



Mountain Telephone

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

CONNECTION



The Coffee Issue

Enjoy the region's
best brews

KABOBS!

COWBOY
POETS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Ensuring Access for All

Supreme Court upholds
Universal Service Fund

Money raised by a small fee on your communications bill makes a critical difference throughout rural America. Earlier this year, a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the Universal Service Fund, or USF, to continue.


I can't emphasize enough how critical this ruling is in a journey that began in 1934, when the Communications Act decreed all Americans should have access to rapid, efficient and nationwide communication services at reasonable prices.

Then, the 1996 Telecommunications Act created the USF to better connect rural areas and make voice and broadband services more affordable for rural and low-income consumers, schools, libraries and rural health care facilities.

By affirming that the Federal Communications Commission has discretion to collect the fees, the court kept this foundational tool in place. A March survey of nearly 270 NTCA members indicated that the USF programs help keep rural broadband rates more affordable. Without this funding, rural consumer rates could be more than double those in urban areas.

Policymakers in Washington, D.C., are debating how to reform universal service programs going forward, so that they can continue to serve the needs of millions of Americans.

It is essential that our elected officials understand the positive impacts the critical USF programs have had—and continue to have—on the availability, affordability and sustainability of voice and broadband services for millions of consumers, businesses and anchor institutions in rural America.

Visit ntca.org/universalservice. 



Secure Your Digital World

Keys for success


While October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, protecting yourself requires year-long vigilance. And everyone's needs vary based on the online tools and resources you use.

Remember, bad actors are increasingly sophisticated—they want access to your information. The FBI offers a few tips for some of the key points of emphasis, and they provide a good starting point for planning your personalized security strategy.

Create a sturdy defense. Update systems, software and apps. Also, install a strong, reputable antivirus program.

Connect carefully. Be cautious when connecting to a public Wi-Fi network. Avoid sensitive transactions, including purchases. Create a strong and unique passphrase for each online account.

Lock down all accounts. Establish multifactor authentication. Examine the email address in all correspondence and scrutinize website URLs before responding to a message or visiting a site. Don't click on anything in unsolicited emails or text messages.

Guard your information. Be cautious about your information in online profiles and social media accounts. Sharing the names of pets, schools and family members gives scammers hints they need to guess your passwords or the answers to your account security questions. Never send payments to unknown people or organizations, particularly those urging immediate action. 

RAISING HISTORY

Heritage breed farmers preserve the past while protecting the future

Story by LES O'DELL

Farmers, ranchers, shepherds and homesteaders work to raise crops and livestock as efficiently as possible. Like any business, the goal is to maximize income and profitability.

Yet many agriculturalists also see themselves as conservationists, working to preserve the past while ensuring the future by using Earth-friendly farming methods and raising animals facing extinction.

In Pikeville, Tennessee, Amy Balog and her family raise endangered agricultural animals, also called heritage livestock breeds. “There are so many reasons why,” she says. “It’s not only keeping the genetics going. It’s the history and provenance of the breeds.”

Her Faverolles chickens, Sebastopol geese and Saxony ducks are among 180 breeds listed on the Conservation Priority List, an annual ranking of farm animals on the brink of disappearing. The list includes varieties of 11 different animals, from rabbits to cattle, horses and hogs. Many breeds fall out of favor in commercial agricultural settings. Perhaps they don’t put on weight as quickly as other breeds, for example. But they still have value.

SUSTAINABILITY

Protecting biodiversity and genetic resources is an important reason for protecting heritage breeds, says Allison Kincaid, executive director of The Livestock Conservancy. But many producers choose heritage animals because they want to make a difference.

“None of us can predict what the future of agriculture will look like. This is about keeping these breeds around as a genetic

reservoir,” she says, adding these animals are key to food security. “If we didn’t have this diversity, eventually we would narrow our food system down to where it wasn’t sustainable. There would be no backup.”

Likewise, farmer Grant Breitreutz of Redwood Falls, Minnesota, takes a conservation approach to crop production. “We’ve been no-till for 12 years for all of our crops,” he says. Grant leaves farm implements that expose the soil, such as plows and discs, in the machine shed. Instead, he plants cover crops, grasses and other plants he sows without exposing the soil in order to replenish organic nutrients and to minimize erosion.

