Mountain Telephone

MAY/JUNE 2025

CONNECTION

SMART RURAL COMMUNITIES

Pushing Boundaries

Mountain expands into Powell County

GAMING

FIREFLIES

NTCA THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

RURAL CONNECTIONS

By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association

The Journey to Connectivity

NTCA members create broadband networks so fast and reliable that it's easy to take for granted the effort and expertise needed to bring these services to homes and businesses. These professionals do amazing work, particularly when considering the intricate, multi-step journey to build, expand and maintain a network.

It begins with detailed research and careful planning. The broadband provider must learn exactly how many homes and businesses might want service, as well as the challenges posed by the landscape. Then, a thorough review of the numbers determines if the project makes financial sense. It's a puzzle where the pieces are population density, infrastructure costs and potential demand for the service.

Then there's the engineering—design, build and inspect. Detailed maps identify routes for cables, permitting, environmental regulations and access to land. Some of these projects can take two to four years from the first engineering drawing to the first connection.

The work doesn't stop when the network goes live. These networks require maintenance, technology upgrades and customer support.

These networks are lifelines connecting rural communities to telehealth, education, remote work and cutting-edge technologies. With the help of service providers like yours, we're building broadband to last and ensuring no community gets left behind in our increasingly digital world.

To learn more, check out the Foundation for Rural Service and JSI's latest report, "Delivering Broadband From Beginning to 'End,'" at frs.org/delivering-broadband-beginning-end.

Safe Searches

Tips to avoid scams

When you need information fast, a quick check of Google is often the first stop. In fact, some people find it easier to search online for everything, including the addresses for a specific website like a bank, trusted repair service or health care provider.

Unfortunately, scammers know this, too, so they sometimes create bogus sites with addresses confusingly close to the real thing.

Google is aware of this trend, and it touts advanced systems that keep users' search results 99% spam-free. The company also offers a few tips for closing the final security weaknesses.

- Pay close attention to the URL—the specific web address—before clicking any unfamiliar link. Typically, in an email, hovering the cursor over the address will show the complete link. Don't click the link if it looks suspicious.
- The three dots next to the search results in Google can be used to find more details about the webpage, store or business you're considering. You can find clues indicating if the site is legitimate before clicking the link.
- When you're looking for official resources, watch out for unusual address formatting. For example, there's typically only one correct customer service number for a larger company. But not all businesses have customer service numbers, and searching for them requires you to be mindful. Watch for strange formatting in the website address, including unexpected symbols or emojis.

AI-generated Adobe Stock image by h4KunA

A Rockin' RECIPE

Hannah Dasher cooks up an online storm

Performer Hannah Dasher created a countryfied niche for herself on social media.

Photo courtesy of Jeremy Ryan Photography

Story by BRANDI DIXON

Hannah Dasher is a blast of classic country and rock 'n' roll paired with social media influencer. Stepping into the home she calls "Honky-Tonk Graceland" and features on her social media is, as Hannah says, like going back in time to "your meemaw's house."

"Avocado green canisters, gold salt and pepper shakers, brass pots. I love my retro kitchen, and I love that the fans feel right at home," she says, adding that she enjoys entertaining.

Music and songwriting are Hannah's first loves. "I was rehearsing my acceptance speech for best new female vocalist of the year in my mirror at age 10," she says. "I grew up listening to '90s country radio, and knew I wanted to be an entertainer."

Hannah pursued music professionally, taking her big hair and a heaping helping of Southern charm to Nashville, Tennessee. She started out writing songs for other artists, getting some big accolades thanks to collaborations with Brad Paisley, Lainey Wilson and Ian Munsick, to name a few. She continued performing whenever she had the chance.

STAND BY YOUR PAN

In 2020 during the pandemic, Hannah found herself stuck. "All the stages shut down, and I needed a stage," she says. "Talking with some friends I learned a lot of girls my age couldn't cook, so I stumbled into the world of social media, and it was the perfect storm."

Hannah took to TikTok to share her family's beloved recipes and a few of her own, all while sprinkling in a bit of her signature rockin' country flavor. The recipe produced the now-viral Stand By Your Pan social media accounts. More than 1.5 million followers join Hannah daily in her retro kitchen.

"I love that this brought country and noncountry music fans together," she says. "It's hard to pigeonhole into just one world, and I'm glad that I can be this representative of the past and the future via a semicelebrity chef."

ALL THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

When Hannah Dasher isn't cranking out content, she's picking up a guitar and writing music.

