



Mountain Telephone

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

CONNECTION



Vacation Destination

Menifee sees rise in short-term rentals

SMALL TOWN CHRISTMAS

PETS FOR VETS





By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Professionally Secure

NTCA members are committed to your safety

As we enter the holiday season, it is an opportunity to acknowledge a group of professionals you may not realize is working diligently behind the scenes to make this season—as well as every month of the year—enjoyable and safe.

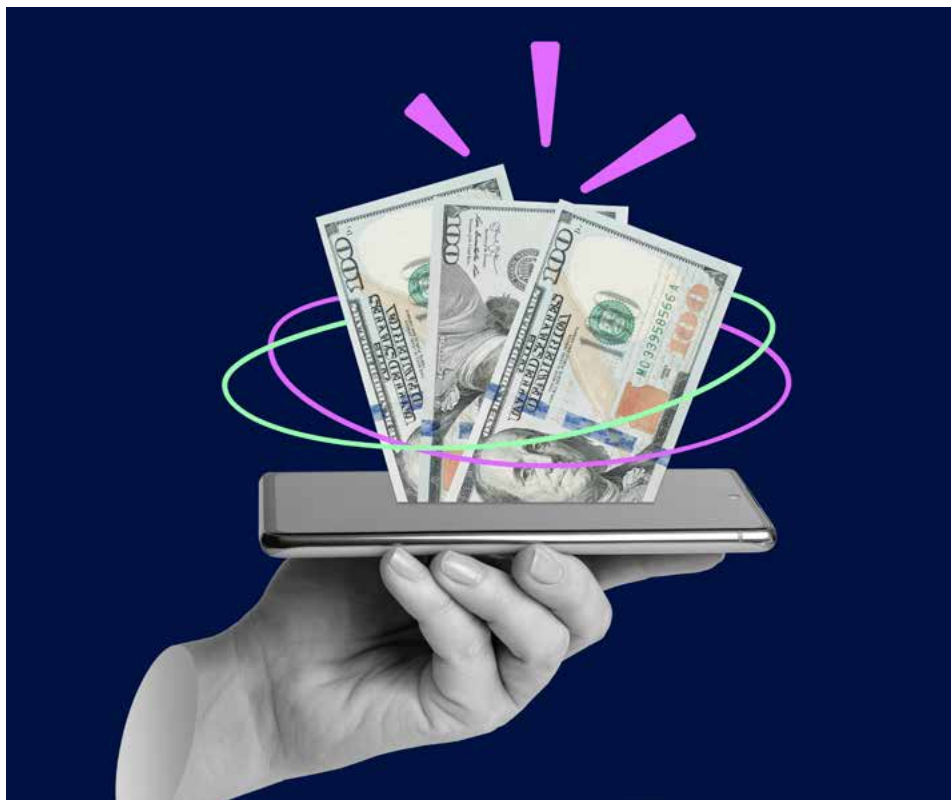
Many of you stream movies, music, short videos or interactive games, and there's always online shopping. NTCA members provide rural communities with the networks vital for all of this and so much more, from banking to education, telehealth and beyond.

Unfortunately, online risks do exist. Scammers may try to capture your personal information, or malicious websites might lead to insecure transactions. There are even attempts to disrupt the infrastructure itself.

Monitoring threats and vigilantly updating everything from software to security strategies is central to the day-to-day job of rural broadband providers. To help with this, NTCA created CyberShare: The Small Broadband Provider ISAC, an information-sharing network that allows participating providers to collaborate and share critical information. Whether it's learning about vulnerable equipment, software exploits, recent cyberattack attempts or mitigation strategies, this information sharing helps members proactively strengthen their defenses to keep you and your family safe online.

You play a role, too. When you're shopping online, make smart choices, such as relying on websites with addresses that begin with https, shop on well-established sites and lean on strong, secure passwords.

Together we can enjoy happy, safe holidays. 📱



Adobe Stock image by LariBat

Use Caution With Cash Apps

While mobile payment apps like PayPal or Venmo make it easy to send and receive money online or through an app on a phone, scammers are also waiting to take advantage.

This service becomes an intermediary between your money and whoever is on the other end of a transaction, which can create an added layer of security.

But if a scammer tricks you into sending money, it's hard to get it back. The Federal Trade Commission notes the risks and offers tips for staying safe.

- Don't send a payment to claim a prize or collect sweepstakes winnings.
- Never give your account credentials to anyone who contacts you.
- Protect your account with multifactor authentication or a personal identification number.
- Before paying, double-check the recipient's information to make sure you're sending money to the right person.
- If you get an unexpected request for money from someone you do recognize, speak with that person directly to make sure the request really is valid, not a scam by a hacker who got access to their account.

If you find unauthorized payments or think you paid a scammer, immediately report the transaction to the service providing the payment app. Instructions should be available on the service's website. Also, report the scam to reportfraud.ftc.gov. 📱

Outside the Box

Personalized presents extend gift-giving beyond holidays

Looking for that gift that keeps on giving long after they've tossed the wrapping paper and bows? With a little online exploration, a nontraditional gift is out there for just about everyone on your list.

