



Mountain Telephone

MARCH/APRIL 2025

# CONNECTION



## Eli's Story

Local family keeps the faith

ROOSTER RUN

ROLLER COASTERS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Broadband Built to Last


How the Universal Service Fund Helps Keep Americans Connected

**W**hen we're connected, America thrives, and for rural communities, the federal Universal Service Fund (USF) helps community-based providers deliver broadband built to last for generations. This fund is critical for ensuring high-quality, affordable broadband services are available for families, schools, libraries, health care facilities and so much more.

The idea behind the USF is that all Americans should have reliable access to communications services at a reasonable cost—it's been a national objective for over a century and was codified into law in the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Today, the USF enables providers to make a business case to invest in many rural areas, sustain networks once they are built and keep service rates affordable.

Unfortunately, the USF is at risk of disruption. Last summer, a federal circuit court declared that the way the USF is funded is unconstitutional, and the case is now before the Supreme Court for review.

According to an August 2024 survey of more than 200 NTCA members across 35 states, the loss of USF support could be catastrophic for rural consumers. Respondents reported that rural consumers could see their monthly bills increase by \$72. And 68% of respondents said they may need to cancel over \$1 billion in deployment projects.

These survey results highlight the importance of the USF in both getting and keeping rural consumers connected to high-quality, affordable services. You can learn more at [ntca.org/universalservice](https://ntca.org/universalservice). 



Adobe Stock Illustration by Julien Eichinger

# The Buzz

## An internet roadmap

The online world moves fast, and it's a rich, helpful place. In fact, there are so many opportunities and so many resources that keeping up with the latest can prove daunting. Here are a few hot topics:

### VIDEO SHORTS

These bite-sized videos usually last a few seconds. They're often lighter in tone. Many are great for showing fun or helpful ideas quickly, such as cooking tips, telling a joke or sharing engaging facts. Others are simply silly fun. Most social media services offer some version of these videos.

### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OR AI

AI is appearing in more and more places. It may help complete a text message, edit and sort photos on a smartphone or even create an image from scratch. And that's only the beginning. Think of AI as a smart, learning system capable of processing tremendous amounts of information—and it's changing and growing daily.

### CRYPTOCURRENCY

This digital currency is stored and managed on secure systems. Bitcoin is a famous example, but there are many others. Some people use cryptocurrency to buy goods or services, and others consider it an investment. It's another growing, diversifying part of the digital world.

### VIRTUAL REALITY OR VR

With the right hardware, such as VR goggles, virtual reality can be like stepping into a video game or movie. It's also a rapidly growing technology, expected to become more affordable and accessible over time.

# Wading Into the Stream

## Catch the current to entertainment

The arrival of streaming entertainment services brought the promise of simple, affordable access to deep, rich libraries of content.

So, how are these increasingly popular

services, ranging from Netflix to YouTube TV, doing? Seemingly endless content? Check. Simple and affordable? Well, that gets a little complicated.

With care, though, you can find the

services that not only meet your needs but also your budget. Live sports, ad-free options, high-definition streams and so much more are a few clicks away. 📺

### DEFINE YOUR PRIORITIES

With so many possibilities, first consider what you generally want to watch. Do you love original dramas? Perhaps classic sitcoms and movies are your favorites? Are live sports or kids' programming your go-to shows? Or maybe it's a mix of all of the above. Here are a few options:

For exclusive originals: Netflix, Hulu and Max—formerly HBO Max—are standouts. They mix fresh shows and movies with a wealth of older favorites. And Hulu gives access to TV episodes the day after they air on traditional TV.

#### For family and classics:

Disney+ shines. And Peacock and Paramount+ serve up plenty of long-time favorites, as well as new shows.

### AD TIERS

When it comes to pricing, streaming services increasingly offer a range of options—along with some tradeoffs.