"God always sends it from the left side of the sky and out of my mouth," she says of her process. "Sometimes it's melody and lyrics simultaneously, but you just never know, and you always have to be looking for it."

Hannah is on the road this year with her band on The Wanted Tour, featuring stops across the United States, the United Kingdom and Sweden. She encourages fans to spread the word and come see her and her "boys."

Unmatched Performance

No technology beats our network's speed

There's something magical when technology becomes so advanced that it simply works, without muss, fuss or the need for advanced skills. Your smartphone is a great example, particularly whatever app you prefer for photos. Looking for an image of your cat or dog, a mountain or a beach? Just ask and the search will likely provide shockingly good results.

SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

That app simply does the job, and our internet service is much the same—it simply works. It's fast, reliable and resilient. Thanks to the long-term investments to create a fiber optic network supported by a team of local professionals, we can provide services that unlock the online world. If you consider internet access essential, there's no better option.

Whether you're working from home, attending virtual classes or binge-watching your favorite shows, fiber makes sure everything runs smoothly. Do you have multiple devices online at once, rely on video calls or enjoy challenging online games? No problem. The performance is there whenever you need it.

It's important to remember, not all technologies have the same benefit. They may work, but not as well as fiber. With those other systems, storms might block signals or otherwise create interruptions. However, compared with other technologies, our fiber network is designed to not only stay online more reliably but also bounce back more quickly if there is an outage.

Not every community gets to enjoy this type of internet service. We designed our fiber network to exceed the requirements of today with features capable of handling future online tools and resources. Considering how quickly technology is advancing, an adaptable network is vital for our community to stay competitive in an increasingly online world.

After all, high-speed internet is more than a nice-to-have luxury. From telehealth services to online education, fiber optic networks give us access to essential resources that fundamentally improve our quality of life. Similarly, reliable, fast internet energizes our economy. From established area businesses to new entrepreneurs, the internet provides the tools needed to compete.

We're committed to bringing these benefits to every corner of our community. And please remember, Mountain Telephone is about more than the physical network. The dedicated professionals making up our team live here, believe in our area's future and are committed to providing unparalleled support.

So, let's celebrate the progress we've made and look forward to a future where everyone can enjoy the advantages of cutting-edge technology. Our goal is to ensure no one is left behind and that everyone has access to the opportunities high-speed internet provides.

Thank you for your continued support and trust. Together, we're building a brighter, more connected future.

Mountain Telephone
CONNECTION
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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:

Canaan Napier, a Stanton teen, plays a virtual reality game using Mountain's Gig-speed broadband service.
See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of Shane and Leah Napier

CALLING ALL SHUTTERBUGS!

Have you captured a breathtaking snapshot that shows the beauty of Bath, Elliott, Menifee, Morgan or Wolfe counties? If so, we want to hear from you.

Mountain Telephone is accepting photos for its next directory and calendar. Printed photos will no longer be accepted. Each submission can include up to two photos, which must be digital high-quality JPEG images. To submit photos, go to mrtc.com and select the "Photo Contest" tab. For additional questions, please contact Hope Potter at hpotter@mountaintelephone.com. Winning photos will be selected based on creativity, quality and portrayal of the area. Deadline for submission is June 1. Winners will be announced on or before Sept. 30.

All entries must be submitted by the original photographer who has sole ownership of any copyright. By entering the contest, you agree to have your photograph displayed on the MRTC directory or annual calendar without any fee or other forms of compensation.