GAMING SUBSCRIPTIONS

Just like movie and music services, game subscriptions offer unlimited access to huge catalogs of titles for players who would rather not put up the \$70-\$80 average price for each individual game. Paying a part of the most popular subscriptions—Xbox Game Pass at \$9.99-\$19.99 per month, PlayStation Plus at \$17.99 or Apple Arcade at \$6.99—is a great way to show your gamers some love.

WATCH 'EM PLAY

Video game streaming involves broadcasting live gameplay over the internet, allowing viewers to engage with and watch other players in real time. Like livestreaming on Facebook and TikTok, game streamers provide content for viewers worldwide, playing video games and offering commentary.

Twitch is by far the most popular service, with more than 240 million monthly subscribers who play, watch, create content and follow other gamers. Three subscription tiers with different levels of perks range from \$4.99 to \$24.99 per month. Steam is also huge. Discord, Kick, Caffeine and DLive are other popular choices for gifting your interactive gamers, just confirm the platform they prefer so you're sure to get them a gift they can use.

'OF THE MONTH' CLUBS

With a quick internet search, you can set

up a monthly delivery of everything from pickles to pet chews to bath gels, bacon and beyond. Look at sites like Amazing Clubs or Month Club Store to find multiple choices in one spot.

A monthly themed box or crate can satisfy all ages, from educational toys at Crunchlabs and a monthly Lego set through Brick Loot to a spa-in-a-box from Therabox. Visit Cratejoy for a wide selection.

Consider a gift subscription to Dear Holmes, which mails weekly clues on fancy stationery for solving a Victorian-era crime. For \$50, six months' worth of mysteries will turn your person into a solo Sherlock or the leader of a team of Watsons who share stories on YouTube.

GIFT CARDS

You've no doubt noticed the columns of gift cards at your supermarket or drugstore. They look like colorful credit cards, and that's exactly what they are. These pieces of plastic can be applied toward almost anything from cash to food delivery services. The easiest way to give something everyone wants and by far the simplest to ship, gift cards are expected to generate \$447.1 billion in revenue this year.

You can grab gift cards toward recurring subscriptions, like a movie or music streaming service. You're sure to earn points by gifting a part of the monthly Netflix or Hulu charges. Or find a Spotify, Apple Music or SiriusXM gift card and keep the happy tunes flowing all year. 🎧

GIFT CARD SMARTS

Stick to stores you know and trust. Avoid buying online where shady sellers may promote fake or stolen gift cards.

Avoid cards with signs of tampering.

Pay with a credit card if possible. If you run into problems and have to file a chargeback, your credit card company will investigate.

Consider using the gift card quickly to avoid potential inactivity fees or issues like business closure.

Keep copies. If the gift card doesn't work, the number on the card and store receipt will help you file a report with the Federal Trade Commission at reportfraud.ftc.gov.

Source: Federal Trade Commission

Enjoy the Holidays!

Let's thrive and celebrate together

The final two months of 2025 will bring turkey dinners, bright lights, festive gatherings and so much more. I always enjoy this time of year, when shared values and community spirit tie us together. At Mountain Telephone, we're happy to play our part, too.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

We proudly support the local businesses that make our economy strong during this busiest of shopping seasons. Generosity and gift-giving fuel much of that success for businesses of all sizes.

For some companies, the gains made this holiday season are the difference between a profitable year and lean results.

By providing quality communications services, we strive to help them connect not only to you but also to the online tools and resources—even the online shoppers—that create success. A study last year, supported in part by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association found rural economies with strong broadband usage grew at a rate 200% higher than similar areas with low broadband usage. Simply put, in places lacking reliable internet, businesses close at a faster rate.

At Mountain Telephone, though, we don't need national studies to tell us how we're doing. We are attuned to the needs of local businesses to better serve them. When a new business opens, we are eager to support it by providing broadband service. And we know our fast, reliable internet network is considered essential infrastructure for employers looking for a location.

But shopping and income are only two parts of the equation during the holiday season.

There's time for pure fun, too. Though many people do find plenty of enjoyment in shopping, many families will turn to their broadband connection to unlock a treasure trove of digital experiences.

Music, movies, gaming, social media and far more are a few clicks away. You'll even find an article in this magazine noting several possible digital gifts, perfect for the times when you need a creative solution.

As we give thanks during this holiday season, it's important to remember more than fun and opportunity. That's the other side of our mission. Yes, we focus on providing essential services, but we also believe in giving back, both as a company and as individuals.

It's often particularly trying during the holidays. If you can help, consider contributing monetarily to a charity, finding a few spare hours to volunteer or donating food or other goods.

Please visit local shops and check out the talented artisans of our community. Find a one-of-a-kind gift from an equally unique business. And if you're able, help as you can. Together, we make this community a wonderful home where we can all thrive.