Many services have lower-cost plans, but they come with ads. If you don't want interruptions, be prepared to pay extra. Similarly, Netflix offers a more expensive choice for high-definition content. Meanwhile Disney+ emphasizes the ability to bundle added services like Hulu.

**Netflix:** A lower-priced ad tier was introduced in 2023 to go along with the more expensive ad-free option.

**Disney+ and Hulu:** The price difference between ad-supported and ad-free versions is significant, so be aware when considering such services.

**Amazon:** Members of Amazon Prime must now pay an extra fee to remove ads from streaming content.

So, the price considerations of comparing streaming services to traditional cable television is more complex. But the system offers consumers greater choice—after all, many people don't mind ads. Pricing and offers can change quickly, so check each service for the current rates and offers.

### LIVE SPORTS

Traditional TV networks are still the biggest player in the live sports world, but services like YouTube TV and Sling allow you to tap into many of those channels. However, the streamers are catching up.

Services like ESPN+, Peacock and Paramount+ have exclusive sports content. Amazon Prime hosts NFL games on Thursday nights. Even Netflix recently showcased a live night of boxing.

Then, there are also the direct-to-consumer options, like the NFL's Sunday Ticket or MLS Season Pass on Apple TV. Fans can binge-watch their favorite leagues.

# Be a DIY VIP

Online resources and communities can help conquer many projects

Even though it doesn't always feel like it, spring is replacing winter, and I can't wait. It's time to get outside for fun and maybe a little bit of work, too. This is the time of year when many of us plan to spruce up the yard, plant a garden or tackle overdue home chores.



**SHAYNE ISON**  
General Manager

Whatever task you need to get done or hobby you enjoy, there are likely internet-based resources that can help. At Mountain, we see firsthand examples of how access to high-speed broadband empowers you to learn, plan and confidently execute projects.

Consider gardeners, for example. It doesn't matter if someone is a beginner or a seasoned green thumb, they can use the internet to research plant varieties suited to their climate, find layout ideas for vegetable gardens and even order seeds and supplies online. YouTube tutorials provide step-by-step guides for building trellises, creating compost bins and improving soil quality. Websites like the Farmers' Almanac and our state extension offices are also great resources that can provide planting calendars and pest management tips.

Even better, online communities let gardeners share advice and troubleshoot problems in real time. From identifying mysterious weeds to diagnosing yellowing leaves, having access to expert advice—or a crowd of helpful fellow gardeners—can make all the difference.

Or perhaps you struggle with keeping a lush, green lawn. Those never happen by accident. Fortunately, you don't need to be a landscaping expert to achieve one. Go online to find lawn care schedules tailored to our region and learn about the right fertilizers, grass seed mixes and weed treatments. Online video tutorials show how to aerate your soil, reseed patchy areas and properly mow for healthy growth.

Tech-savvy homeowners can even use smart irrigation systems connected to Wi-Fi to control watering systems from a smartphone. These tools improve water usage and keep your lawn looking great, even during hot, dry spells.

There are plenty of other ways modern digital tools can make life a little easier. From fixing leaky faucets to repairing drywall, the internet has become a go-to resource for home repair solutions. With access to instructional videos, product reviews and downloadable manuals, you can tackle many common repairs.

While the internet can help you dream big about your spring projects, it's important to make safety a priority—especially if your plans involve digging. Before you break ground for a new garden bed, fence or deck, call 811 to have underground utilities marked. It's free. It's easy. And it could save you from costly repairs—or worse, a dangerous accident.

Broadband internet has made it easier than ever to plan and execute DIY projects, but some tasks still require a little extra preparation. As you gear up for a productive spring, let the web be your guide—but don't forget to make that crucial call before you dig.

Here at Mountain, we're proud to keep our community connected and equipped for success, whether you're planting tomatoes or building a new patio. Happy spring—and safe digging! 📧

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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:



Born with a heart problem, Eli Ison continues to amaze doctors with his progress.  
See story Page 12.