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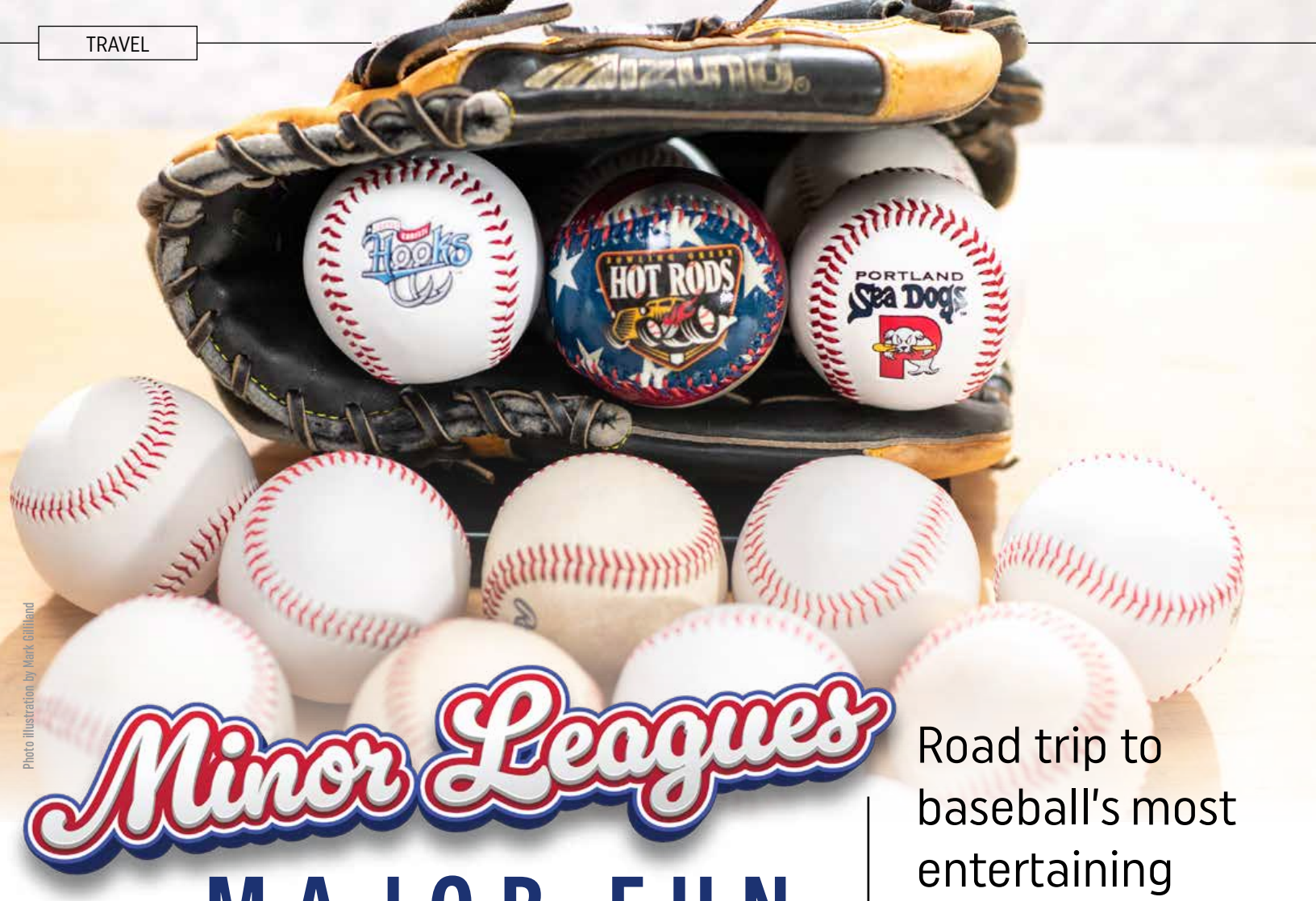


Photo illustration by Mark Gilliland

Minor Leagues MAJOR FUN

Road trip to baseball's most entertaining destinations

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Ric Sisler admits he misses the annual spring-to-fall marathon of a baseball season. "When it's in your blood, it doesn't matter what you're doing. You're always going to be pulled toward that industry, and I'm certainly no exception," he says. "Going to the ballpark, the camaraderie and being around the yard was just a thrill for me.

"I certainly don't miss tarp pulls and some of those types of things," he says with a laugh, referring to the back-breaking work of getting protective tarps on and off the diamond during rainy weather.

The national pastime is most certainly in Ric's blood. He played for three

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Marketers and merchandisers will say quite a lot. Creative—some may say outlandish—nicknames, mascots and logos are part of the landscape of minor league baseball. Here are a few of our favorites:

Florida: The Fort Myers Mighty Mussels—The nickname is more about seafood than sinew.

Alabama: Rocket City Trash Pandas—It pairs Huntsville's role in the space industry with a cute raccoon reference.

Georgia: Augusta GreenJackets—The GreenJackets mascot is akin to a yellow jacket, but the reference is to Augusta's long history with The Masters golf tournament, which awards the winner a green jacket.

North Carolina: Kannapolis Cannon Ballers—The alliteration is nice for the team once known as the Intimidators after the late NASCAR star and Kannapolis native Dale Earnhardt Sr., who was then part-owner of the team. The Cannon Ballers mascot, Boomer, has an uncanny resemblance to Earnhardt.

Kentucky: Bowling Green Hot Rods—The nickname gives the team a link to the nearby National Corvette Museum.