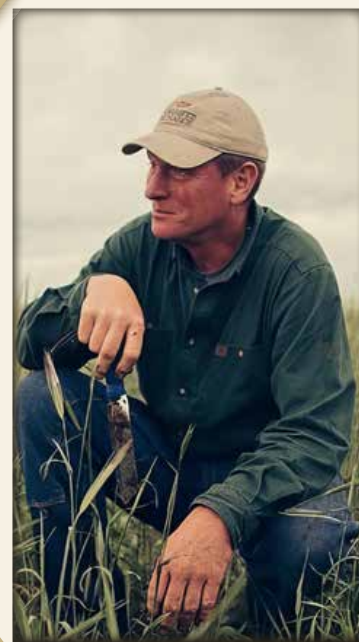
Grant pivoted to conservation farming practices to ensure his soil is healthy and hearty enough to produce bumper crops for generations to come. “If we’ve done this for 130 years of farming, how much time do we have left? So, that’s why we focus so hard on building our soils back,” he says. “It has made a world of difference, and the crops are much more drought resistant and are yielding more bushels per acre. Plus, our pastures have tripled in production over the years by taking care of the soil first.”

The Breitreutz family won the inaugural Minnesota Leopold Conservation Award, presented in 2024 by the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition. Grant says honors are not important, but preserving things for future generations is. Amy agrees.

“It’s more about quality over quantity and quality is what keeps these lines going. If we don’t do it, I’m afraid they’ll all get lost,” she says.



Amy and Daniel Balog, who live outside Pikeville, Tennessee, raise heritage animals like the Sebastopol goose she’s holding.



Grant Breitreutz uses no-till techniques that protect soil quality on his Minnesota farm.

For more about agronomic conservation, visit sandcountymuseum.org and to learn about livestock conservation efforts, visit livestockconservancy.org.

Photo courtesy of Amy and Daniel Balog

Photo courtesy of Grant Breitreutz

National Co-op Month

Preserving what matters

Every October, we celebrate National Cooperative Month. Why? Because it's a time to reflect on what makes co-ops special. This year, we're adding a little extra flavor with our slogan, letting you know as a cooperative, members are our jam.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

It might sound like a silly slogan we're using to spread the fun, but it's the truth. Cooperatives put people before profits, serve the community and give you and your neighbors the power to make local decisions. And to me, that's as sweet as it gets.

Just like your favorite jam, Mountain Telephone is made of real ingredients. Real people. Real care. Real principles. Seven principles, to be exact, guide everything we do and remind us why the cooperative model is worth preserving.

Our Recipe for Success: The Seven Cooperative Principles

1. OPEN AND VOLUNTARY MEMBERSHIP

Everyone is welcome. It doesn't matter your race, religion or gender. If you need our services and accept the responsibilities of membership, you're a member.

2. DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL

You're not a customer, you're a member. That means you help guide the direction of your cooperative by providing valuable feedback through your interactions with the co-op.

3. MEMBERS' ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

When you invest in us, we invest in you. At Mountain Telephone, we are good stewards of your investment in the co-op by improving your service, supporting community activities and, when possible, returning any leftover money to you through capital credits.

4. AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE

We're local through and through, which means we answer to you, not faraway investors. It also means we won't enter into any agreements or partnerships that put local control of the co-op at risk.

5. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Knowledge is power. We prioritize education, training and sharing information about the issues that affect our co-op.

6. COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES

Have you tried a mixed-berry jam? The flavors support each other just like co-ops support each other. Together we're stronger. We work with other cooperatives at the local, state and national levels to share knowledge, improve services and strengthen the communities we serve.

7. CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

This is our home, too, and Mountain Telephone succeeds when our communities do. That's why we care deeply about supporting you, through advanced technologies, college scholarships, community sponsorships and charitable donations.

These aren't just words on paper, they're the ingredients that make Mountain Telephone a sweet addition to our community. Members are our jam not only in October but all year long.

Thanks for being part of something meaningful. 🍷



CONNECTION

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

VOL. 13, NO. 5

The Mountain Telephone Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, © 2025. It is distributed without charge to all member/owners of the cooperative.



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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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



Local coffee shops offer more than great drinks. They often become popular gathering places, bringing communities together.
See story Page 8.

Adobe Stock photo by eddows

You're invited

Mountain Telephone is excited to announce the dates for its upcoming Customer Appreciation Days. All events will begin at 11 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m.

- Menifee County: Sept. 9—Menifee County Farmers Market
- Bath County: Sept. 12—Mud Lick First Church of God
- Wolfe County: Sept. 17—Wolfe County Extension Office, Community Room
- Elliott County: Oct. 8—Elliott County Extension, Farmers Market Shelter
- Powell County: Oct. 14—Middle Fork Volunteer Fire Department
- Morgan County: Oct. 17—MRTC Headquarters Building



**Know what's below.
Call before you dig.**

OCTOBER IS CO-OP MONTH

100% LOCALLY OWNED

MEMBER MADE

CO-OP Preserves

MEMBERS are our jam

This National Co-op Month is extra sweet because 2025 is the International Year of Cooperatives. We're spreading the word that co-ops build a better world, and you're the key ingredient. Learn more about your co-op at mrtc.com

Mountain Telephone

Preserving What Matters Most

When in doubt, check it out!