Thank you for letting Mountain Telephone serve you. Have a Happy Thanksgiving and a very Merry Christmas. 📺



CONNECTION

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

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Mountain Telephone

Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc., is a member-owned cooperative dedicated to providing communications technology to the people of Elliott, Menifee, Morgan, Wolfe and a section of Bath counties. The company covers 1,048 square miles and supplies service to nearly 11,500 members.

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On the Cover:



The number of short-term rental properties in Menifee County is growing to meet increased demand.
See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of Carrie Lawson,
Menifee County Tourism



THANK YOU

ON VETERANS DAY—AND EVERY DAY—
WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR SERVICE

CLOSED FOR THE HOLIDAYS

To allow our employees time to celebrate the holidays with their families, Mountain offices will close on the following dates:

Thanksgiving—Thursday, Nov. 27, and
Friday, Nov. 28

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

New Year's Day—Thursday, Jan. 1



Mountain's December of Giving

Upgrade your current internet package or sign up for new service and get **two months free and special gift.**

Starting December 1-31.



Speedway In Lights

Bristol gears up for Christmas festivities

Story by KATHY DENES

Ready to take a lap around the “The World’s Fastest Half-Mile” illuminated by 3 million Christmas lights? For the 29th year, Tennessee’s Bristol Motor Speedway and Dragway is inviting the public to come celebrate the season.

The route of the 4-mile-long Food City Speedway In Lights powered by TVA starts at Bristol Dragway, entered off Highway 394. About midway through, drivers enter the iconic “Last Great Colosseum” and circle its half-mile concrete oval. After taking that memorable lap, guests can park inside the track and treat the family to the Christmas Village, presented by HSN.

The Christmas Village, adorned in holiday decor, includes Santa’s Hut, where kids get the chance to meet the jolliest old elf. There are also carnival rides, vendors offering Christmas crafts and treats, a tubing slide and a snow maze.

After enjoying all the village has to offer, guests will get back in their vehicles and continue the drive, which concludes at the Dragway entrance.

ICE, ICE, BABY!

Finishing the drive doesn’t have to mean it’s time to leave the speedway, though. Adding to the holiday sparkle is the Tri-Cities Airport Ice Rink at Bristol

Motor Speedway, presented by Stateline Services and touted as the region’s best and longest-standing ice rink. Visitors can enjoy skating daily from Thursday, Nov. 20, through Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026. Admission is \$12 for guests who bring their own skates or \$15 for those who need to rent them.

The 120-by-60-foot ice rink is covered by a tent at the speedway’s North Entrance. Promotional nights and special events are offered, such as College Nights at the Ice Rink. On Tuesdays, students who present their valid college IDs at the ticket booth will get a free skate rental.

A LIGHT FOR CHILDREN

Proceeds from the Speedway In Lights and affiliated events benefit Bristol Speedway Children’s Charities, which funds agencies that have helped thousands of children. The charity was founded in 1996 when Bristol Speedway became part of Speedway Motorsports, which has a Speedway Children’s Charities chapter at each of its 11 racing venues.

Claudia Byrd, the executive director of the Bristol chapter, was charged with coming up with a signature fundraising event. Inspired by her family’s tradition of enjoying holiday light displays in her hometown, Claudia suggested the speedway present a Christmas lights show. It

quickly got the green light from track owner Bruton Smith. To date, thanks to the Christmas event and others throughout the year, the charity has distributed nearly \$20 million.

“Speedway In Lights is not only the flagship fundraiser for Speedway Children’s Charities but a tradition for so many in the Tri-Cities region,” says Betsy Holleman, the charity’s senior manager for development and events. “The event has accounted for a third of our annual budget for over 25 years. It’s an opportunity to bring family out for an evening of Christmas fun, while supporting kids in our area.”

FAST FACTS

Speedway In Lights begins on Friday, Nov. 21, and continues daily from 6-10 p.m. into the new year, concluding on Saturday, Jan. 3.

Prices for cars range between \$25-\$35. Vans are \$85, and buses are \$150. Visitors can take advantage of Fast Lane presented by Citi, a speedy \$75 option that provides a shorter wait time on select nights when traffic lines get long.

For details about Fast Lane presented by Citi and all other Speedway In Lights event and pricing updates, go to bristolmotorspeedway.com. 📱



ABOVE: The display of Speedway In Lights sponsor Food City brightens up a section of the route.

LEFT: Skaters enjoy the covered ice rink outside Bristol Motor Speedway.

Booking BOOM

Short-term rental market grows in Menifee

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Around the time the pandemic hit in 2020, more and more out-of-towners began discovering what locals already knew—Eastern Kentucky is home to some of the most beautiful terrain in the country. Not only that, it's also the perfect low-key destination for hiking, climbing, kayaking or simply marveling at the scenery.

Around that time in Menifee County individuals and investors started buying up old cabins and either renovating them into modern rentals or scrapping them entirely for new builds, says Carrie Lawson, director of Menifee County Tourism.