Photo courtesy of the Scranton Wilkes-Barre RailRiders

Young fans take in a midseason fireworks display from ground level at PNC Field, home of the Scranton Wilkes-Barre RailRiders.

Photo courtesy of Andy Johns

The Memphis Redbirds offer another reason to visit West Tennessee.

seasons in the New York Yankees minor league system before running several minor league organizations as a front office executive and as vice president/general manager of the independent South Coast League based in Georgia. His father, Dick Sisler, was a Major League Baseball manager and All-Star player, and his grandfather, George Sisler, is enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Ric, who is still involved in athletics as director of corporate sponsorships at Western Carolina University, says many fans of the game come back season after season.

"Minor league baseball has been part of the fabric of our society in a lot of smaller towns," he says. "It was kind of a binding agent for folks to come watch baseball with their friends and neighbors and just have a wholesome time."

While the minor leagues are about family fun and community pride to many fans, the game is a balance of business and player development for the teams and their MLB affiliates. The minors have long relied on fan-friendly, creative promotions and player interactions to sell tickets, and all of that comes with an affordable price tag.

"I think people have always gone to minor league games because it's affordable," Ric says. "You had great entertainment and could see some potential big-league players there at an affordable price. You're very close to the field and close to the players. It was a different setting from the Major League parks. I don't want to see that change."

Planning a trip this summer—or maybe even a baseball pilgrimage? There's a game, sports history and tradition, as well as a bunch of fun waiting for you.

HISTORIC HOME FIELDS

Some of the oldest ballparks in the country are in the Southeast, and three of them are on the National Register of Historic Places.

That list includes Birmingham, Alabama's Rickwood Field, which is the nation's oldest professional baseball park still with its original structure. Opened in 1910, two years before Boston's Fenway Park, Rickwood was home to the Negro Leagues' Birmingham Black Barons.

The double-A Birmingham Barons play an annual ceremonial game at Rickwood, and Major League Baseball hosted a game between the St. Louis Cardinals and San Francisco Giants at the venerable ballpark last season, a 6-5 Cardinals victory.

Jackie Robinson Ballpark in Daytona Beach, Florida, was the first ballpark to allow the Brooklyn Dodgers' African American prospect whose name now graces the stadium to play with white players in the segregated South in 1946. The park dates to 1914 and was originally named Daytona City Island Ballpark.

Spartanburg, South Carolina's Duncan Park was constructed in 1926 and was home to minor league baseball almost continually until 1994. It was also home to the Spartanburg Sluggers, a Negro League minors team from 1928-52. An estimated 21,000 spectators reportedly crowded in and around the ballpark to attend Game 5 of the 1938 American Legion World Series between Spartanburg and Los Angeles.

The 3,000-seat stadium is currently Spartanburg High School's home field. The city of Spartanburg is building a new stadium for the Hub City Spartanburgers of the South Atlantic League. The city is the new home of the former Down East Wood Ducks of Kinston, North Carolina.

Simply the Best

Mountain broadband is a game-changer in Powell County

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Shane and Leah Napier used to perform a little ritual when their family cozied up to stream a TV show or a movie. "We'd always go, 'OK, kids, let's turn off all our phones and devices so we can watch the show,'" Leah says.

Back then, the Stanton-based family of five relied on out-of-date DSL internet service from a well-known multinational telecommunications corporation. But even that company's best internet service package wasn't cutting it. So, when they heard Mountain Telephone was expanding its fiber broadband network into Powell County, the Napiers jumped on it.

Today, they're one of nearly 1,000 homes and businesses in eastern Powell County with access to Mountain's superfast fiber internet service, thanks to the cooperative's $12.5 million expansion project.

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

For years, people like the Napiers struggled with internet service options in their rural section of Powell County. The only way to get connected was to buy unreliable and overpriced satellite services with data caps or low-quality DSL service from national corporations with very little local presence. One of those services could be downed by a good rainstorm, while the other might slow to a halt during peak usage times. Both offered customer service with long wait times.

Even in perfect conditions, none of the options could perform well enough consistently for a hardworking family with three teens.

Mountain Telephone employees heard these complaints from Powell County residents for years, says Director of Strategy and Business Development at Mountain, Ricky Pennington. That's largely because the cooperative's service area includes neighboring Menifee and Wolfe counties.