Mountain will never ask for your personal information by call, text or email.



Unsure if a message is real? Call us: 606-743-3121. We're always happy to chat.



Mapping out your perfect road trip

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Fall is the perfect time for travel and new experiences with family and friends. And while flying can have its conveniences, most travelers prefer to hit the road when mapping out their next adventure. According to AAA's domestic travel forecast for a recent holiday weekend, 87% of travelers planned to make trips by car.

PREPARE FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

"I usually tend to drive, and most people choose to drive. And the reason for that is, for most families and groups of people, it's the most affordable way to travel," says AAA Texas Communications Manager Doug Shupe. "It's also the most convenient. You can leave when you want to leave and return when you want to. But there definitely needs to be some preparation before taking a long road trip."

Before everyone piles into the car, make sure you're ready for the journey. That includes giving your vehicle a quick inspection, planning a route and having the supplies—and the tunes—to keep everyone happy until you reach your destination.

SAFETY CHECK

Before any lengthy road trip, Doug recommends taking your vehicle for a tuneup at a trusted repair facility. But if you can't find time for that, it's still a good idea to do a few quick checks on your own.





Check your tires to make sure they're properly inflated and in good condition.

That includes the tread. If you can put an upside-down quarter in the grooves of your tires and see the top of George Washington's head, it's probably a good idea to replace them before taking a long trip.

If your vehicle's battery is more than 3 years old, consider having it tested before getting on the road. Vibration can also cause a battery to fail sooner, so check that the terminals are secure and free of corrosion.

Examine your radiator and cooling system to make sure they're in good condition. Check belts and hoses for cracks or fraying that could lead to problems after extended use.

Ensure your wiper blades are in good shape in case you pass through a rainy patch, and have someone help you check that your headlights, taillights and turn signals are all working properly.

PLANNING YOUR ROUTE

One of the best parts of any road trip is mapping out a path, as long as there's a little room for improvisation. Plan ahead and make the most of these tools



that can help you find the right stops along the way.

Know what's coming—Apps like Roadtrippers and GasBuddy can help you pick the best place to make a pit stop. Get suggestions for must-visit restaurants and scenic drives or just scope out the most affordable gas prices so you can make the most of your detours.

Go analog—GPS is an invaluable resource on the road, but it's still smart to have a physical map to orient yourself just in case you lose signal or your battery dies. Maps can even be a fun distraction for kids and give them a hands-on way to follow along with where you are.

Track your itinerary—If you've already set up all your reservations for hotels, restaurants and attractions, TripIt can keep track of it all in one place. The app syncs with your inbox to compile an itinerary, so you don't have to search for each confirmation email, and sends you reminders so you can focus on having fun.

Don't be afraid to rest—If you're driving for multiple days, be realistic about how far you can go before resting for the night. It's better to lean toward too many stops than too few. You can even pull over for a quick 30-minute nap if you're feeling drowsy.

FUN AND GAMES

Hitting the open road also means getting to spend plenty of time with your favorite people. So don't forget



to prepare the food, games and music that will help you make the most of it.

State of play—Road trip games are classic, from the Alphabet Game and I Spy to Two Truths and a Lie and 20 Questions. Make your own fun by taking turns thinking of a movie and describing it in the worst way possible to see who can guess it. Or, learn more about each other by picking a category like songs, books or foods and building your own top-five lists.

Fight the munchies—Stops at hole-in-the-wall restaurants are a must for



any road trip. But someone is bound to get hangry in between meals. Everyone's favorite snacks will vary, but it's hard to go wrong with some trail mix or jerky. You can even pack fruit and rice cakes for healthy options.

The perfect mix—Planning out a playlist that will make everyone happy is a tall task. You want music that will fit the mood and maybe even complement the terrain you're driving through. Fortunately, you don't have to do it alone these days. If everyone shares the same music service, you can make a shared playlist that everyone can contribute to. You can even make a game out of it, guessing who's the secret Swiftie or where all those oldies came from. 📻



JUST WARMING UP

Local coffee shops fuel connection

Stories by JEN CALHOUN

With fall in the air, the idea of cozying up with a steaming mug at a nearby coffee shop or grabbing a cold brew on the way to fun with friends sounds like a great way to spend some time.