The number of short-term rental properties in the region has exploded in recent years, spurring an increase in tourism dollars coming into the county. “In the last couple of years, we have opened up more businesses as a result,” Lawson says. “And there’s lots more of that in the works, which is hugely exciting for us.”

BEAUTIFUL SCENERY

Back in the '90s, families looking for a getaway in Menifee County built hundreds of A-frame cabins. Over time, however, many of those cabins began to sit idle.

“Then the pandemic happened, and all these people were looking for a place to get away,” Lawson says. “That ended up creating a boom in buying those A-frames.”

Menifee County was a smart destination, too. For one thing, it wasn't overly crowded or expensive like Pigeon Forge or Gatlinburg. Also, secluded areas and privacy are still available in these particular hills.

In addition to cozy and mid-sized modernized cabins, people started building large properties perched on cliff lines that overlook stunning valleys. Some of these rentals can accommodate up to 30 people for family reunions, multifamily get-togethers or corporate retreats. They are listed on various online short-term-rental sites, including Airbnb, VRBO, Evolve, Priceline and Hip Camp.

“We’ve got several hundred short-term rentals that I know of,” Lawson says. “They’re spread all over the county, because we’ve got Cave Run Lake on one side of us and the Red River Gorge on the other side. They may go do some boating and climbing at those places, but more and more like to come back and stay with us because of the serenity.”

FIBER INTERNET DOESN'T HURT, EITHER

Despite the desire for privacy and a need for seclusion, modern-day mountain-goers aren't exactly Jeremiah Johnsons.

Instead, they rely heavily on creature comforts, especially high-speed internet service. They need it for everything from



Menifee County Tourism Director Carrie Lawson catches up on some work using Mountain Telephone's fiber broadband service, which is available in some of the most remote areas of the county.

cellphones to streaming services. Mountain Telephone, which offers some of the fastest, most reliable fiber internet service in the country, is playing an important role in Menifee County's burgeoning popularity.

Not only could pandemic-era guests work remotely in comfort, but many people also realized their broadband service in the woods is significantly better than the service they get at home in the city.

Airbnb research found travelers tend to rely on fast internet to have a pleasant trip and stay in touch with friends and family, according to an article from Hospitable. Hospitable is a company that provides software services for short-term rental property owners.

"Wi-Fi is one of the amenities guests search for most often," the article says. "It's also essential for business travelers and digital nomads who work remotely."

The article encourages property owners to add fast Wi-Fi and laptop-friendly workspaces to their rentals' list of amenities as a way to increase their bookings and revenue. "And since many guests view Wi-Fi as a standard feature for a

vacation rental property, if you don't include it in your list of amenities, travelers will prefer similar listings that offer internet over your listing," it says. "Then, your Airbnb occupancy rate will suffer."

KEEPING SMALL TOWNS SMALL

Looking ahead, county officials are walking a careful line between growth and preservation, Lawson says. "While I want to see more business come to Menifee County and more people get the



Photos courtesy of Carrie Lawson, Menifee County Tourism

In recent years, individuals and property developers have built new homes and renovated old ones to feed the growing tourism market in Menifee County.

chance to stay here instead of moving away, I never, ever want to lose sight of who we are or our small-town charm," she says.

It makes sense, too. In an era when authentic experiences feel increasingly rare, Menifee County is discovering its best marketing strategy is simply being itself.

"Coming here is a way to get away," Lawson says. "We offer that tranquility and small-town charm. They want to sit around the fire. They want to stargaze. They want to relax and not worry about all the craziness." 🗨️

BY THE NUMBERS

More and more vacationers are choosing short-term rental properties, especially when traveling with family or friends. Check out these statistics from DemandSage, a data compiling business. It's important to note that these are stats from Airbnb, but there are many other online booking sites for short-term properties.

Airbnb Statistics 2025

- Airbnb has over 8 million active listings spanning 220 countries.
- Over 5 million hosts have made their properties available on Airbnb.
- Since the company's launch, hosts have earned over \$250 billion through Airbnb.
- Airbnb has more than 200 million active users worldwide.
- The typical host in the U.S. earns \$14,000 from Airbnb.
- The United States has the highest number of Airbnb listings, featuring around 2.25 million active properties.

Source: demandsage.com/airbnb-statistics



HEALING BONDS

Pets for Vets makes the perfect match

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Clarissa Black first took Bear, her husky-malamute, to visit patients at a Veterans Administration medical center, she had no idea he was about to change hundreds of lives.

Of course, she knew Bear was special. He had a way about him. When someone needed quiet company, Bear could lie perfectly still for hours. If someone was working on mobility, Bear would position himself at the perfect distance, paws up, as if to offer encouragement. And when people looked into the dog's eyes and spoke to him, he'd cock his head and let out one of his husky "woos" right on cue.