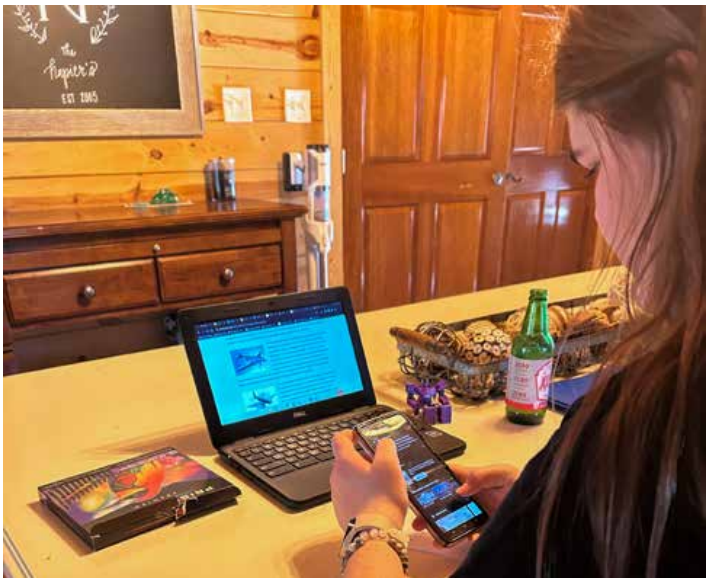
People living just over the line from Mountain's counties regularly called and asked if they could sign up for Mountain's service. "Unfortunately, we were never able to make that work," Ricky says. "Funding's always been the issue."

That changed in 2022 when Mountain received a United States Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service ReConnect grant for a little over $9 million. The grant's matching component required Mountain to put in a little more than $3 million. As soon as they got the news, Mountain Telephone's staff got to work planning the expanded network.

GET CONNECTED

For more information on accessing Mountain Telephone's fast fiber internet service, call 606-743-3121 or 800-939-3121. Visit mrtc.com to submit your name and address to sign up for services.

Photos courtesy of Shane and Leah Napier



ABOVE: Willow Napier, 17, uses her laptop and mobile phone to research while working on an art project.

LEFT: Canaan Napier uses the family's Gig-speed service to play games, do homework, watch videos and keep in touch with friends.

The RUS ReConnect program started in 2018 as a way to expand internet access in underserved rural areas. "Over the past few years, there's been a huge effort out of Washington, D.C., to make sure rural and underserved areas receive proper broadband services," Ricky says. "You've got to be able to connect to the internet in the world we live in today. Everything is trending toward being able to connect online to do any aspect of life for anything."

FIBER VS. DSL AND SATELLITE

There are several reasons Mountain's fiber broadband network is superior to DSL or satellite internet service providers. Fiber networks send data using light pulses that move through fiber optic cables.

Fiber isn't as susceptible to interference as DSL, or direct service line, networks, which are transmitted through old-fashioned copper wire. It's also important to know the quality of satellite internet service can be dictated by thunder, rain or snow.

To add to those benefits, fiber is multiple times faster than either DSL or satellite, with a far higher response time and greater overall reliability. When you pair that with Mountain Telephone's fast and friendly local service, it's an easy decision for most people.

COMFORT AND CONNECTION

Getting Mountain's internet brought a sigh of relief for the Napiers, who were among the first families in Powell County to access the cooperative's service.

"We needed it," Shane says. "Between our kids and us, there are telephones and computers and TVs all dependent on our internet service. We don't have cable TV. We stream. Everything is through the internet."

THE MOUNTAIN FIBER DIFFERENCE

SPEED

Mountain's fiber broadband service can deliver symmetrical speeds of up to 2 Gigs, while DSL and satellite services typically max out at 100 and 150 Mbps, respectively.

Mountain's fiber network offers ultralow latency, which means it has a superfast reaction time, compared with satellite's high latency and DSL's moderate latency.

RELIABILITY

Fiber broadband consistently performs regardless of weather conditions. Satellite internet can crash in a storm, and DSL lines can be compromised by the elements.

Mountain's fiber plans offer unlimited data. Many satellite and some DSL plans can impose restrictive monthly data limits.

FUTURE USE

Fiber bradband infrastructure allows for increasing bandwidth in decades to come. It can grow as technology grows. DSL's copper lines can't.

Right after work and sometimes on weekends, their former internet provider offered spotty service. "We couldn't connect," he says. "Sometimes service was so bad, we couldn't even watch a TV show."

It was especially frustrating for their son, who enjoys gaming. "He was always lagging on his games," Shane says. "So, for us to just to be able to come home and do our individual hobbies or relax or whatever, it's great."

From left, Shane, Leah, Willow, Canaan and Olive Napier signed up for Mountain's fiber internet service as soon as it became available in their section of Powell County. Before that, the family struggled with spotty, unreliable service.

