

CONNECTION



Take a Bow

SIPP Theater stages
a comeback

**FARMHOUSE
MEMORIES**

**RURAL
WRITERS**



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A Winning Game

Esports brings fun, competition and a future

NTCA members are committed to doing more than providing fast, reliable internet service. They strive to enrich the community, including finding new opportunities to help everyone as technologies and online trends evolve.


For example, a growing high school sport unlocks all the traditional benefits of competition, such as team building, while enhancing skills applicable to modern careers. Known as esports, competitive gaming can make a difference in the lives of students.

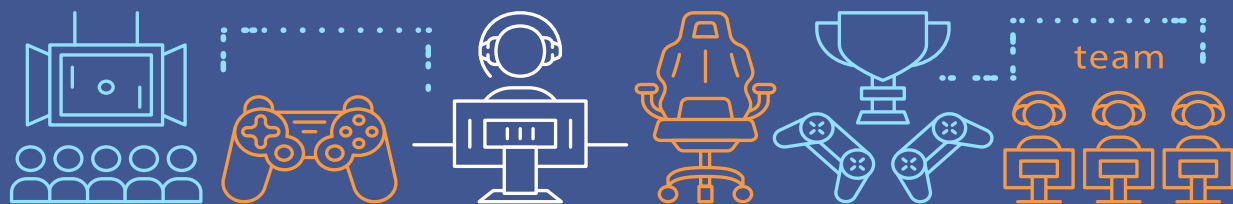
High schools across the nation have embraced esports, and the National Federation of State High School Associations includes esports alongside basketball, football, volleyball and more. Without fast, reliable internet services, however, rural students wouldn't have access. That's the power of providers like yours—they break down barriers and open doors to new opportunities.

Many of the competitions may seem familiar to gamers, ranging from sports games and racing simulations to strategy

and multiplayer battle titles. A growing number of colleges recognize esports and field teams. There's even professional-level competition.

The benefits of esports resemble those found in traditional high school sports. Success relies on teamwork and cooperation. Participants learn life skills and gain a deeper understanding of technology needed for careers ranging from software development to marketing. The broad world of gaming also brings people together, and 61% of gamers say they've met someone they otherwise would not have ever encountered.

Every day broadband uplifts rural America, and we look forward to seeing what innovations and opportunities come next. 



ESPORTS

ESPORTS STATS

Esports is increasingly popular, turning gaming into team competitions at high schools, colleges and even in professional competitions. Some online streaming services offer live coverage of competitions.

WHO ARE GAMERS?

- 24%** are younger than 18 years old
- 36%** are between the ages of 18-34
- 13%** are between the ages of 35-44
- 12%** are between the ages of 45-54

WHO ARE ESPORTS SPECTATORS?

- 50%** are between the ages of 25-41
- 26%** are between the ages of 16-24
- 20%** are between the ages of 42-56

BUILDING SKILLS

Esports creates skills today's students will find marketable.

- Computer network and hardware proficiency
- Digital literacy
- Broadcasting
- Soft skills
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving
- Team building

Source: NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A Sound Investment



System upgrade takes listening to next level

Whether you're gaming, watching a movie or listening to music, a high-quality sound system can take you from casually listening to feeling like you're part of the action. If you've thought about installing a sound system in your home, 'tis the season, to treat yourself to one that easily meets your needs and budget.

All sound systems have two basic components. First, there's the source providing the audio signal. This can be a TV, gaming device or digital music player, like your phone or computer. The second component is the amplifier, which boosts the audio signal. More than just volume, the amplifier improves the overall sound quality with more detail and clarity.

When it comes to speakers, music formats only require two, but the more speakers you have, the more immersive the sound will be. A soundbar, sometimes called a media bar, has multiple speakers enclosed in a single horizontal unit, usually placed above or below the TV. A surround sound system is much more complex, with speakers strategically placed around the room to deliver the best possible sound.