"People really felt like he was talking to them," says Clarissa, whose background in animal science and anthrozoology gave her a deeper insight into the interactions. "They felt seen, and they felt heard."

Clarissa's experience with Bear at the VA hospital sparked the idea for Pets for Vets, a nonprofit organization that matches veterans with specially trained companion animals. Since she founded it more than 15 years ago, the organization has matched more than 800 animals with veterans.

WANT TO HELP?

Pets for Vets is a four-star rated, not-for-profit organization that relies on donations to provide free services to veterans. There are several ways to donate.

Donate online: Visit petsforvets.com/donate to make a secure online donation.

Donate by mail: Pets for Vets Inc., P.O. Box 10860, Wilmington, NC 28404.

Other ways to give: The organization also accepts cryptocurrency and vehicle donations that include cars, trucks, boats and motorcycles.

Volunteer: Fill out the volunteer form at petsforvets.com to offer your time and expertise.

For more information about the program, or to apply for a companion animal, visit petsforvets.com or send an email to contactus@petsforvets.com.



LEFT: Spyder's tendency to jump in laps and lick faces helped calm and center Leif Mesinger when he became frustrated.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Clarissa Black, founder and executive director of Pets for Vets, with her late dog, Bear, who sparked the idea for the not-for-profit organization.

We're looking for that reciprocal match where both are getting exactly what they want."

MAKING A MATCH

Once the group approves a veteran's application for a companion animal, the search gets underway. Clarissa's experience as a marine mammal trainer taught her the most powerful relationships happen when both parties get exactly what they need. The process isn't about finding a good dog. It's about finding exactly the right dog.

The matching process is not only thorough, it's personal. Veterans work closely with trainers to identify their needs and prepare for pet ownership. "We spend a lot of time getting to know our veterans, finding out what it is they need, what they're looking for and what would be a good fit for them," she says.

Meanwhile, trainers visit shelters and rescue groups to conduct one-on-one "interviews" with potential animal companions, which can include cats, rabbits and other species, as well. If a veteran enjoys outdoor activities, for example, the trainer might look for a more active dog that loves to fetch and hike. On

the other hand, a more sedentary vet might need a peaceful pooch or calm cat.

From there, each animal undergoes foundation training customized for its future human. During this time, which often takes place in a foster situation, trainers enhance what Clarissa calls the animal's "superpowers," or the natural behaviors that made them perfect for their veteran in the first place.

"We're really trying to make this connection where both are getting exactly what they want," she says. "Ultimately, that connection is what's going to fulfill them and maybe even heal them. There's some research out there that suggests that it's not just any dog, it's the right dog—the dog that people feel connected to—that can help mitigate anxiety and depression." 🐾

SECOND CHANCES

After Leif Mesinger returned home from Iraq, the world felt different. It was harder to navigate and harder to understand. The Army infantryman and gunner suffered a traumatic brain injury from an improvised explosive device blast, and it changed everything.

"My mind was racing, and I struggled to communicate," Leif says in a Pets for Vets testimonial video. "I felt disconnected from everything I used to know."

But help arrived in the form of a tiny, hairless waif of a dog named Spyder. Clarissa Black, founder of Pets for Vets, discovered the dog after meeting with Leif and finding out what he needed in a companion animal.

Spyder's superpower was that he loved to jump into people's laps and lick them. It was a trait Clarissa intentionally honed in Spyder before presenting him to Leif. She knew that kind of gentle, rhythmic contact could ground a person dealing with anxiety.

In time, Spyder's constant presence gave Leif a growing sense of purpose and a deepening bond. Thanks to his more than 15 years with Spyder, Leif's communication with others has improved and his life is more fulfilling than ever. "Spyder was kind of like that saving grace that centered me again and brought me back," he says.

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

The program generally serves veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries, but the organization is open to helping any vet who could benefit from a deep connection with a pet. And while the service is completely free to the veterans, it relies on donations from the public and a network of more than 100 volunteer animal trainers across the country.

It's important to note that Pets for Vets animals aren't service dogs that have been highly trained to assist people with disabilities. Still, the organization works hard to meet the veterans' needs as well as the animals'.

"We're not just asking what the dog gives the veteran," Clarissa says. "We want to know what the veteran gives the dog."

Picture PERFECT

West Liberty's Small Town Christmas enters its second year

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Sandra Dye found out the Morgan County Sorghum Festival parade was canceled in September 2024, she was disappointed. It just so happened that was the same year both her daughters were on the Morgan County Middle School Sorghum Festival court.

The idea that she wouldn't get to see her children wearing their sashes and waving from a parade float really bothered the proud mama. But if there was another parade out there, maybe there was still hope.

"So, I made a Facebook post on The Six 0 Six," Sandra says, referencing her food truck business's social media page. "I said, 'When does West Liberty have a Christmas parade?'"

The answer, she learned, was that there wasn't one. And while there was a great deal of interest in attending one, no one

seemed interested in organizing it. So, when Sandra and her friend, Kristi Gullett, tentatively volunteered, they found themselves deep in planning not just a parade but a multilayered event that was coming up fast.