LOOK TOWARD THE Light

Whatever you call them, fireflies mesmerize

Story by SARA DIAMOND PATTERSON

Catching lightning bugs in a Mason jar with holes punched in the lid is a summer ritual for kids across the country. Watching their light show together is often a time for families to slow down, which is what Lynn Frierson Faust's family began doing in the Great Smoky Mountains during the 1960s.

They marveled for years at the unique light display, as the flying beetles blinked on and off at the same time for several hours after dark. When Lynn heard the August 1991 edition of Science News magazine featured an article on fireflies that blink in unison, she figured she would finally find out why and how they made their magic.

"I remember thinking, 'Oh cool, a lightning bug feature. It'll talk about our light show.' Only it didn't mention one thing," she says. In fact, the authors said the Western Hemisphere had no species of fireflies that blinked synchronously.

Lynn let them know they were mistaken and invited them to come to the Smokies to see the show for themselves. The scientists did and agreed Lynn was right, lighting the way for her life's work.

'JUST SO DARN FUN'

As "The Lightning Bug Lady," Lynn is internationally known for her research on the ecology and habits of the more than 125 species of U.S. fireflies, helping

THE LOWDOWN

HOW: Fireflies produce their magical flashes through bioluminescence, a chemical reaction.

WHY: Each of the more than 125 species of fireflies in the United States—2,000 worldwide—has a unique signature flash pattern the males use to attract females of their specific type.

WHERE: Everywhere. Many Western species do not flash or fly, but they're out there.

WHEN: Warm summer nights.

AI-generated artwork by Firefly

LEND A HAND

Pesticides and habitat reduction have taken a toll on firefly populations. Maintaining a "wild" area of your yard with a little water, native vegetation and undisturbed soil will make your home more firefly friendly. But the easiest way to help is simply by turning out the lights during their active period. Visit xerces.org or firefly.org for more tips.

Photo courtesy of Lynn Frierson Faust

A BBC crew takes a break from filming in 2019. Naturalist Lynn Frierson Faust examines equipment she and Mark Zloba, ecological manager at the Edge of Appalachia, use to gather fireflies at the preserve outside of Cincinnati.

to raise awareness of their unique life cycles and importance within ecosystems.

She scrambles to 14 states each year to catch them emerging during their eight-week active season, usually early June to late July. For 18 years, she has been the worldwide go-to on the subject, serving as on-site scientific consultant for BBC Earth, Discovery, National Geographic and other international film crews. Lynn's 2017 book, "Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs," was the first-ever comprehensive firefly field guide and shared the results of her nearly three decades of research on behalf of museums, universities, state and national parks and nature centers.

"I'm not a scientist per se, but I've done the research, a whole lot of research," she says. "I'm just a regular person obsessed with these and fortunate to have the time and a little knowledge to build on."

Throughout history, fireflies have symbolized hope and mystery, serving as transient reminders that life is fleeting. In some cultures, people see them as their lost ancestors, a sacred connection between the earthly and spiritual worlds.

When she began, Lynn didn't have much research to start with. "There were just a bunch of dusty old scientific papers, but that's about it," she says. "There's just not been that much research done on them since they aren't harmful or helpful to people or crops."

They are, however, a great indicator species for the health of ecosystems. "When they disappear, we have to know why and where to look." And Lynn says they will always serve as a nostalgic reminder of days gone by.

"Lightning bugs are fantastic ambassadors leading people back into nature and to a better understanding of the connectedness of it all," she says. "Plus, they're just so darn fun."

HERE THEY ARE!

No matter where you are, you don't have to go far to find the magic. You can look for lightning bugs anywhere from your backyard to wildlife management areas or wooded parks, avoiding light pollution and areas that spray for mosquitos.

The Southeast offers the most variety of firefly species. "Generally speaking—and this holds true for almost all living things—as you go south closer toward the equator, you get a greater diversity of species but maybe fewer numbers," firefly expert Lynn Frierson Faust says. "Whereas when you go north in latitude, you get greater numbers but fewer species."

The Photinus carolinus species in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park of Tennessee and North Carolina are known for their synchronous flashes. You can see them put on a similar show at South Carolina's Congaree National Park. Thousands of these fireflies emit between five to eight flashes of light all at once followed by eight to 10 seconds of darkness.

Their light shows have become so popular, each year more than 20,000 people enter a lottery drawing at each park for viewing spots during the two-week active period, usually in early June depending on temperatures and soil moisture.