But local coffee shops are more than somewhere to get a drink and something sweet. They're a place for people to gather and connect. Even if they're drive-thrus and takeout spots, local businesses tend to offer customized, tasty blends java lovers just can't find at the nearest fast-food joint.

Best of all, the locally owned coffee shops in this region reflect their communities and foster genuine relationships. Some even offer a great place to settle in and get some work or studying done. So, next time you're looking for a nice cup of brew or a specially made drink, make sure to check out these businesses.

THE LITTLE TRAILER WITH A BIG HEART

When Zoe Spencer first moved to Menifee County after marrying her husband, Jacob Spencer, she struggled a bit to settle in. "I was kind of lonely for a while," she says. "I don't have any family here, and I didn't really know anybody."

Her new surroundings sparked a new idea. Why not start a coffee shop? Not only is it a great way to meet new people, but it would also bring a nice addition to Frenchburg. Besides, Zoe had always wanted to own her own business.

"I wanted to get out there and get to know the community," she says. "But I also wanted to be able to bring something to the community."

With that in mind, Zoe opened Appalachian Brews Coffee Co.

The 2-year-old shop is in an 8-by-12-foot trailer next to her husband's family business, Menifee Farm Supply.

While the coffee trailer is more or less permanently parked, it can be moved to take it to festivals and special events. "We do try to set up

for the Mountain Memories Festival here," Zoe says.

Customers can order at the window. Some drive right up, while others walk up. "It just depends on what they want to do," she adds.

The shop sells espresso-based coffee drinks, everything from lattes, cappuccinos, frappes and hot and cold brews. In addition, it offers smoothies, lemonade, Lotus energy drinks and loaded teas. While there's no indoor seating, picnic tables scattered around the trailer are a great place for customers to gather and chat while they sip.

"When I opened, there weren't really any new businesses opening at that time," Zoe says. "Everybody really loved it. They're so glad to have a coffee shop in their town, and that makes me feel good about what I'm doing."

Zoe's goals include expanding the coffee shop into a permanent space to host live music and give customers a place to relax indoors. "It would be really cool if we could do that," she says. ☺



Zoe Spencer, owner of Appalachian Brews, says customers can walk or drive right up to the window to get their coffee fix.

Photos courtesy of Hope Potter

Appalachian Brews Coffee Co., 467 KY-36, Frenchburg, next to Menifee Farm Supply. Socials: Facebook

FINDING A HOME IN THE HILLS

Amy and Kevin Turner first explored Sandy Hook on a whim while looking for a little breathing room. Their hometown of Evergreen, Colorado, once a peaceful mountain enclave, was increasingly overcrowded and busy.

“We were just really interested in finding a much simpler place to live,” says Kevin, who co-owns Let Freedom Ring Coffee Co. with Amy. “Colorado just wasn’t the best place for us anymore.”

As they were exploring the hills of Eastern Kentucky, they came across Sandy Hook, which felt like more than just another small town. Instead, it was a community with a beating heart, surrounded by natural beauty. The only thing missing? A coffee shop.

“I saw a need for something like that here, because there’s really not a lot here,” Amy says. “And there was absolutely, definitely not a coffee shop.”

So, after moving to Sandy Hook in August 2024, they started transforming their vision into a reality. After finding a small space on Main Street and remodeling it, they opened Let Freedom Ring Coffee Co. on May 31.

The cafe-style, walk-in-only shop serves everything from specialty coffee drinks and dirty sodas—soda mixed with flavored syrups and/or creamers and milk—breakfast sandwiches, pastries, cookies and even milkshakes and ice cream. The coffees are sourced from a nearby local roaster, and the Turners partner with Kentucky’s oldest tea company. They also offer online ordering through their website.

The business was packed the first week it opened, and it’s been steady ever since, Kevin says. “Everybody that’s been coming in has been super excited that there’s something finally here,” he says. ☞

Let Freedom Ring Coffee Co., 167 Main St., Sandy Hook. lfrcoffee.co.com, Socials: Facebook, Instagram and TikTok