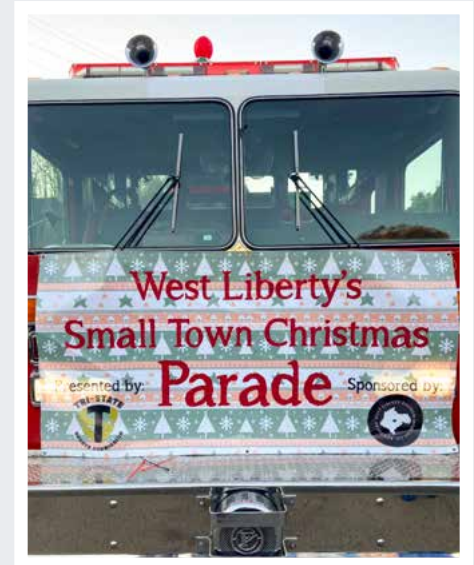
"Everyone started saying, 'You need to do the Christmas parade,' which turned into, 'You need to add this. You need to do that,'" Sandra says. "It just blew up from there."

The success of last year's inaugural event inspired Sandra and Kristi to keep going. In December, West Liberty Tourism will sponsor the second Small Town Christmas, a festival complete with parade, the 5K Holiday Hustle, food trucks, arts and crafts vendors, an ice skating rink and a tree-lighting ceremony.

FROM FOOD TRUCK OWNER TO EVENT ORGANIZER

One of the first things Sandra and Kristi did was meet with West Liberty's police chief to figure out a parade route. With that settled, they partnered with West Liberty Tourism to offer ice skating at the top of the Gateway Transit building.

The planning didn't stop there, how-



West Liberty's signature holiday event is in its second year.

"I love giving back to our community. It brings a real spark, and people get excited."

—SANDRA DYE, SMALL TOWN CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION ORGANIZER

ever, because the community kept wanting more. Soon, Heather Johnson, with Tri-State Sports Commission, hopped on board and added a "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" costume contest to this list of activities and a 5K run/walk the morning of the event.

Another plan was to add a stage for performances by local musicians and church choirs. But when that was canceled due to weather forecasts, another friend, Larry Lewis, brought his personal

sound system in to pump music through the streets.

Sandra laughs when asked whether she'd had any large-event planning experience before this. "No, not exactly," she says. "But I am on the fair board for our carnival that used to come to West Liberty and our rodeo. So, I do like to plan events, but I'd never planned anything this big."

COMMUNITY POWER

This year, Sandra, Kristi and Heather expect the event to be even bigger as the word gets out and more people become invested. They also hope to see more food trucks and vendors take part this year.

"As early as this summer, I had people reaching out to find out if we were going to do this," Sandra says. "They want to participate."

This year, the organizers intend to request a \$10 fee for vendors, which will go to a local charity. "I want to make sure they have some investment in the event, so they'll show up," Sandra says. "Plus, we can help people in our community with the money."

The donation underscores the importance of the community celebration. West Liberty Tourism, local organizations, churches and businesses all chip in with donations of money, prizes and volunteers to make Small Town Christmas happen.

And last year, when storms nearly toppled the town's 30-foot Christmas tree, Mountain Telephone stepped in with bucket trucks to restore the centerpiece.

It's moments like those that give Sandra a warm feeling. "I love community events," she says. "I love giving back to our community. It brings a real spark, and people get excited." 📞

ENJOY THE SPIRIT OF THE SEASON!

West Liberty's Small Town Christmas will take place Saturday, Dec. 6. For more information and the latest updates, visit West Liberty's Small Town Christmas Facebook page.



FROM TOP: A decorated tractor makes its way along the parade route.

The ice-skating rink, provided by West Liberty Tourism, is a favorite among festivalgoers.

"A Christmas Story" parade float offers scenes and characters from the popular movie.



Share a Pizza

Share Your Heart

Start a new holiday meal tradition

Turkey, ham, lamb—tradition gives them all a place on the holiday table. But gather the family together for a pizza party, and you can roll out a whole new tradition.

Make your own pizza dough with just a handful of ingredients, and you'll know that there are no preservatives and other unhealthy additives. For a family affair and fun for the kids, create a bar with pizza toppings—pepperoni, sausage, onions, peppers, cheese and the like—and let them make their own.

A preheated pizza stone will crisp the crust, but a cookie sheet also works.

A pizza salad with Italian herbs and a creamy vinaigrette dressing is the perfect pairing.

A dessert pizza with fresh berries and other fruits available year-round delivers a refreshing finish. Make the crust the day before and layer on the cream cheese spread. But wait until shortly before serving to add the fruits so they will stay colorful and fresh.



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

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



FAMILY NIGHT PIZZA

- 1 cup warm water (105 F)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast
- 1 tablespoon olive or avocado oil
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 to 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

Preheat oven to 500 F. Put a pizza stone or cookie sheet in the oven while it preheats, and let it warm for at least 10 minutes.