SOUNDBAR VS. SURROUND SOUND

Soundbars are ready to go right out of the box. They're relatively inexpensive, sleek and easy to install. Soundbars are ideal for smaller spaces because of their minimal visual impact.

When shopping for a soundbar, pay close attention to the number of speakers hidden inside. A larger soundbar doesn't

necessarily mean better sound quality. Look to manufacturers like Bose, Sonos or Vizio for reliable options.

Surround sound is the choice for high fidelity and full dynamic range of sound—think of your listening area as a movie theater with booming audio. It considers factors like room size, acoustics and listening positions to determine the number of speakers and locations. If you already have a basic speaker system at home, upgrading to surround sound might be as simple as adding an extra speaker or two.

PRICE OF PERFECTION

Very simple sound systems can still deliver a fantastic listening experience, so don't worry if you're starting on a smaller budget. But if you're designing your own setup and need advice on speaker placement or hiding wires behind walls, you'll need an electrician for expert guidance. Installers charge an average of \$50-\$100 an hour, so remember to budget for that.

The most common format for surround sound systems is the 5.1, with six audio channels, five speakers and a subwoofer that delivers the deep, rumbling bass frequencies. A 5.1 setup can cost between \$300 to \$1,700.

A more extensive option is the 7.1 surround, with two additional audio channels and two more speakers. Comparable to the audio setup found in large cinemas, the cost of this configuration runs anywhere from \$400 to \$4,000. [🔗](#)

Honoring Those Who Served

Veterans Day is a holiday for all

I always look forward to the holiday season, embracing the spirit, warmth and joy that come with Thanksgiving and Christmas. For many of us, these weeks are filled with happiness, and I'm grateful for every one of them. But there's another holiday during this time that deserves our reflection, gratitude and remembrance.



RUTH CONLEY
Chief Executive Officer

Every Nov. 11, Veterans Day honors the men and women who served in the armed forces. It's a day that carries a great deal of weight in rural communities like ours, where many families know intimately about all that our veterans and their families face.

Perhaps there are stories handed down from generation to generation about someone who served decades ago. Or maybe a family member recently served or is currently active in the military. Communities like ours always step up when there's a need.

I see daily examples of how our communications services connect us. Even though they've changed over the years, beginning with telephone service and continuing with our state-of-the-art fast and reliable broadband network, the thread is still the same—we help you make connections.

Veterans Day offers another opportunity to connect in a meaningful way. Take a few moments to reach out, listen and learn from those who have served. One of the best ways to honor our veterans is by ensuring their stories are preserved and shared. In today's digital age, we have more communication tools than ever to help keep their legacies alive. Many online resources allow us to explore the experiences of our veterans and contribute to preserving their stories.

For example, the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project is a valuable resource that collects and preserves personal accounts of American war veterans, ensuring future generations can learn from them. If you know a veteran, consider recording their story and submitting it to the project. It's a powerful way to ensure their legacy lives on. You can find more information by visiting loc.gov and searching for the Veterans History Project.

Another great resource is the National Archives at archives.gov, which offers extensive information about military records and veterans' service histories. You can request records, which is particularly helpful for genealogy research. Additionally, The Virtual Wall, found at virtualwall.org, displays the names and details of service members who died in Vietnam.

For those interested in directly supporting veterans, organizations like the Wounded Warrior Project and many others provide crucial assistance to members of our armed forces.

Thank you for joining me in honoring these courageous men and women this Veterans Day on Nov. 11.