NAME GAME

Officially known as Lampyridae, worldwide fireflies are called blinkies, glowflies, moon bugs, peeney-wallies, blinkin' bees, hoturu, fire beetles and candle flies. Here at home, "lightning bug" is more common in the South and Midwest, while "firefly" is typically heard in the West and large cities in the East. Some researchers attribute the differences to weather. While lightning is most active in the South and Midwest, the West sees the most wildfires.

Game On!

Mountain members get free gaming network

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Are you a gamer? Then Mountain Telephone has a treat for you! The cooperative recently joined forces with Fiber Gaming Network, a platform that lets gamers of all ages win prizes in organized tournaments and competitions.

FGN is dedicated to showcasing the power of high-speed internet through gaming tournaments and community events. It partners with fiber broadband providers like Mountain that want their members to get the most out of their gaming experiences.

Currently, Mountain is offering the service to all broadband subscribers at no cost, meaning they won't have to pay to join FGN tournaments and events. In the future, however, only Mountain members who subscribe to the top two internet tiers—Fiber Premier and Fiber Platinum—will be eligible to use FGN gaming service for free.

Fiber Premier offers broadband speeds up to 1 Gig. It's great for families who work from home or have 10 or more devices on their property. Fiber Platinum, which can provide speeds up to 2 Gigs, offers powerful service perfect for 4K streaming and gamers.

"If you're a serious gamer, Fiber Platinum is the way to go," says Joshua Adkins, a sales tech at Mountain. "It's got a direct fiber line into the home, and its speeds are unmatched."

ESPORTS ON THE RISE

Gaming has become an official sport in many places across the country. More than 8,600 high schools in the United States have esports teams, according to the National Education Association. In addition, the Kentucky High School Athletic Association categorized esports as a sport in 2019.

"There's a rising wave of esports scholarships, too," Joshua says. "None of this is a surprise to young people these days. It's becoming more and more lucrative."

In 2024, Wang "UMA" Yuan-hao, a Taiwanese gamer, won $1 million in a Street Fighter 6 tournament, and a Danish gamer named Joshua Sundstein has won more than $7 million throughout his gaming career.

Prize packages and winnings are bound to increase in coming years as esports continues to grow. As of May 2024, more than 200 colleges and universities in the U.S. offer esports teams, according to a May article in EdTech, a publication focused on issues surrounding technology and education.

WIN PRIZES, EARN POINTS

FGN is structured with Mountain Telephone broadband users in mind. They can compete in local tournaments, or they can play gamers from nearly 815 communities

JUST THE STATS

- 78% of U.S. households include at least one gamer.
- 58% of gamers play on more than one device.
- 65% of U.S. adults, and 70% of people under the age of 18, regularly play video games.
- 78% of gamers play mobile games, 58% use a gaming console and 54% play on a PC.
- 53% of gamers are male, 46% are female.
- 3.3 billion people are gamers worldwide.

Source: Data from Entertainment Software Association and Newzoo

> IF YOU'RE A SERIOUS GAMER, FIBER PLATINUM IS THE WAY TO GO."
>
> —JOSHUA ADKINS, MOUNTAIN TELEPHONE SALES TECHNICIAN

Adobe Stock image by Alexander

nationwide. Gamers of all ages and skill levels can take part in scheduled events.

The local aspect is important, says Director of Partner Success at FGN, Camille Quach. Despite how common gaming is these days, there still aren't enough local clubs or teams devoted to it in the same way as traditional sports. This local outreach is something that gaming communities haven't received in the same way, so the impact is that much more powerful, she says.

Also, FGN gives away prizes and tracks points. FGN gamers can earn points for playing, regardless of whether they win or not. "We give out prizes for both winning and participating," says FGN President Darcy Lorincz.

BETTER GAMING EXPERIENCE

In addition to the tournaments, events and prizes, FGN is powered by WTFast, a technology that addresses latency and jitter issues, giving users a smoother, more consistent gaming experience, Darcy says.

Even with high bandwidth, gamers can run into problems like latency or delays. Gamers' monitors can also experience jitter, a deviation in a pulse of high-frequency digital signal that can cause flickering and clicks.

"When people play FGN on Mountain's broadband, the WTFast technology will make it better than any game they ever played, because they don't have those issues," Darcy says

READY TO PLAY?

Fiber Gaming Network, or FGN, is a gaming platform that provides a structured gaming experience for Mountain Telephone internet members. FGN offers gaming tournaments and community gaming events, including weekend competitions and larger-scale esports showdowns in games including Super Smash Bros., Rocket League, Fortnight, Minecraft, Farming Simulator, Madden NFL and NBA 2K.