HOT DRINKS				COLD DRINKS			
	S	R	L		S	R	L
COFFEE	2.85	3.50	4.00	COLD BREW		4.00	4.75
AMERICANO	3.50	4.25	5.00	ICED AMERICANO		4.50	5.25
CAPPUCCINO	3.50	4.25	5.00	ICED CAPPUCCINO		5.50	6.75
LATTE	3.50	4.25	5.00	ICED LATTE		5.50	6.75
MOCHA	4.75	5.50	6.25	ICED MOCHA		6.00	7.00
WHITE/CLASSIC				ICED DALGONA		5.25	6.25
DALGONA LATTE	3.75	4.75	6.25	CARAMEL MACCHIATO		5.75	6.75
MATCHA LATTE	5.25	6.75	—	COLD BREW LATTE		5.75	6.75
FLAVORED LATTE	4.75	5.50	6.25	ICED MATCHA LATTE		6.75	—
HOT CHOCOLATE	3.00	4.00	5.00	FROZEN HOT CHOCOLATE		5.00	6.50
WHITE/CLASSIC				WHITE/CLASSIC			
TEA	2.25	3.25	4.25	LOTUS PLANT ENERGY			6.75
KID'S STEAMER	3.25	—	—	ICED TEA	2.25	2.75	3.25
+SINGLE SHOT 1.25				SWEET TEA	2.75	3.25	3.75
+DOUBLE SHOT 1.50				LEMONADE	2.75	3.25	3.75
+SYRUP 0.70				LITTLE SANDY CREAM SODA			6.75
+SAUCES 1.00				LION LEMONADE	3.95	4.45	4.95
WHITE CHOCOLATE				LFR SIGNATURE SODA			6.75
CLASSIC CHOCOLATE							
CARAMEL							
+SUGAR FREE SYRUP/SAUCE 0.75							

Amy and Kevin Turner and their children moved to Sandy Hook from Colorado looking for a more relaxed way of life.

Photo courtesy of Hope Potter

HOW THE WEST WAS HEARD

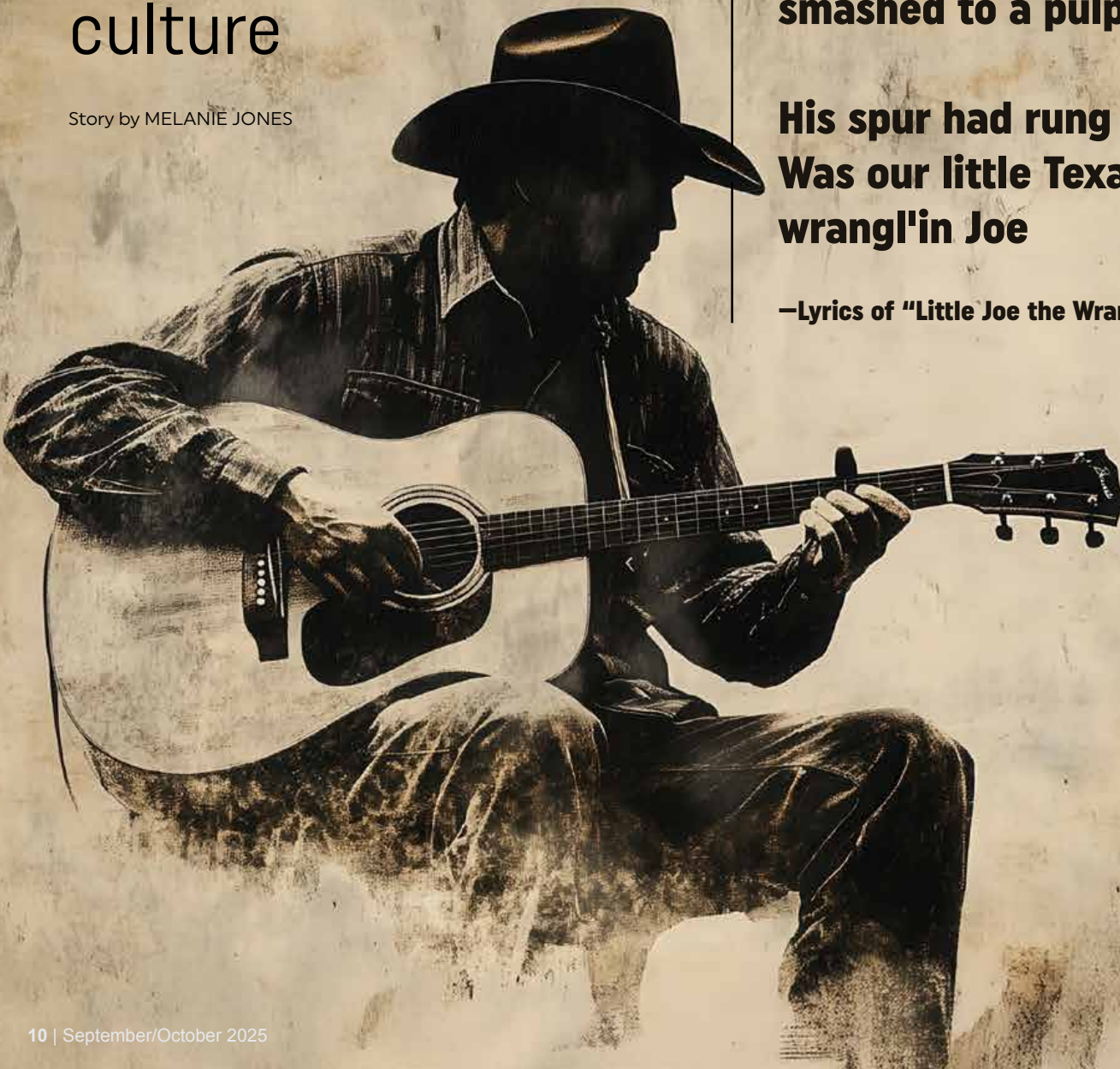
Poet and musician captures cowboy culture

