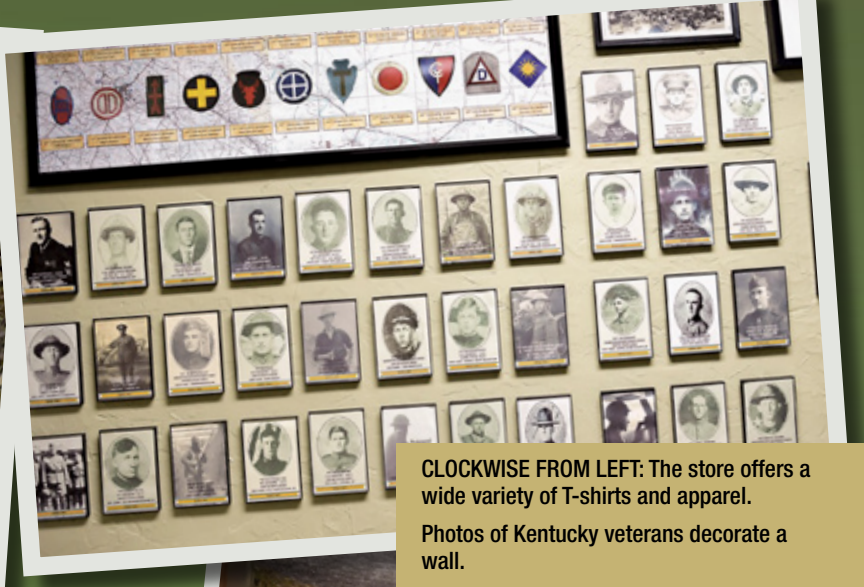
Doug Salyer sees his business, Grunts Rucksack, as more than Paintsville's only military surplus store. It's also a minimuseum full of collectibles from long-ago wars and a place to hear tales from veterans who served and sacrificed for their country. "I talk to all these guys who come in," Doug says. "I want to hear their story. I want their pictures and their information."

It's a job that never gets old, says Doug, who retired from the United States Army in 2008 as a sergeant first class in the infantry. He estimates only four of every 10 people who walk through the door actually buy something, while the others like to check out his World War II memorabilia and collectibles. Still, business has been brisk enough that he had to double his floor space just a few months after opening last September. "Hunters are

probably some of my biggest customers," Doug says. "But I also get preppers and survivalists and veterans, of course."

POINTS OF PRIDE

Named for the heavy pack carried by Army infantrymen, Grunts Rucksack sells everything from surplus military uniforms to tactical gear, patriotic T-shirts, service hats and mugs. Doug also builds shadow boxes for military memorabilia and creates commemorative certificates for service members who have lost their original certificates and medals. "I take their DD-214, which are their official military discharge papers, and I do a commemorative certificate," he says. "It's not an official document — and it says so right on the certificate — but it can mean a lot to people who might have lost some of their things in the past."



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The store offers a wide variety of T-shirts and apparel.

Photos of Kentucky veterans decorate a wall.

Grunts Rucksack is Paintsville's first military supply store since the early 1990s.

Doug's own military service got him interested in the trade. During his 20 years of service, he spent a total of 37 months in combat. His combat time included a stint in Bosnia for policing measures after the Bosnian War, seven months in Iraq during Operation Desert Fox and Desert Thunder, and two tours of duty during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

AN INTERNET SUCCESS STORY

Grunts Rucksack got its start as an eBay shop online in 2005 when Doug was still serving in the Army. After five years of operation, he closed the online shop because he was also working a full-time job and attending college classes.

But when the COVID-19 pandemic caused in-person businesses to close all over the country in March 2020, he reopened the eBay shop while still working his day job. "My wife's business, Skin Logics by Anita, had to close for a while because of all the government rules surrounding salons and spas," Doug says. "We were down to being just a one-income family for a while there, which was tough. Even her unemployment money didn't come through until she had already opened back up a few months later."

Despite his initial concerns, his Grunts Rucksack eBay shop did surprisingly well in the age of COVID. "It did so well that I probably could have quit my full-time job," he says. "I didn't, but I could have. During COVID, everyone went online. There was so much business."

STILL SELLING

Even today, business is booming online. Doug continues to sell memorabilia and services using his Foothills Communications fiber

broadband connection. He also uses the internet to entertain viewers on Facebook with fun memes and shoutouts to the veteran community.

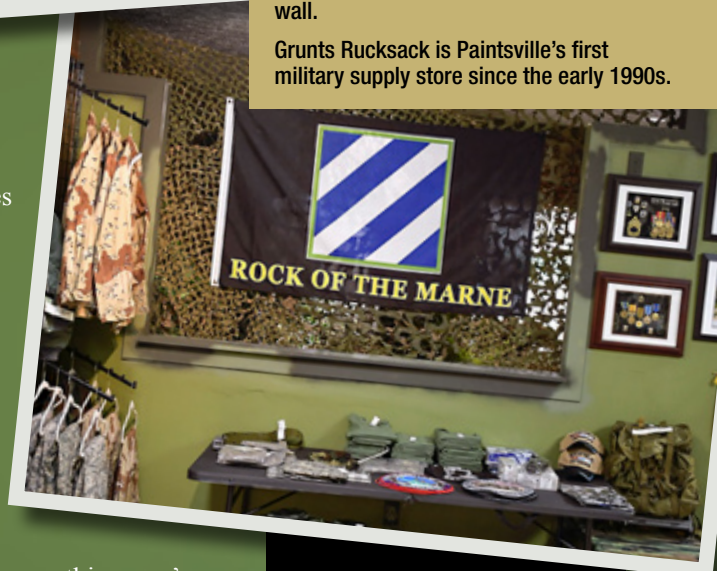
The idea for a brick-and-mortar store had been sitting in the back of his mind for a few years before Anita encouraged him to finally go for it. "She said, 'Honey, you need to go ahead and do something you're passionate about,'" he remembers.