Also, from all of us at Foothills, we wish all of you a joyful Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas! 📺



CONNECTION

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The Foothills Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Foothills Communications, ©2024. 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, Johnson and Lawrence counties, as well as parts of Boyd and Carter counties and Prichard, West Virginia. 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:



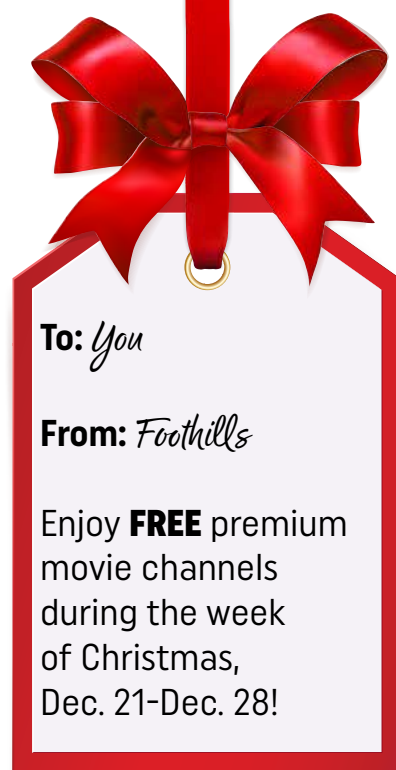
The Pointe of Joy dancers take the stage at the recently renovated SIPP Theater in Paintsville.
See story Page 8.

Photo contributed by
John Michael Laney

Win Big with Foothills!

Foothills Communications is offering customers a chance to win one of three **\$200 Visa Gift Cards**. To be eligible, customers can do one or more of the following during December:

- Sign up for monthly auto pay
- Download and use the Foothills eBill app
- Upgrade your internet speed to 1 Gig or higher



SPEED THINGS UP WITH 2 GIG INTERNET

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From all of us at Foothills Communications, we wish you a warm and happy holiday season.

In observance of the holidays, our office will be closed on the following dates:

Thanksgiving—Thursday, Nov. 28, and Friday, Nov. 29

Christmas—Tuesday, Dec. 24, and Wednesday, Dec. 25

Blast Off

Go on a holiday adventure at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Looking for an out-of-this-world family experience this holiday season? The U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, will capture everyone's imagination, from kids to adults.

The center was first conceived as Wernher von Braun and his team of rocket scientists were in the final months of refining the Saturn V rocket that would send Apollo astronauts to the moon. As director of the nearby Marshall Space Flight Center, von Braun saw the need for a permanent exhibit to showcase the hardware of the space program.

He petitioned the Alabama Legislature to create a museum with the help of the U.S. Army Missile Command and NASA. The U.S. Army donated land for the museum, and the U.S. Space & Rocket Center opened its doors in 1970, the year after Apollo 11 successfully carried astronauts to the moon and back.

Since then, the center has hosted more than 650,000 visitors each year from as many as 64 different countries. Visitors can get an up-close look at an authentic Saturn V rocket, one of only three in the world, as well as Pathfinder, the world's only fully stacked space shuttle display.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE TO EXPLORE

Not only is the USSRC an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, but it is also the official NASA Visitor Center for Marshall Space Flight Center. The museum offers regular bus tours highlighting the facility where the Space Launch System is in development to carry astronauts to Mars, asteroids and even deeper into space.

In addition to exhibits detailing the most complete chronology of launch vehicles in the country, the center's Apollo 16 command module, real Apollo 12 moon rock and daily STEM on Stage performances let visitors interact with artifacts and exhibits.

Children under 8 can explore an International Space Station-themed playground at Kids Cosmos, and every Saturday kids 12 and up are invited to the Maker Lab for hands-on projects that incorporate lessons on topics like solar energy and robotics. Adrenaline junkies can ride the G-Force Accelerator to experience three times the force of gravity or take the Moon Shot to see what a rocket launch feels like as you fly 140 feet straight up in 2.5 seconds.

"The Space & Rocket Center is really an amazing feast for the eyes. It's a place to learn about the past, the present and the future of space exploration."

—Pat Ammons, senior director of public and media relations

AN ASTRONOMICAL CHRISTMAS

One of the USSRC's most popular attractions is the INTUITIVE Planetarium, which features a state-of-the-art digital dome theater. Each screening is unique as a team of live astrophysicists takes visitors on a tour of the solar system.