Mountain is currently offering the subscription for free to all subscribers, but that could change. To sign up, go to fibergamingnetwork.com.

Fantastic Frying

Flavorful chicken with the finest sides

Many say munching on piping-hot, crispy fried chicken is a joy like no other. Whether it's juicy white meat from the breast or the wings or the deep, engaging flavors of the dark meat found in thighs and legs, when it comes to fried chicken, most everyone has a preference. But there are a few things that good pieces of fried chicken have in common—the skin must stay on, and it must be crispy.

That's not too much to ask, but it's something that many cooks cannot achieve. There's a knack to it that may take a few extra steps, but the endgame is well worth it.

Serve the chicken alongside a big spoonful of potato salad and finish with a bowl of banana pudding and you have a meal fit for a beautiful summer evening.

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

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

CRISPY FRIED CHICKEN

- 1 (4-pound) chicken, cut into pieces
- 1 cup whole milk buttermilk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour for coating
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 quarts vegetable oil for frying

Dry chicken with paper towels. Put the flour in a large plastic bag. Let the amount of chicken you are cooking dictate the amount of flour you use. Season the flour with paprika, garlic powder, salt and pepper to taste. Paprika helps to brown the chicken.

Dip chicken pieces in buttermilk then, a few at a time, put them in the bag with the flour, seal the bag and shake to coat well.

Place the coated chicken on a cookie sheet or tray, and cover with a clean dish towel or waxed paper. Let sit until the flour reaches a paste-like consistency. This step is important to ensure that the skin will be crispy and adhere to the chicken.

Fill a large skillet (cast iron is best) about 1/3 to 1/2 full of vegetable oil. Heat until very hot.

Put in as many chicken pieces as the skillet can hold. Brown the chicken in hot oil on both sides.

When browned, reduce heat and cover the skillet. Let cook for 30 minutes (the chicken will be cooked through but not crispy). Remove cover, raise heat again and continue to fry until crispy. Drain the fried chicken on paper towels. Depending on how much chicken you have, you may have to fry it in a few batches. Keep the finished chicken in a slightly warm oven while preparing the rest.

LOADED BAKED POTATO SALAD

- 4 pounds russet potatoes
- 1-2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 3/4 cup sour cream or full-fat Greek yogurt
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 12 ounces bacon, cooked, cooled and chopped
- 6 green onions, whites and green parts, chopped

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place cleaned potatoes on a baking sheet and pierce four to five times with a fork. Lightly coat with olive oil, sprinkle with kosher salt and cook for 50-60 minutes or until easily pierced with a cake tester or skewer. Remove from the oven and let cool for 5 minutes. When cool enough to handle, peel the potatoes and cut into 1-inch chunks, discarding the potato skins. The potato flesh may crumble and get shaggy, and that's OK—transfer it all to a large mixing bowl. While still warm, sprinkle the potatoes with the apple cider vinegar. Set aside for 15-30 minutes or until the potatoes are cooled.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a large skillet or in the oven, drain and let cool. Crumble into bite-size pieces.

In a small bowl, mix the mayonnaise and sour cream. Season with the kosher salt and pepper.

When the potatoes are cool, pour the mayonnaise mix over them with the crumbled bacon, green onion and cheddar cheese. Gently fold the ingredients together. Season with more salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate for 3 hours up to overnight before serving. Store in the refrigerator for up to four days.

NUTTER BUTTER 'NANA PUDDING

- 8 ounces softened cream cheese
- 1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 (3.4-ounce) boxes instant vanilla pudding
- 2 3/4 cups cold milk
- 8 ounces whipped topping divided
- 1 (1-pound) package Nutter Butter or other peanut butter sandwich cookies
- 5-7 ripe bananas, sliced

In a large mixing bowl, beat the softened cream cheese until smooth. Add the condensed milk and mix until there are no lumps.

In a second bowl, mix the pudding mix and milk together until smooth. Pour the pudding into the cream cheese mixture and mix until completely combined. Fold in half of the whipped topping.

Line the bottom of a trifle dish with a layer of Nutter Butter cookies. Add a layer of banana slices on top of the cookies. Spread a layer of the pudding mixture evenly over the bananas. Repeat 1-3 times, depending on the size of your dish.

Spread the remaining whipped topping on top of the pudding. Cover and chill for at least 4 hours but overnight is best.

Crush a few Nutter Butters on top of the whipped topping immediately before serving.

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