MAKE THE DOUGH

In a large mixing bowl, stir water, yeast and sugar to combine. Let mixture sit for 5 minutes or until it becomes frothy and bubbles form. Gently stir in olive oil.

Add 2 cups of flour and salt and mix with a spatula until a ball begins to form. The

dough will still be slightly sticky. Add more flour as needed to form a dough ball.

Transfer to a floured surface and knead into a smooth dough, adding up to 1/2 cup extra flour if needed.

Cover the bowl with a damp tea towel, and let it rise for 10 minutes or up to 1 hour.

ASSEMBLE THE PIZZA

Roll the dough into your desired shape and put it on a piece of parchment paper. Add pizza sauce, cheese and toppings of choice. Transfer the pizza to the preheated pizza stone or cookie sheet in the oven.

Bake for 12-15 minutes or until the bottom of the crust is golden brown. Remove the pizza from the oven, and let it cool for 5-10 minutes before serving.

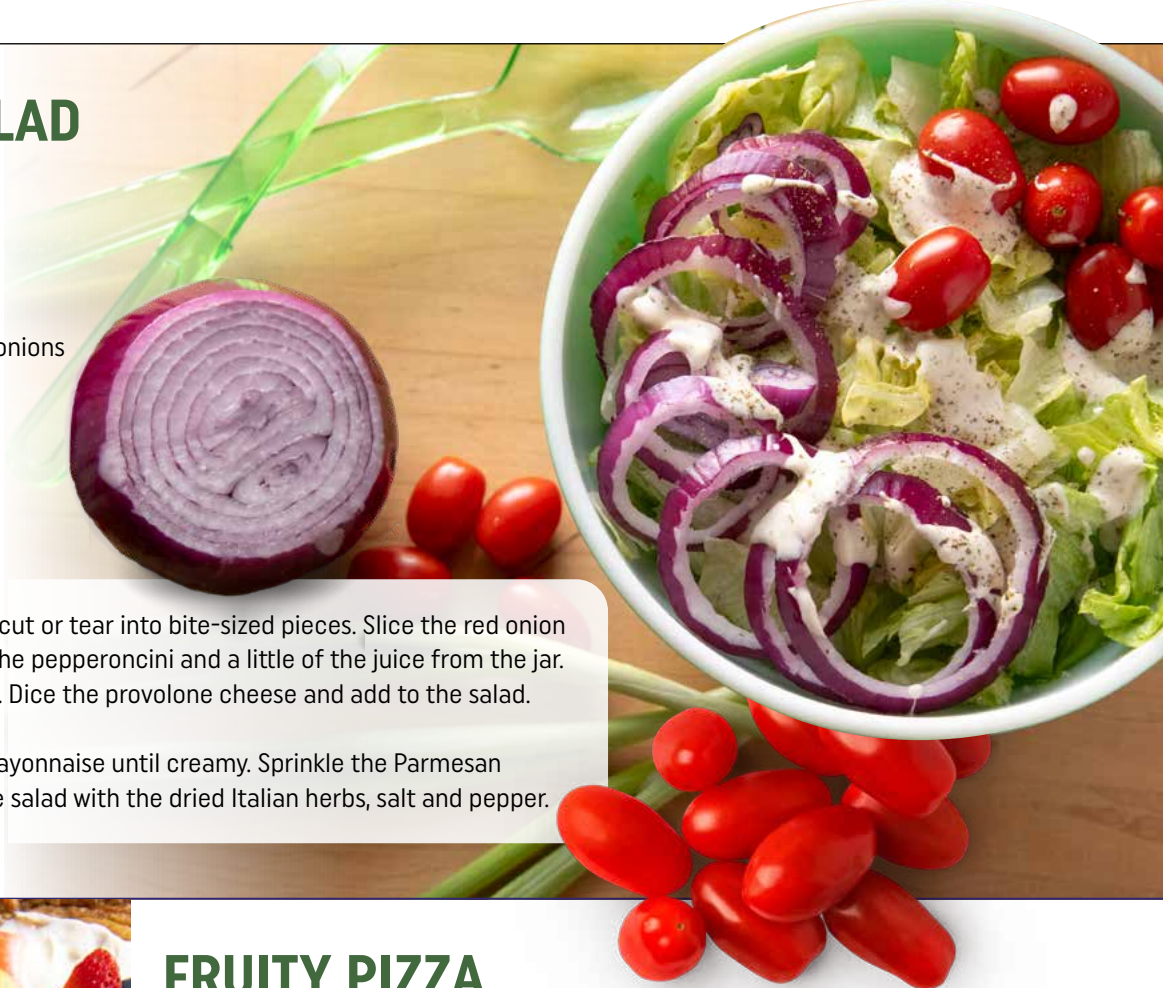
PIZZA NIGHT SALAD

- 1 head iceberg lettuce
- 1 medium red onion
- 6-8 pepperoncini peppers
- Chopped tomatoes to taste
- 8 slices provolone cheese
- 1 bunch fresh chives or green onions
- 1 1/3 cup favorite vinaigrette
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon or more dried Italian herbs
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Wash and air dry the lettuce and cut or tear into bite-sized pieces. Slice the red onion and add to the lettuce, along with the pepperoncini and a little of the juice from the jar.