"It is truly an extraordinary, absolutely world-class planetarium," says Senior Director of Public and Media Relations Pat Ammons. "It's all live and interactive. They take you on a personal tour, you can ask questions and it's highly interactive."

Throughout the holidays, the planetarium also screens a special feature called "The Star of Bethlehem," which explores both the science and religion behind the famous celestial phenomenon. 📺

A HELPING HAND

While the holidays often bring hope and happiness, for many people achieving those peaceful goals are elusive. That's particularly true this year, as communities throughout the Southeast strive to recover from damaging winds and devastating floods.

Dolly Parton, Walmart and countless others have contributed to organizations supporting these rural areas in need. If you wish to contribute, consider these options:

American Red Cross: [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org)

The Salvation Army: [salvationarmyusa.org](https://www.salvationarmyusa.org)

Photos courtesy of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center

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media relations

LEFT: The U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, is a holiday destination for the family.

Photo courtesy of Ash Agency



ABOVE: Finn Cushing, 2, tries an astronaut's suit on for size.

LEFT: See a piece of the moon, a rock brought home by astronauts.

The Historic **SIPP** Theater

After 93 years Paintsville's jewel still shines



STORY BY JEN CALHOUN

When the now-Historic SIPP Theater opened in 1932, it brought the people of Paintsville together in new and exciting ways.

The movie house was the first in the city to show talkies, or movies with soundtracks. It was also the first place to host the local broadcasting institution, WSIP, which was founded upstairs in 1949.

"It was built as a vaudeville-style theater," says Jeremiah Parsons, director of Paintsville Tourism, which operates the venue. "It had a stage that could host a variety of different acts, so it was already

an important part of the community the day it opened."

SONG OF THE SIPP

Nearly 100 years later, the world has changed, but the SIPP still stands. Named for the Sipp family, the theater brands itself in all capital letters—a nod to a time when the name Sipp loomed large on the building in its heyday.

"It's more than a movie theater now," Parsons says. "It's the home of the Main Street Players, our community theater troupe, and we also host performances by

the Johnson Central High School Players and Pointe of Joy Dance Studios. People still can celebrate here now, but they can also honor the heritage of what came before."

The theater, which includes a stage with full sound and lighting capabilities, shows two prereleased movies a month—generally one newer classic and another that's geared more toward children. The 2023 movie "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" has been featured, and so has "Barbie." The theater also relies on old favorites like "The Goonies" and "It's a Wonderful Life."



LEFT: The SIPP opened in 1932. It was Paintsville's first theater that showed movies with sound. Today, the Main Street building hosts movies, concerts and other special events.

ABOVE: The renovated theater includes a full stage, as well as professional lighting and sound systems.



Jeremiah Parsons, director of Paintsville Tourism, stands in front of the recently renovated SIPP Theater.

Customers can rent the theater as a venue for special events. "The high school does their awards show here, and the Kentucky Chitauqua, an arts group that brings Kentucky's history to life, has performed here," Parsons says. "We've done music events like Bluegrass at the SIPP and the Lexington Philharmonic. So many great musicians have played here over the years—big names in bluegrass like Larry Sparks and J.D. Crowe. We've even had beauty pageants, parties and weddings. It really is a multiuse facility."

BRUSH WITH DESTRUCTION

But the theater hasn't always thrived. The latter part of the 20th century was tough on the SIPP, as it was for many older buildings in America's downtowns in the days when shopping malls ruled the consumer landscape.

After closing for years, the SIPP reopened in 1994 through the efforts of local lawyer C.K. Belhasen. The theater hosted concerts and other events and remained active until closing again in 2008.

In 2010, the city bought the theater and completed some renovations, including extending the stage and adding modern lighting and sound equipment. It reopened again in 2012, and it's been open ever since.