Photo by William LeMaster

# MOUNTAINS OF MONEY FOR SCHOOL!

## Scholarship applications now being accepted

Mountain Telephone is proud to invest in our community by offering several ways for students to earn money for school. This year, we are excited to offer even more scholarships to help local students build bright and prosperous futures.

### Mountain Telephone and Morehead State University scholarships

- Multiple \$3,000 scholarships will be awarded.
- Scholarships are available to residents of Elliott, Wolfe, Morgan, Menifee and Bath counties who are attending Morehead State University.
- Application deadline is March 15, 2025.
- To find out more, visit [www.moreheadstate.academicworks.com](http://www.moreheadstate.academicworks.com) or contact Kesha Ison at 606-743-3121.

### Mountain Telephone and Kentucky Community & Technical College System scholarships

- Multiple \$1,500 scholarships will be awarded.
- Scholarships are available to residents of Elliott, Wolfe, Morgan, Menifee and Bath counties who are attending Maysville Community & Technical College.
- Application deadline is April 15, 2025.
- To find out more, visit [kctcs.edu](http://kctcs.edu) or contact your high school guidance counselor.



**“The biggest mistake that students and their families make is they feel they wouldn't qualify—they opt out.”**

—James Lewis, president and co-founder of the National Society of High School Scholars



## 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 [www.mrtc.com](http://www.mrtc.com) and select the "Photo Contest" tab. For additional questions, please contact Hope Potter at [hpotter@mountaintelephone.com](mailto: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.



**HAPPY  
Easter**

Enjoy a safe and fun Easter. In observance of Good Friday, our office will be closed on Friday, April 18.

# ALONG FOR THE RIDE

## Roller coasters take thrill-seekers to the limit

Story by KATHY DENES

It's a rite of passage—a child in the roller coaster line steps up to the mark, stands up straight and finally hits that magical measurement, tall enough to be welcomed aboard for a lifetime of adventure.

The thrill of roller coasters never grows old, whether they're modern rockets of cold, sleek steel or creaky, wooden rides that are a nostalgic nod to yesteryear. Around 1,000 coasters in the United States and thousands worldwide offer limitless options for destination vacations.

“At this point, I've been on just under 1,200 unique coasters at over 300 different amusement parks,” says James Nocito, a CoasterNerds contributing writer whose hobby of “chasing down rides” has taken him to 38 countries on four continents.

“Sometimes, I do actually think the hobby is ridiculous, but it's also given me a chance to visit all sorts of places I probably wouldn't have otherwise, like all 50 U.S. states. I guess I've always compared it to people who try to see a baseball game at every Major League Baseball stadium or such.”

Roller coaster fans seeking out the fastest ride, wildest twists and turns or just a new experience have created a community. Numerous websites, like coaster101.com, and social media pages, like Facebook's CoasterNerds, are dedicated to informing and connecting enthusiasts.

“There's this whole community within the parks and coasters fandom, and some of the best people I met from internet chatrooms or online message boards when I was a teenager are people I know 20-plus years later, now hanging out in person,” James says.

He hesitates to cite one roller coaster as his favorite, “but if I were going to suggest to someone some of the biggest, baddest or craziest rides in the U.S., I'd probably start with Fury 325.” That ride at Carowinds in Charlotte, North Carolina, is North America's tallest, fastest and longest giga coaster—one with a height or drop of at least 300 feet. 📺

### IF YOU'RE GOING

- For a selection of the country's top 100 coasters, consult [coasterbuzz.com/rollercoasters/top100](http://coasterbuzz.com/rollercoasters/top100).
- If taking younger travelers along, be sure to check height requirements for the coasters you hope to experience.
- To check real-time waits before you go, visit [queue-times.com](http://queue-times.com).
- Concerned about motion sickness? Snack on something fairly bland 30 minutes to an hour before jumping in line.