Story by MELANIE JONES

**Next morn'in just
at daybreak
And beneath his horse,
smashed to a pulp**

**His spur had rung his knell
Was our little Texas Faithful,
wrangl'in Joe**

—Lyrics of “Little Joe the Wrangler”





Andy Hedges plays several instruments favored by cowboys, including the banjo.

Andy Hedges, a cowboy poet, musician and podcaster, collects oral histories of the Old West the way rodeo champs collect belt buckles. He's a champion of cowboy culture, and he has the hat to prove it.

"I think there's something about that image that just resonates with people," he says. "They know cowboys represent some of the best of American values—independence, honesty, hard work. And when they hear it, they're hearing real, authentic stories from cowboy culture. They learn the real truth behind the cowboy image."

Cowboy poetry also extends to music, with songs like "Rounded Up in Glory" and "Little Joe the Wrangler." Roy Rogers and Gene Autry brought that style of music to the silver screen, although the Hollywood version is not at the heart of the genre.

Authenticity inspires events across the country, from the Cowpoke Fall Gathering in Loomis, California, to Old West Days in Valentine, Nebraska. Minnesota annually declares a Cowboy Poetry Week, and Andy is returning to Jonesborough, Tennessee, where he performed several times. Cowboy music has even made it to the world-famous Carnegie Hall.

DISCOVERY

Andy, who lives in Lubbock, Texas, is part of a movement that began in 1985, when a group of cowboys met in Elko, Nevada, for the inaugural National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. It's where cowboys swap tales, sing songs of the range and recite poetry that fills lonely days and nights.

What makes a poet a cowboy poet? Andy says his friend Vess Quinlan explains it this way: "He told me there's two ways you can make a deposit in the cowboy poetry bank. One is by being a working cowboy who writes poetry. The other one is to be a non-cowboy who writes poetry that is so good, it becomes accepted by working cowboys. And, of course, it has to be authentic. It has to ring true to those people."

"A lot of people write or recite cowboy poetry or sing the old cowboy songs or write new songs," Andy says. "The truth is a lot

of us, including myself, have never made a living as a cowboy."

Andy has spent years immersing himself in cowboy culture's history, poetry and music. "I try really hard to represent the culture in an authentic way," he says.

He grew up hearing stories of his dad, who worked the rodeo circuit before becoming a Primitive Baptist preacher. He watched old Hollywood Westerns and listened to Western music. "All I really thought I wanted to do was be a cowboy," he says.

But his true obsession with cowboy culture began when he saw an episode of "Austin City Limits" featuring Michael Martin Murphy and friends. Those friends included cowboy poet Waddie Mitchell, cowboy singer Don Edwards and the groups Sons of the San Joaquin and Riders in the Sky. "It just opened that world up to me," Andy says. "I didn't realize there were people who still sang the old songs. I'd never heard cowboy poetry before I heard Waddie on that show."

A self-taught guitarist, young Andy learned some of the old songs. "It was really the beginning of a lifelong obsession with cowboy poetry and cowboy songs," he says.

By the time he could drive, the homeschooled teen was traveling to cowboy gatherings. By 20, he made it to Elko, where he's appeared 17 times. Since recording his album of duets, "Ride On, Cowboy," he and some of the album's guests have appeared on the Grand Ole Opry and practiced, practiced, practiced their way to Carnegie Hall, where they performed for an appreciative audience in March 2024.

The music has an international audience. While travelers come to the United States for gatherings, some performers also toured overseas. Andy even traveled to Turkmenistan as part of a cultural exchange. "The cowboy has always been the folk hero of America," he says. "People identify with that image. You know, when I traveled to Turkmenistan, or just travel overseas not performing, when I wear a cowboy hat, people love that and immediately associate that image with the United States." 🇺🇸

SWAPPING STORIES

Cowboy poet and musician Andy Hedges will be the teller-in-residence at the National Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee, Sept. 2-6. Andy has participated in the National Storytelling Festival before.