Today the venue is managed by Paintsville Tourism, an agency that promotes local attractions and events like the U.S. 23 Country Music Highway Museum and Butcher Holler, home of Loretta Lynn. The tourism office uses its high-speed, fiber internet from Foothills Communications to power its website and Facebook pages.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Parsons says the building continues to engage the community through its events. "It can be expensive to maintain," he says. "But at the same time, our community is growing. We've got plans for it. We want to update the lighting and other things."

Many small towns in America have lost their historic buildings to time, but the SIPP still stands because of the persistence of the people of Paintsville and Johnson County. "I think recognizing the history of the theater is so important to all of us," Parsons says.

"It's exciting to think it provided a gathering place for this community nearly 100 years ago, and it still does today," he adds. "It's also centrally located, which helps everyone enjoy it. It breathes life into the whole city, whether through movies, dance, theater or a church function. We're so lucky to have it." 📺

TAKE A TRIP TO THE SIPP

Visit the Historic SIPP Theater at 336 Main St. in Paintsville. The theater and event venue offers movies, plays and concerts. It can also be rented for special events. For more information and to find out the latest happenings and events at the SIPP, visit the theater's Facebook page, go to paintsvilletourism.com or call 606-297-1469. Special events are scheduled around the Christmas holidays and during the Butcher Holler Backwoods event, the weeklong celebration of Loretta Lynn's birthday every April.

To find out more about the Paintsville Main Street Players latest lineup, visit and like the troupe's Facebook page, call 606-791-2372 or email info.mainstreetplayers@gmail.com.

THE ART OF SELF- RELIANCE

Rural writers get a boost from the internet

Story by JEN CALHOUN



Shawna Holly was researching how to publish her first novel when she ran into a type of writer's block she'd never experienced. This particular block had nothing to do with plot holes or mental tangles. Instead, it centered around the relatively slow-moving churn of books through the nation's traditional publishing houses.

"The industry—from my perspective—is very busy, like so many other businesses right now," Shawna says. "There are very few literary agents and acquisitions editors compared to how many debut authors are seeking representation, and they're all overworked. As a result, the path to traditional publishing is slow. For authors seeking a faster solution, self-publishing is the answer."

So, that's what she did. In June 2023, the Boerne, Texas-based writer published her first novel, "The Stories We Keep," via a self-publishing platform that distributes paperbacks and e-books all over the world. Her second book, "When We're Broken," came out earlier this fall. Both books are in the genre of women's literary fiction.

TAKING CHARGE

Shawna is among a growing number of writers embracing self-publishing

platforms to bypass traditional gatekeepers and speed up the book publishing process. This is especially true for writers from small or rural towns who may have a harder time finding an agent or fostering connections to publishing houses in larger cities.

"Agents receive thousands of queries a year, and they're only taking on maybe two or three new authors in addition to the clients they already have to manage," Shawna says. "It just makes it darn near impossible to find that magic match. I just thought, 'I'm in my 40s and have more stories to write. I don't want to wait.'"

Best-selling authors who famously self-published before landing big book deals and film adaptations include Amanda Brown, who wrote "Legally Blonde," and Andy Weir, who wrote "The Martian." Colleen Hoover, the East Texas author of the blockbuster "It Ends with Us," also self-published her first book, "Slammed," in 2012. She increased her audience by giving away free books and by posting regularly on social media.

Even those self-published writers who don't reach traditional literary heights have profited in the world of self-publishing. The Alliance of Independent Authors published a survey in 2023 reporting that

self-published authors earned a median income of \$12,749—more than double that of traditionally published authors. They also made up more than 50% of Kindle's Top 400 books of 2023, the survey found.

UNTANGLING THE WEB

Self-publishing isn't the only internet tool that sparks creativity, however. Connie Clyburn is an East Tennessee-based writer of several books, including "Wisdom from the Doublewide" and the devotional "Aging Fabulously." Connie found fellowship online through video calls with other writers from as far away as Ireland.