## PLANNING A COASTER VACATION?

Consider visiting these thrill rides:

The Beast broke all records when it opened at Kings Island in Mason, Ohio, in 1979, and it still reigns as Guinness World Records' longest wooden roller coaster.

The Voyage at Holiday World in Santa Claus, Indiana, is the world's second-longest wooden coaster, running for 1.2 miles and featuring a world-record five underground tunnels.

It's always coaster weather at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, where the 7-acre center court offers five unique options.

Two record-breaking coasters—the nation's first tilt coaster, the Circuit Breaker, and Palindrome, a one-of-a-kind infinity coaster—are set to open in Texas this year at Austin's COTALand.

Also opening this year at Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, is the Siren's Curse, expected to break records for height, speed and longest tilt.



Photo courtesy of Lake Winnepesaukah



Adobe Stock photo by Panosk18

**TOP:** The Cannon Ball at Lake Winnepesaukah is the oldest wooden roller coaster in Georgia.

**ABOVE:** The Six Flags family of parks is known for exciting roller coasters, like the Joker at Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson Township, N.J.

**LEFT:** Southern California's mild weather means rides like the roller coaster and Ferris wheel at Pacific Amusement Park on the Santa Monica Pier can be enjoyed throughout the year.

## FIND YOUR THRILL

Look for CoasterNerds on Facebook and visit these websites for more information: [coasterforce.com](http://coasterforce.com), [aceonline.org](http://aceonline.org), [coaster101.com](http://coaster101.com) and [coasterbuzz.com](http://coasterbuzz.com).



Adobe Stock illustration by Wasum

# Something to Grow About

## Rooster Run project launches in Elliott County

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

Vanessa and Matt Maggard were traveling through the mountains of North Carolina in 2018 when they started seeing bears. These weren't everyday bears, either—the kind that dig into garbage cans and stumble through parking lots. These bears were statues stationed outside different businesses and organizations. They were colorful and fun. With every sighting, visitors and residents alike could sense a connection and spark of fun.

“Then we were visiting Elkhorn City, Kentucky, and they had their elk all over town in the same way,” Vanessa says. “I loved seeing the different ways they decorated them—all the creativity that gave you a sense of who the people are in that area.”

That got them thinking. If Elliott County were to do something similar, what would its statues be? “My husband said, ‘We really need roosters here,’” Vanessa says.

With that, the idea for the Rooster Run project was born. Beginning this spring, the ongoing campaign will allow businesses, organizations and individuals in Elliott County to buy 4-foot-tall concrete roosters to paint and decorate in any way they choose.

“Forget the corn and beans, we want to be planting roosters all over the county this spring,” Vanessa says.

Once they're complete, the plan is to offer maps marking the location of each rooster. “People will get to see a lot more of Elliott County and see the beauty it has to offer,” she says. “It's not just going to be for people on the main road. It'll be all over.”

The Maggards also hope to include QR codes on the statues themselves. “That way you can scan them to find out more about



Wooden roosters carved by folk artist Minnie Adkins are the inspiration for the Rooster Run project.

that business or that place,” Vanessa says. “We want it to be fun, but we also want them to learn a little bit more about our county.”

### WHY ROOSTERS?

The idea for roosters came about because of Elliott County's world-renowned folk artist Minnie Adkins. Minnie is best known for her animal sculptures and drawings. Some are sleek, like the elegant wooden horse displayed in the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. But others are irreverent and funny, like her wide-eyed roosters and sheep. She's also the inspiration behind Sandy Hook's Minnie Adkins Day, a folk art festival that brings people from all over the country to the town with a population of little more than 600.

Minnie started whittling wooden toys as a child. When she picked it up as a hobby again as an adult, her husband, Garland, saw the potential in the little wooden figurines. He took a few of them up to the folk art gallery at Morehead State University. At that first go-around, she sold three pieces for \$35. With every new





ABOVE: Minnie Adkins is a famous folk artist from Sandy Hook. Her work is displayed at the Smithsonian Institution.