Toss the tomatoes over the salad. Dice the provolone cheese and add to the salad. Sprinkle the salad with the chives.

Mix the salad dressing and the mayonnaise until creamy. Sprinkle the Parmesan cheese over the top and season the salad with the dried Italian herbs, salt and pepper.



FRUITY PIZZA

FOR THE CRUST

- 1 1/3 cups unsalted butter, softened
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 eggs, room temperature
- 2 tablespoons whole milk, room temperature
- 4 cups flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

FOR THE FROSTING

- 2 7-ounce jars marshmallow creme
- 2 8-ounce packages cream cheese

SUGGESTED TOPPINGS

- Kiwi, sliced
- Blueberries
- Raspberries
- Pears, cored and sliced
- Mango, peeled and cubed
- Strawberries, sliced

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

For the cookie crust: In a large bowl, cream the butter, sugar, orange zest and vanilla thoroughly. Add the eggs and beat until light and fluffy. Add the milk and mix.

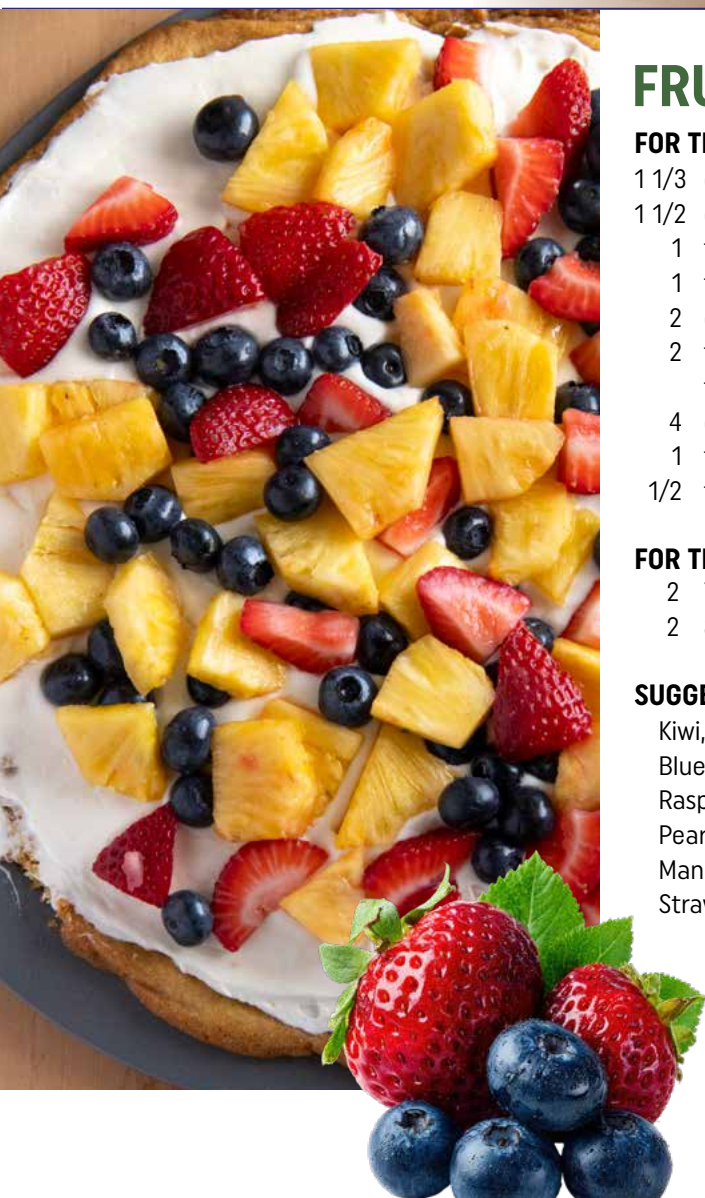
In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder and salt, then blend this into the butter mixture. Divide the dough into two disks and lightly flatten each disk between two sheets of parchment paper. If baking one large pizza, do not divide the dough. Refrigerate for 1 hour or freeze for 20 minutes.

Roll each dough half into an 11-inch round, then transfer to pizza pans. Or, press the dough into a large sheet cake pan.

Bake until the cookie dough is cooked and golden brown, but not overly crisp, 15-18 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool completely.

For the frosting: In a mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip together the marshmallow creme and cream cheese until light in texture. Spread onto each cooled crust.

To decorate: Top the pizza with prepared sliced fruit, as desired. Slice into squares or wedges and serve. 🍷





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