"It's a really fantastic gathering of all kinds of storytellers from different traditions," he says of the festival. "I was honored to be there representing the cowboy tradition and sharing cowboy poetry with them." As teller-in-residence, he'll perform a concert every day, make media appearances and take part in other community events. For more information on the event, go to storytellingcenter.net.

To learn more about cowboy culture, check out Andy's podcast, "Cowboy Crossroads." You can download episodes at andyhedges.com/cowboy-crossroads.

FROM COFFEE TO COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Stories by JEN CALHOUN

When COVID-19 forced businesses to adapt or close, Renae Cannon chose change. SheBrews' original location on Main Street in Campton offered indoor seating and a small library. What it didn't have, however, was a drive-thru.

Today, Renae's coffee shop runs out of a smaller building beside Dollar General on Highway 15, serving the popular Signature medium roast coffee sourced from Creative Coffee Company in nearby Winchester. While SheBrews no longer has a library or indoor seating, the shop offers the all-important drive-thru experience and enough outdoor seating to start a coffee klatch.

"Having the drive-thru is beneficial. But honestly, I miss having people coming in and sitting down and hanging out," Renae says. "But I'm glad that I'm able to get people when they're on the way to wherever they're headed."

Renae also offers a small-scale catering service of sorts. When people call asking her to bring coffee and pastries, she's on it. "I've got these big pots, so when people call and order pastries and coffees, I'll take them to them," she says. "Some people the other day ordered a dozen doughnuts, a dozen scones and two pots of coffee."

In addition to the scones and doughnuts, the shop also sells muffins and a variety of specialty drinks. Recent posts on Facebook include the Sophia Special, a white chocolate and hazelnut latte, a white chocolate Irish creme iced coffee, a mango smoothie and much more. "Sometimes we even bake bread, like banana bread, or we do zucchini bread," Renae says. "The white chocolate raspberry scones are in pretty high demand, too."

Photos courtesy of Hope Potter



The zucchini comes from her pet project, her local community gardens. "This is our third year, I believe," she says.

The gardens started as a partnership with the Catholic Church of the Good Shepherd in Campton, which offers a food pantry. The church bought the seeds and gave Renae free rein to do whatever she wants with the church's help.

In the beginning, they built two raised beds. Now, Rhonda and her group of volunteers have established six raised beds, two in-ground gardens and beds at Dessie Scott's Children's Home and one at a nursing home in Wolfe County.

The project is also a great teaching tool for children. Partnering with local 4-H

Renae Cannon, owner of SheBrews in Campton, makes time for taking care of the community through various projects, including a community garden.

clubs, Renae helped form a kids' garden club and cooking club. They start by showing school-age children how to plant seeds in the classroom. Then the garden club members transplant the seedlings into the ground. When the plants are ready, the children harvest the tomatoes and peppers, and Renae teaches them how to make salsa. Along the way, the kids learn how to take care of the garden by weeding and watering.

"Then we showed them how to can the salsa," she says. "So, it's kind of like showing them where their food comes from and how to grow it, then showing them how to nurture it, harvest it, prepare it and save it for the winter." ☑

SheBrews, 569 KY-15S, Campton.
Socials: Facebook

A FAITH-BASED HAVEN

Rhonda Ison woke up one August morning in 2024 with a message planted firmly in her mind. “It was just like the Lord said, ‘It’s time,’” Rhonda says. “I knew what that meant.”

That spiritual awakening led Rhonda to open Sowing the Seeds Proffee & Gift Shop in West Liberty. Like the name says, Sowing the Seeds is part coffee shop and part gift shop—with a big heaping helping of faith mixed in for good measure.

The shop sells regular coffee drinks, lemonade, children’s drinks, protein drinks, smoothies, shakes and proffee—coffee blended with protein supplements. The store also offers various boutique items including Bibles, jewelry and other faith-based pieces. “There’s nothing like that around here,” Rhonda says. “There’s no place to buy a Bible. There’s no place to buy anything religious.”

Not only does her shop fill the gap of faith-based gifts, it also serves as a gathering spot for anyone interested in studying the Bible or talking about their faith.

Rhonda says some visitors say they can literally feel the presence of God in the shop.

Her true passion lies in the personal connections she forges with visitors. She’s even been known to stop everything, even while making 15 coffees, to pray with someone who needs it. “If you ask me to stop whatever I’m doing, that’s what I’m there for,” she says.

When one woman recently requested prayer, four or five other customers spontaneously joined in, creating an impromptu circle of support, Rhonda says.