RIGHT: A flock of Minnie's roosters holds court in her studio.



visit, she'd sell more and more pieces. Workers at the college would rush out to buy her latest pieces, leaving Minnie and Garland to sell them right off the truck.

As her popularity and fame grew, so did the folk-art scene in Elliott County. Minnie is still known for her encouragement and mentorship of other artists. In recent years, the artist community has dwindled somewhat, but Minnie and her work continue to draw crowds and admirers to the region.

"We think this is a good way to recognize Minnie's contributions to Elliott County while also allowing everyone in the county to be part of it," Vanessa says. "It takes all of us to make things work."


### SPREADING THE WORD

The idea for Rooster Run sat for a while, Vanessa says. First, there were surgeries and illnesses and day-to-day hangups that slowed things down. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

But in 2024, with the help of her friend Anita Skaggs, owner of Little Sandy Lodge, Vanessa took the idea to the community. She gathered support from the Elliott County Arts Council, the Elliott County Historical Society, Elliott County Tourism and

Laurel Gorge Cultural Heritage Center. By mid-November, about 10 organizations, businesses and individuals expressed interest in buying a rooster.

The partnerships have also led to more ideas for Rooster Run, including stickers for those who visit all the statues and drawings for Rooster Run T-shirts. The T-shirts are expected to include a rhyme provided by Kentucky children's book author Mike Norris: "Gas up your car and have some fun at the Elliott County Rooster Run."

"It's generated a lot of enthusiasm from everyone," Vanessa says. "We want something that binds the whole community together. COVID kind of shut us all down and separated us. This is just another way to bring us back together." 

### ROOSTERS FOR SALE

Interested in getting a rooster? The 400-pound concrete statues are expected to be available this spring and will cost around \$200 each. For more information, email Vanessa Maggard at [vemm@mrtc.com](mailto:vemm@mrtc.com).

# Empowerment Through Sports

Adaptive competitions and

Story by DREW WOOLLEY and JEN CALHOUN



## ADAPTIVE CLIMBERS FESTIVAL

After Shane Farver’s lower-level spinal cord injury, the rock-climbing enthusiast realized he needed to learn new ways of moving through the world, whether scrambling up rocks or making his way through shopping malls and office buildings.

“Early on in my recovery, a friend of mine said, ‘A cool thing about climbing is the problem-solving aspect of it. You have to figure out how to get from this hold to that hold as efficiently as possible using your body as it is and kind of figuring those things out,’” Shane says.

It’s the same for people with disabilities, he says. “We have to be problem-solvers, because—very often—the world is not made for us.”

Today, Shane is communications director and a member of the organizing committee for the Adaptive Climbers Festival. The three-day event offers people with disabilities a chance to learn rock climbing and other outdoor skills while camping and communing in Eastern Kentucky’s Red River Gorge.

“We really emphasize the notion that we do not take people with disabilities rock climbing,” Shane says. “We teach people with disabilities how to rock climb. The nuance there is we’re not here to take you on a ride. We’re here to empower you and help you see what’s possible in rock climbing and hopefully provide some confidence elsewhere in your life.”

### SWEET SETUP

The idea for the Adaptive Climbers Festival came about during a hot tub hang with a few adaptive climbers and their allies. “They were talking about the fact that outside of the competitive environment, there aren’t a lot of opportunities for people with disabilities to rock climb,” Shane says.

The first Adaptive Climbers Festival was in 2018 at a climbing area in northwest Alabama, but by 2022 the event found its home at Lago Linda Hideaway, a 410-acre wonderland that offers cabins, RV sites and campgrounds surrounding a 5-acre lake.

“We have our run of the place,” Shane says. “Once we figured out that setup, we didn’t want to hold it anywhere else. We also have other partners who help us out, including the local search and rescue folks. It’s a huge coordinated effort.”