From her home in Telford, Tennessee—which she describes as "a little wide place in the road between Jonesborough and Greeneville"—she also uses the internet to connect with others through her online magazine. Called *ah law, y'all*, the quarterly publication highlights the Southern Appalachian area.

"You don't always think about how vital the internet is as a writer," says Connie, who infuses her writing with scripture and ways to apply it to everyday life. "But, as a rural writer, it has opened up a big world. Anything that I come up with



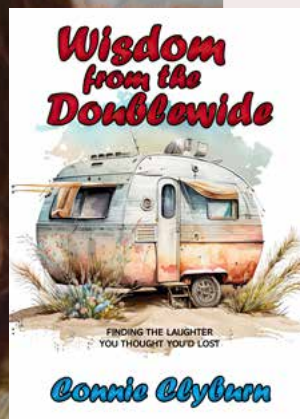
that I want to read about or research or just connect with is right there at your fingertips.” 🗨️

Photo courtesy of Connie Clyburn

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information on Connie Clyburn, look up her blog, “Wisdom from the Doublewide,” and the online magazine *ah law, y'all*.

Find out more about Shawna Holly and her books at shawnaholly.com.



LEFT: Connie Clyburn got her start as a journalist, and now she writes books, a blog and a newsletter from her home in East Tennessee near Jonesborough. Connie turned her blog into the book “Wisdom from the Doublewide.”

OPPOSITE PAGE: Shawna Holly lives outside of San Antonio, in a town of about 15,000 people. An Air Force veteran, Shawna self-published her book, “The Stories We Keep,” to avoid the sometimes long and tedious process of finding an agent and a publisher.

GET A START WITH SELF-PUBLISHING

Most writers learn quickly that finding a publisher is often harder than writing the book itself. Books are meant to be read, but the steps involved with finding an agent and publisher can waste valuable time and resources. As a result, many writers self-publish. The comprehensive book and writers' blog “What We Reading” lists several self-publishing platforms. We've listed a few resources here for e-books. Visit whatwewereading.com for more information on self-publishing print books.

Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, also known as KDP

- Highest market share and sales in the self-publishing industry.
- Writers earn royalties of between 35% and 70% depending on the price of the book.
- It's important to note there's another option called KDP Select, which is different than KDP. KDP Select users get certain marketing perks that can help sell their books. In exchange, they can't publish their work with any other self-publishing company.

Apple Books

- Writers earn royalties of 70% on all e-books.
- Second-biggest player in the industry after Amazon's KDP.
- No upfront fees for authors once they have an iTunes account.

Barnes & Noble Press, also known as B&N

- Writers earn 70% on e-books above 99 cents.
- B&N is considered one of the easiest platforms to use.
- Completely free to use, and it does not require exclusivity.

Other platforms include Kobo Writing Life, Draft2Digital, StreetLib, IngramSpark and PublishDrive, some of which have different pricing models and royalty distributions. Each of these platforms generally offers distribution to all the major e-book retailers, so it's important to research all options.

Source: “15 Best Self-Publishing Platforms for Your Book” from the blog “What We Reading.”

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Farmhouse Memories in Louisa is a full-service florist that also sells home decor and antiques.

Farmhouse Memories creates a festive atmosphere all year long



Story by JEN CALHOUN

Marsha and Harold Slone remember that cold November day in 2001 like it was yesterday. Less than three months earlier, terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center's twin towers and the Pentagon. A fourth plane meant for the Capitol building crashed into a field in Pennsylvania.

People were scared, and business at their Louisa shop, Farmhouse Memories, was slow. Customers hadn't been in the mood for flowers, antiques or home decor after the tragedy that fractured the nation's sense of security. To make matters worse, the couple had recently taken a risk on a larger building in Louisa, and the mortgage was due.

But as the Slones rounded the corner into town about an hour before they planned to open, they saw something that changed the way they think about business forever. A line of people stood in their coats at the front door of their shop, laughing, talking and visiting. "It was amazing," Marsha says. "It was like that for two days. That weekend after Thanksgiving is still our celebration weekend. That's when we realized, 'Hey, we may be OK.'"