This isn’t Rhonda’s first venture into a faith-based business. Nearly 20 years ago, she opened a Bible shop, but the timing wasn’t right. Today, with the addition of drinks and treats, Rhonda continues with what she sees as her calling. She and her husband, Dale, are committed to keeping God first in their endeavors.

For Rhonda, success isn’t measured in profits but in transformation. “If they don’t know Jesus when they walk in, they’re going to get a little bit of Jesus by the time they walk out,” she says. ☺

**Sowing the Seeds Proffee & Gift Shop, 64 KY-191, West Liberty.
Socials: Facebook**

Rhonda Ison’s business, Sowing the Seeds Proffee & Gift Shop, is part coffee shop, part gift shop and fully inspired by her faith.



Photos courtesy of Hope Potter

Adobe Stock image by iStockphoto

Dinner on a Stick

Kabobs make for easy meals, quick cleanup

Do you ever crave an easy meal with meat and vegetables? Try putting kabobs on the menu. It's a tasty grill-friendly choice, and cleanup is easy.

Begin with a tender cut of meat like top sirloin, which is affordable. Filet also works well. If you'd like, substitute chicken or tofu. Just remember to cut your protein portions to about the same size so they cook evenly. You can add as many chopped veggies as you like.

Begin with a fresh marinade. Homemade chimichurri does double duty as a marinade and seasoning sauce—it works for any protein. Round out your meal with crunchy Asian coleslaw and a fresh apple cake for dessert.

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

GRILLED CHIMICHURRI STEAK KABOBS

CHIMICHURRI SAUCE

- 1/2 cup fresh cilantro, packed, leaves and tender stems
- 1/2 cup fresh parsley, packed
- 3 tablespoons fresh oregano or 3 teaspoons dried
- 1 lemon, zested and juiced
- 3-4 cloves of garlic
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Put all ingredients in a food processor

and pulse until blended. Taste and season with salt and pepper as desired.

STEAK KABOBS

- 32 ounces top sirloin, or the protein of your choice, cut into 2-inch cubes
- 36-48 baby potatoes, golden or mini reds
- 2 medium bell peppers, any color, chopped into 2-inch pieces
- 2 small red onions, chopped into 2-inch pieces
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper



CRUNCHY ASIAN COLESLAW

- 2 packages ramen noodles, any flavor
- 2 16-ounce packages shredded coleslaw mix
- 1 cup slivered almonds, toasted
- 5 green onions, chopped
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/3 cup rice vinegar

Reserve the flavor packets from the noodles for another use or toss. Crush the

noodles and set aside. Toss together the coleslaw mix, almonds and green onions in a large salad bowl.

Whisk together the sugar, oil and vinegar in a small bowl until mixed. Add the dressing to the coleslaw mixture and toss to coat. Mix in the chopped noodles. Serve immediately. Makes 12 servings.

Note: You may prepare the salad in advance, adding the noodles just before serving so they are crunchy.

FRESH APPLE CAKE

- 1 cup oil
- 2 cups sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup pecans or walnuts, chopped
- 3 cups apples, peeled and chopped

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 16 ounces powdered sugar

- 8 tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons vanilla

Measure oil into a large bowl, then whisk in sugar and eggs.

Mix together the flour, salt, baking powder and cinnamon, then add to the creamed mixture, beating well. Add vanilla, then fold in nuts and apples.

Pour mixture into a greased 9-by-13-inch pan. Bake at 350 F for 50 minutes or until cake tests done. Cover with foil if it gets too dark around the edges.

To make frosting: Combine all frosting ingredients and spread over cooled cake.

After reserving some of the chimichurri to use during cooking and for dipping the cooked kabobs, combine the rest of the sauce and the cubed protein in a sealable bag. Set aside to marinate. Meanwhile, soak the skewers in water a minimum of 20 minutes so they don't burn on the grill.

Add potatoes to a large pot, cover with water and 2 teaspoons of salt. Boil for 5-7 minutes or until fork tender. Drain and rinse the potatoes. Let them sit in cold water to cool. Chop veggies and have them ready to slide onto your skewers.

Now it's time to assemble: Using a soaked skewer, put either a potato or piece

of meat on first, so the rest of the veggies don't slide off the end. Then alternate between meat, potatoes and veggies.

Prepare the grill to about 500 F. Once it's ready, place steak kabobs perpendicular to the grill grates. Grill 3 minutes on each side for medium doneness. If you use chicken, cook for 5-7 minutes. Tofu needs to cook about 10 minutes. While cooking, brush the reserved chimichurri on the kabobs.

Remove the kabobs from the grill and let rest for 3-5 minutes. Use the chimichurri as an extra dipping sauce, if desired. 🍴





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