### MOVING MOUNTAINS

The event offers about 30 clinics, including courses on rappelling and anchor-building, which shows attendees how to set up their ropes for climbing. Most of the courses are led by people with disabilities.

“That’s kind of our ethos—the idea that we’re here to empower people and to give people opportunities to grow and lead,” Shane says.

The Adaptive Climbers Festival has grown from about 30 participants to about 150 in 2024, including attendees from across the country, as well as some from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Spain. 📍

# events shatter barriers



Photos courtesy of Beth King



ABOVE: Training to succeed in new sports, like javelin, cycling, powerlifting and rowing, gives Beth King the confidence to overcome life's other challenges.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Participants in the Adaptive Climbers Festival come from all over the world to enjoy a weekend of rock climbing, fellowship and fun in Eastern Kentucky's Red River Gorge area.

## RESTORING FREEDOM

The first time Beth King saw a recumbent tricycle, she thought it was a joke. She rarely left the house for anything other than doctors' appointments after retiring from the military in 2014 due to injuries she sustained three years earlier when a rocket-propelled grenade brought down her Chinook helicopter in Afghanistan.

Then, after battling a traumatic brain injury, rehabbing for permanent damage to her spine and back and undergoing a bilateral joint replacement for severe pain in her jaw, Beth's occupational therapist wanted her to hop on what to her looked like a child's toy.

"When she showed me a picture, it looked like a Big Wheel from when I was a kid," says Beth, who was not happy about the idea. "But halfway through my first ride, I realized I'm out here by myself, no one's running after me to catch me. And I really found that

liberating. I felt a sense of independence I hadn't felt in years."


She then took part in the Wounded Warrior Project's Soldier Ride, introducing her to the world of adaptive sports. Now based in Missouri, Beth has trained in javelin, rowing, discus and powerlifting, even competing at the 2022 Invictus Games in the Netherlands. She hopes to qualify for the Paralympics in 2028.

"It's what saved me. I was really struggling with depression, suicidal thoughts and isolation. I just couldn't deal with anything. And it gave me something to train for, to get out of bed for," Beth says. "Sports made me realize that I could still do all the things that I thought I lost."

### FINDING INSPIRATION

Realizing she was losing almost all function in her feet, in 2023 Beth decided to have her right foot amputated, allowing her to begin learning to walk with an artificial one. Last year, she completed her first year of welding school, a goal she set after retiring from the military.

"I think sports really gave me the confidence to advocate for myself. To believe that I didn't really lose as much as I thought I had," she says. "If you had asked me a year ago if I'd be welding right now, I would have said, 'No way.' I couldn't see a life bigger than the box I had put myself in with my injuries."

Once she finishes school, Beth hopes to be able to make adaptive equipment for more people. "I don't think people always understand that it's not just sports equipment. It's freedom," she says. "It's a regular life and feeling like you're a part of things. To have a place where people can go and just have fun and play a sport, even if it might look different. I think people are starting to realize that it really does matter." 



# Eli's Heart

Jayde, Eli and Jacob Ison enjoy a break with their dog.

## Local family finds healing and hope through faith

Story by JEN CALHOUN  
Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

**I**n May 2023 Jayde Ison was halfway through what seemed to be an easy pregnancy when she and her husband, Jacob, got the news. Their baby was diagnosed with a serious heart condition while still in the womb.

“We were pretty devastated and frustrated,” says Jayde, a physician’s assistant whose pregnancy had no signs of trouble before the 20-week scan revealed the problem. “We didn’t understand it.”

Their baby, Eli, had a particularly severe case of tetralogy of fallot, or ToF, a rare heart condition that ultimately affected the oxygenation of his blood. In addition, his pulmonary valve didn’t close correctly, which caused problems with the way blood flowed through his heart.

The predictions from the doctors were dire. Eli, they said, would have trouble breathing, latching and eating. His development would be delayed.