IN THE BEGINNING

The Slones first opened Farmhouse Memories in 1995. "When we started, we were really thinking it would be more antiques and home decor, but as we evolved, we realized the floral industry is going to be a lot stronger way to make a living," Marsha says.

Nearly 30 years later, the shop stays true to its roots. Not only a full-service florist, it also sells antiques, home decor and gifts. Situated in a 1930s farmhouse, the shop offers different rooms with various displays, beautifully curated to give customers a chance to peruse.

"I want them to feel like they can walk through the store as much as they want," Marsha says. "We'll greet you when you come in, and we'll make ourselves readily available. But we don't stay on your heels unless you need us and ask for us."

With the world moving at such a fast pace, the Slones want the shop to be a place to relax and recharge. "We have some new things, some antiques, some floral stuff, some vintage and some wreaths," Marsha says. "Harold is amazing at creating displays, and he can also build any kind of thing I can dream up."



ABOVE: Harold and Marsha Slone started the business in 1995 when they were in their 20s. Today their son, Zeb, helps too.

TOP RIGHT: The annual Farmhouse Memories Christmas Open House takes place the weekend after Thanksgiving and features refreshments and a festive atmosphere.

RIGHT: Marsha, center, is helped along by floral designers Besse Hignite, left, and Katina Hardwick.

LOVING LOUISA

Harold is also the mayor of Louisa and—like Marsha—a fierce advocate for their city. Marsha loves how people come together to help and how they support local businesses like hers. During the shop's annual Christmas Open House the weekend after Thanksgiving, she offers shoppers refreshments and samples.

"It's kind of like a homecoming or a party," she says. "We like to chat and visit with people and show them our thanks for supporting us. It's what I love about a small town. You can't duplicate that feeling."

Long before she was the city's first lady, Marsha served as the town greeter and a vocal supporter for other local businesses. "I'm always telling people who come here that they need to go here and there," she says. "We have cool cafes and restaurants and bakeries here now. I know what it's like to be little and new. I know how hard it can be. There's not one road I've not gone down in business."

INTERNET SAVES THE DAY

One of the scariest times for the shop came during the COVID-19 pandemic. Between forced closures and fears of infection, Marsha realized she needed to find a new way to sell. "I think I had maybe 7,000 followers on Facebook around then," she says. "I realized I could post pictures of items, and they could pay me over the phone. Then I could set it out for them to pick up."

FARMHOUSE MEMORIES

Farmhouse Memories is a full-service florist, gift and home decor shop at 75 Highway 32 in Louisa. In addition to floral arrangements—both real and silk—for every occasion, the shop sells premade wreaths, antiques, gourmet food items and so much more. Farmhouse Memories holds its annual Christmas Open House the weekend after Thanksgiving and a sneak peek earlier in the month. To find out more, visit the website at farmhousememoriesflowers.com or find the business on Facebook at **Farmhouse Memories Florist, Antiques & Gifts**. The phone number is 606-638-7800.

Using their Foothills broadband connection, the Slones did more than survive. They also increased their customer base. "Over about six to eight months, my business continued to grow," Marsha says. "Honestly, it brought us more customers, because the more social media I did, the more people started driving here from places in Ohio, like Chesapeake or South Point. Now, I have customers that will drive 30-40 miles just to come here." 📱

Holiday Simplicity

Breakfast casseroles are a gift for busy hosts

Make-ahead casseroles can make the difference between holiday stress and satisfaction. From sweet to savory, there are many choices. Here are several to try this season.



**Food Editor
Anne P. Braly
is a native of
Chattanooga,
Tennessee.**

SCRAMBLED EGG BAKE

- 4 slices bacon
- 8 ounces dried beef
- 2 4-ounce cans mushrooms, drained
- 1/2 cup butter, divided
- 1/2 cup flour
- 4 cups whole milk
- 16 eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk

Saute the bacon until almost done. Add dried beef, mushrooms and 1/4 cup butter. While hot, add flour and stir in whole milk. Simmer sauce until thickened and smooth, stirring constantly.