BITS OF HISTORY

Doug is proud of the shop he's built. For one thing, it offers a service that much of the community had missed since the last military surplus store in Paintsville closed its doors in the early 1990s.

It also gives people a place to learn a little about history through Doug's extensive personal collection of military objects. "This place is probably 60% retail and maybe 40% museum," he says. "I have German World War II helmets and German daggers, as well as reproductions of grenades from Germany and Japan."

He also likes that the shop has become a place for veterans to share some of their memories. "My store hours run from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, but I'm usually already there by 8:30 a.m.," Doug says. "I cannot wait to open up the door every day." 🗨️



MILITARY SURPLUS AND MORE

Grunts Rucksack is at 207 Broadway St., Unit 6, in Paintsville. The shop is situated in two of the upstairs units and offers everything from tactical gear, knives and surplus military uniforms to custom-designed shadowboxes, commemorative certificates and collectibles. The shop also displays military collectibles.

For more information, visit the Grunts Rucksack, LLC Facebook page or check out the eBay store of the same name.

Bite-size brilliance

A not-so-spicy meatball!

Few foods have the versatility that meatballs offer. They're perfect for parties served with toothpicks, but they can also be your dinner tonight served over pasta or mashed potatoes.

What makes a good meatball? Some recipes call for chicken or veal while others rely solely on ground beef. Some recipes call for frying them in a skillet while others send them straight to the oven.

No matter the approach to the finished product, most everyone can agree on one thing: Meatballs are a blessing in the culinary world all wrapped up in a ball of meat.



SWEET-AND-SOUR MEATBALLS

Sauce:

- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1/3 cup pineapple juice
- 1/4 teaspoon Chinese five-spice
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch

Place the brown sugar, vinegar, ketchup, soy sauce, pineapple juice and Chinese five spice in a saucepan over medium heat. Simmer for 5 minutes or until the sugar has dissolved. Stir in cornstarch and simmer for 2 minutes more to thicken. Remove from heat and set aside.

Meatballs:

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 (1-pound) bag frozen meatballs
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 red or green bell pepper, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 cup diced pineapple
- 4 green onions, cut into 1-inch pieces

Place a wok or large frying pan over high heat. Add the oil and the meatballs and cook, turning every minute or so, for 4-5 minutes or until almost cooked through. Add the onion and stir-fry for another 2 minutes. Add the bell pepper and stir-fry for another minute, then add the pineapple and the sweet-and-sour sauce. Stir-fry until well combined. Remove from heat and toss in the green onion.



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Photography by **Mark Gilliland**
Food Styling by **Rhonda Gilliland**

SALISBURY STEAK MEATBALLS

- 1/4 cup grated onion
- 2/3 cup panko bread crumbs
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons ground mustard
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 1/4 pounds ground beef
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (plus more, if needed)

Gravy:

- 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 6-8 medium mushrooms, chopped
- 1/2 cup onion, sliced 1/4-inch thick
- 4-6 cloves garlic, minced

- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups beef stock
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce

In a medium bowl, combine grated onions, breadcrumbs, salt and all the remaining ingredients except the ground beef and oil. Allow the mixture to stand for 5 minutes, then add the meat and mix until just combined and divide the mixture into about 20 meatballs.

Add oil in a large skillet and heat to medium-high. Add the meatballs in a single layer and cook for about 10 minutes, flipping halfway through, until all sides brown evenly. Remove to a plate. If needed, add additional oil and cook any

remaining meatballs the same way.

For the gravy, add 1 tablespoon of butter to the skillet. When melted, add mushrooms and cook 3-4 minutes. Add the onions and saute for 3 minutes, add the garlic and let cook for 30 seconds or until fragrant. Add the remaining butter to the skillet. When melted, add the flour and stir to combine and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Gradually pour in the beef stock, still stirring constantly. Stir in Worcestershire sauce, Dijon and soy sauce and simmer for 3 minutes or until it thickens slightly. Add the meatballs to the skillet along with any juices that may have collected on the plate and cook for 4 minutes. If the gravy thickens too much, add a splash of water. Taste and adjust seasonings as desired.

BUTTERY CHICKEN MEATBALLS

- 1/2 medium onion, grated
- 1/2 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 1/2 pounds ground chicken
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- 2 tablespoons freshly chopped parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Butter sauce:

- 1/2 cup butter
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon freshly chopped parsley

Mix the onion and bread-crumbs together in a large

mixing bowl. Let the mixture sit for 2-3 minutes. Add the rest of the meatball ingredients, excluding the oil, to the bowl. Mix everything together well. Form the mixture into meatballs.

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the meatballs, working in batches if needed. Cook for 2-3 minutes per side until well browned. Transfer the cooked meatballs to a plate and set aside.

For the sauce, add the butter to the skillet, then stir in garlic and ginger and cook for 1 minute. Add the tomato sauce, tomato paste, garam masala, smoked paprika, turmeric, cumin, coriander and chicken broth. Bring the sauce to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes or until slightly thickens. Stir in the cream. Return meatballs to skillet and let them simmer in the sauce until heated through. Garnish with parsley and serve. 🍴





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