“They told us he would likely have a low birth weight and struggle to gain weight,” Jayde wrote on her Facebook page in October 2023, a little over a month after her son was born. The family used the page as a digital message board to provide updates and receive prayers from friends and family.

### **FEELING PEACEFUL**

The outcomes were so serious that Jayde was sent to Cincinnati a month before Eli’s birth, so she could be near Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center where the baby would be born.

But as the due date got closer, both Jayde and Jacob experienced something altogether unexpected in first-time

“THERE WAS A PEACE THAT CAME OVER ME THAT SAID, ‘EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT.’”

—Jacob Ison



Eli was born in September 2023 with a rare congenital heart condition.

parents—even rarer for parents with a baby who could be born in distress. They felt peaceful.

“I wasn’t even a bit nervous,” Jayde says. “Besides all the other things, it was my first baby. But I had a peace about me.”

So did Jacob, a county extension agent who experienced something powerful while driving to Cincinnati before the birth. “I was on my way there to meet Jayde a few days before the due date,” he says. “I remember getting to a red light, and I prayed to God to help me be strong for my family. There was a peace that came over me that said, ‘Everything will be all right.’ I pretty much rejoiced all the way to Cincinnati. I couldn’t hardly hold myself, and

when we got to the hospital we laughed and cut up like any parents would.”

### A STAR IS BORN

The medical staff was still concerned, however. Twelve medical professionals, including doctors and nurses, surrounded Jayde during Eli’s birth. They were fully ready to perform procedures on the baby, who they were sure would be blue and silent when he arrived.

“But he was crying as soon as he came out,” Jayde says. “They laid him on my chest, and we got to love and cuddle him before they took him away to check him out.

“To look at him when he was born,

you wouldn’t have known anything was wrong,” she adds. “He had good color.”

After that, Eli continued to defy the doctors’ predictions. He didn’t have trouble breathing, latching or eating. He also hasn’t experienced developmental delays or problems. And while he was born with some collateral arteries, which tend to cause problems, they also helped supply blood to portions of his lungs that otherwise weren’t getting it due to his heart condition.

“Multiple times—multiple, multiple times—they would say, ‘Well, he’s really sick, or he’s really having trouble with this,’” Jacob says. “But then they’d say, ‘Luckily, he’s got this, so it’s not going to be as big an issue as it could be.’”

### PRAYER WARRIORS

These days, Eli continues to be the talk of the town and the talk of the couple’s church, Watson Enterprise Baptist in Sandy Hook, where Jacob’s father, Larry Dale Ison, is the pastor.

“It’s unbelievable all the churches that have prayed for him all across Eastern Kentucky and even in other states,” Jacob says. “When we needed an extra prayer, they were always there—just above and beyond.”

One church member made Eli a doll from one of Jacob’s favorite T-shirts long before he was born and before anyone knew about the diagnosis. Instead of adding other touches, the woman who made it decided to create a tiny heart out of the fabric and tuck it into the doll. “I was probably 15 weeks along when she brought it to us,” Jayde says. “I look back, and I feel like the Lord put it on her to do that.”

Despite two open-heart surgeries and multiple other procedures requiring poking, prodding and needles, Eli’s smile is like a miracle.

“He’s the best baby I’ve ever seen,” Jayde says. “He’s so happy. He’s always smiling.”

Jacob agrees. “It’s never a trouble to get him to smile,” he says. “All you have to do is say his name. I don’t know why he’s so happy.” ☺

# Pasta Supremo

Italian translates to a great meal

Italian cuisine, with its fresh ingredients and age-old techniques, has woven itself into the fabric of American culture.

Pizza, spaghetti and Alfredo are all favorites, but lasagna may top the list. It's simply hard to resist. Keep the Italian theme going with an Italian chopped salad and a cannoli poke cake. Loosen your belt and get ready to embark on your Italian culinary experience without leaving home.