Beat eggs with evaporated milk and salt. Scramble in remaining 1/4 cup butter.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Ladle a layer of sauce into the dish followed by a layer of scrambled eggs. Repeat layers, ending with a layer of sauce. Garnish with mushrooms and bacon. Cover with foil and bake at 275 F for 1 hour.

To make ahead: Make casserole, cover and refrigerate. Bake as directed.

BLUEBERRY PANCAKE CASSEROLE

Crumb Topping:

- 1/2 cup flour
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Pancakes:

- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 tablespoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups whole buttermilk
- 1/2 cup milk
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1-2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest
- 2 cups blueberries
- Maple syrup, for serving

Crumb topping: The day before, in a medium bowl, combine flour, sugars, cinnamon and salt. Add melted butter and stir until fully incorporated. Cover and refrigerate.

Pancakes: Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish and set aside.

In a large bowl, combine flour, sugar, salt, baking powder and baking soda.

In a separate bowl, combine eggs, buttermilk, milk, melted butter, lemon zest and vanilla extract. Whisk wet ingredients until well combined. Add wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and stir until just combined. The batter will be lumpy. Do not overmix.

Pour the batter into the greased baking dish. Sprinkle the blueberries over the top. Remove the crumb topping from the fridge and crumble over the top of the blueberries and batter. Bake for 35-45 minutes, until puffed and light golden brown. Use a toothpick to check the center for doneness. Serve warm with maple syrup.



FRENCH TOAST CASSEROLE

- 1 12- to 14-ounce loaf French or sour-dough bread. Stale bread works great.
- 1 8-ounce package full-fat cream cheese, softened
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 3 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided
- 8 eggs
- 2/3 cup packed brown sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 1/4 cups whole milk

Topping:

- 1/3 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cold and cubed
- Maple syrup and/or powdered sugar for topping

Grease a 9-by-13-inch casserole with nonstick spray. Either cut the bread into 1-inch cubes or tear it into preferred size. Spread half of the cubes into prepared baking pan.

Using a hand-held or stand mixer with a whisk attachment, beat the cream cheese

on medium-high speed until completely smooth. Beat in the powdered sugar and 1/4 teaspoon vanilla until combined. Drop random spoonfuls of cream cheese mixture on top of the bread. Layer the remaining bread cubes on top of cream cheese. Make sure some cream cheese is still exposed on top. Set aside.

Whisk the eggs, milk, cinnamon, brown sugar and remaining vanilla together until no brown sugar lumps remain. Pour evenly over the bread. Cover the pan tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 3-4 hours or up to 24 hours. Overnight is best.

When ready to bake, remove from the refrigerator and uncover while you make the topping.

Mix the brown sugar, flour and cinnamon. Then, use a pastry cutter or your hands to cut the cold butter into the topping mixture until crumbly.

Bake at 350 F for 45-60 minutes. You can use a knife to check the French toast—it should come out mostly clean when the dish is ready. Avoid putting the knife into the cream cheese dollop, which could give a false reading.

SAVORY RICE CEREAL CASSEROLE

- 2 pounds pork sausage
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 3 cups Rice Krispies
- 3 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 6 eggs
- 2 cans cream of celery soup
- 1/2 cup milk



In a skillet, cook sausage with onion until meat is no longer pink and onions are tender; drain. Transfer mixture to a lightly greased 9-by-13-inch casserole. Top with layers of rice, cereal and cheese. In a bowl beat the eggs with the soup and milk. Spread mixture on top. Cover with foil and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Remove foil and bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean. Let stand for 5-10 minutes before serving.

Note: Making this a day ahead helps to soften the cereal. It can be baked right away, but the cereal may still be crispy. 📺



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