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

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

## ITALIAN LASAGNA

- 1 pound sweet Italian sausage
- 3/4 pound lean ground beef
- 1/2 cup minced onion
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 2 (6.5-ounce) cans tomato sauce
- 2 (6-ounce) cans tomato paste
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried basil leaves
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 12 lasagna noodles
- 16 ounces ricotta cheese
- 1 egg
- 3/4 pound mozzarella cheese, sliced
- 3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Heat the oven to 375 F.

Cook sausage, ground beef, onion and garlic in a Dutch oven over medium heat until well browned.

Stir in crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, tomato paste and water. Season with sugar, 2 tablespoons parsley, basil,

1 teaspoon salt, Italian seasoning, fennel seeds and pepper. Simmer, covered, for about 1 1/2 hours, stirring occasionally.

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Cook lasagna noodles in boiling water for 8 to 10 minutes. Drain noodles, and rinse with cold water.

In a mixing bowl, combine ricotta cheese with egg, remaining 2 tablespoons parsley and 1/2 teaspoon salt.

To assemble, spread 1 1/2 cups of meat sauce in the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Arrange 3 to 4 noodles lengthwise over meat sauce to cover. Spread with 1/2 of the ricotta cheese mixture. Top with 1/3 of the mozzarella cheese slices. Spoon 1 1/2 cups meat sauce over mozzarella, and sprinkle with 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese.

Repeat layers, and top with remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheese. Cover with foil. To prevent sticking, either spray foil with cooking spray or make sure the foil does not touch the cheese. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 25 minutes. Remove lasagna from oven, and let it rest for 15 minutes before slicing and serving.



## CANNOLI POKE CAKE

1 (15.25 ounce) yellow cake mix, plus ingredients on box to make the cake as directed

### Topping:

- 1 1/2 cups ricotta cheese, well drained
- 2 cups mascarpone cheese
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1 (3.4-ounce box) instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon fresh orange zest
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 10 ounces mini chocolate chips

Make sure ricotta cheese is well drained—overnight is best, if possible, because it needs to be thick.

Prepare and bake cake according to directions on the package for a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Remove cake from oven

and poke holes all over it using the handle of a wooden spoon, large wood skewer or a straw. Set cake aside to cool.

In a large bowl, beat the ricotta and mascarpone cheese with an electric mixer on medium speed until well combined. Beat in the powdered sugar and dry pudding mix. Then beat in the vanilla, orange zest, cinnamon and salt. Once well combined, slowly beat in the milk a little at a time.

Spread about 1/3 of the topping over the cake, making sure it gets into holes. Then continue spreading the remaining topping, and sprinkle on the mini chocolate chips. Cover the cake and refrigerate for a few hours or overnight. Cut and serve well chilled.

Note: This cake is especially good with a little chocolate syrup drizzled over the top.

## ITALIAN CHOPPED SALAD

Make the dressing in advance to allow flavors to marry.

### Lemon Vinaigrette:

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 shallot, finely chopped

- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

### Salad:

- 1 head iceberg lettuce
- 1 head radicchio
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1 can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 4 ounces fresh pearl mozzarella, drained
- 4 ounces provolone cheese, diced
- 5 pepperoncini peppers, stemmed and sliced
- Kosher salt and pepper, as needed
- 1 teaspoon fresh oregano, for garnish

Make the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, vinegar, shallot, garlic, oregano, salt and pepper. Set aside.

Cut the iceberg lettuce in half, then cut out the core. Slice the lettuce lengthwise into 1/4-inch strips. Repeat with the radicchio.

In a large bowl, combine the lettuce, radicchio, onion, tomatoes, chickpeas, mozzarella, provolone and pepperoncini. Drizzle with the dressing and toss gently to coat. You may not need all of the dressing, so serve any leftover vinaigrette on the side. Season salad with salt and pepper and toss again. Garnish with oregano, if desired, and serve. 📖





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