

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017

# CONNECTION

## SHARING THE GOOD WORD

Technology takes  
the message  
beyond the church

## CUSTOM CREATIONS

Carving a niche with  
distinctive furniture

## A CHRISTMAS TRADITION

Destinations to find that  
perfect tree





## RURAL CONNECTIONS

BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

### Cybersecurity is everyone's duty

Now that November has rolled around, the time for scary movies, spooky costumes and Halloween parties is over. At NTCA, we also just finished a month-long focus dealing with something just as scary — the cybersecurity threats facing our country.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security declared October as National Cyber Security Awareness Month and November as Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Month. The two designations draw awareness to the danger cyber criminals pose to institutions, businesses and individuals, and it underscores the responsibilities of actively protecting our internet-connected systems.

Today, everything from traffic lights to banks to pharmacies relies on the internet to function, and it is crucial we work to keep these systems secure. One vulnerable computer is enough to leave an organization open to cyberattack.

While online criminals are nothing new, they also show no signs of going away. Cybersecurity is a top issue for NTCA, and I know your telco is working hard every day to ensure your network stays safe and secure. From talking with experts around the industry, here are some things consumers can do to help stop cyberthreats:

- Download and install new updates to your computers and mobile devices.
- Create complex passwords and keep them secure.
- Do not download “free” content or programs from non-reputable sites as they often contain dangerous malware.
- Consider a career in cybersecurity. Federal agencies and private firms are constantly hiring in this expanding field. ☑



BY DREW WOOLLEY

Before Hurricane Harvey even made landfall, telephone cooperatives throughout Texas were deciding how to support each other. Lines of communication opened directly between telcos, and the Texas Statewide Telephone Cooperative Inc. (TSTCI) helped companies along the coast plan for sharing manpower, equipment and generators.

That spirit of camaraderie is part of the cooperative mission, but it also extends beyond the cooperatives themselves. When YK Communications received a phone call from Matagorda County officials at 4 a.m. the morning of Aug. 28 asking for help setting up an emergency operations center, the telco was quick to offer their own offices as a headquarters.

“The fact that those relationships exist is pretty impressive for YK, but that’s also the kind of story you could have heard anywhere in Texas,” says Weldon Gray, CEO of TSTCI.

There are few organizations that understand the importance of giving a helping hand more than Star Communications in North Carolina. When Hurricane Matthew struck in 2016, Star’s main offices were flooded, along with the majority of its nearly 1,500-square-mile coverage area.

VP of Sales and Business Operations Kyle Randleman recalls wading through septic water in the cooperative’s offices to recover thousands of paper records. But he also remembers how Atlantic Telephone Membership Cooperative stepped up to provide generators and extra technicians to help Star get back on its feet.

“We’ll never forget that,” Randleman says. “I think independent telcos sometimes think of themselves as islands, but one of the things I learned is that sometimes you need to not be afraid to let your guard down and ask for help.”

Throughout the Harvey recovery, TSTCI has received offers from cooperatives as far away as Iowa for donations of surplus copper cable, and associate members like CoBank have begun setting up disaster funds throughout the state. ☑



Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative and Brazoria Telephone Company have also set up accounts for donations to help employees and others in their service areas who lost their homes and possessions in the storm.

Checks for Colorado Valley can be made out to CVTC Employee Charity Fund and mailed to CVTC Employee Charity Fund, Attn: Finance Department, P.O. Box 130, La Grange, TX 78945. PayPal donations can also be made directly to [cvtcharveyrelief@coloradovalley.com](mailto:cvtcharveyrelief@coloradovalley.com).

Anyone who wants to support the Brazoria Telephone fund can donate to the “BTCL Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund” at [youcaring.com](http://youcaring.com).



BY DREW WOOLLEY

**A**nyone using technology in the last few years has heard about the importance of cloud computing, but it can sometimes be difficult for people to put their finger on what exactly it is.

Think of it this way: In the past, people had to download applications directly onto their computer or device to use them. With the cloud, those same programs are accessed through the internet.

If you check and send emails from your phone, that's using the cloud. Even posting photos and messages to social media like Facebook takes advantage of cloud technology. Your information is saved somewhere other than your computer, meaning it can be accessed from any other device as long as you have an internet connection.

That flexibility makes cloud technology a game-changer for individuals and businesses. For growing companies that aren't sure what their exact bandwidth needs are, it provides flexibility. For that friend who lost their phone with all the great vacation photos, it acts as a

convenient backup. The cloud can even help people across the globe collaborate on projects in nearly real time.

Research from software company Druva indicates that as businesses learn more about how cloud technology works, they trust its security over their own ability to back up important information. In a survey, 82 percent of people cited the ability to recover from a disastrous loss of data as one of the primary reasons to move their information to the cloud.

It's no wonder, then, that cloud technology has been on the rise and is a focal point for some of the world's biggest companies. Amazon and Microsoft both offer their own cloud computing services, which have seen tremendous growth over the last year. In 2018 and beyond, the cloud is expected to reach even greater heights. ☁

**30%** The portion of Microsoft's revenue expected to be generated by cloud-based software in 2018. (Forbes)

**83%** The percentage of work conducted in the cloud by small- and medium-sized businesses. (RightScale)

**68%** Year-over-year growth for Amazon cloud services in 2017. (Forbes)

**6X** The rate at which cloud computing spending is expected to outpace all other IT spending from 2015 to 2020. (IDC)

**\$180 BILLION** Global spending on cloud technology in 2015. (Bain & Company)

**\$390 BILLION** Forecasted global spending on cloud technology in 2020. (Bain & Company)

**89%** The share of Amazon's operating income generated by Amazon Web Services in the first quarter of 2017. (Amazon)



# Survey says: Rural telcos are overcoming challenges to serve you

Despite plenty of obstacles, telcos like Acira are winning the battle to bring broadband to rural America according to a recent survey — and we're doing it through our commitment to serve you.



**KEVIN BEYER**  
Chief Executive Officer

Unlike our giant corporate counterparts who selectively build in lucrative areas to please their investors, we build the networks for you.

"NTCA members are the proven broadband-solutions providers for their communities, living in the communities they serve and providing critically important broadband service to community anchor institutions," says NTCA Manager of Economic Research and Analysis Rick Schadelbauer. "In so doing, they make significant contributions to the safety, health and overall well-being of their customers. Their service helps facilitate the overall viability of rural America."

Schadelbauer authored the "NTCA 2016 Broadband/Internet Availability Survey Report," which is full of interesting information. For instance, customers demand faster broadband speeds, and telcos like

Acira invest millions of dollars into meeting those demands.

One particular line item from the survey is worth highlighting because I think it explains why we do what we do. According to the data, the median telco responding to the survey serves four public service entities; three primary or secondary schools; one public library; one hospital or medical clinic; as well as 911 call centers, post offices and city halls.

When people think of our communities, these are institutions that give us our identity and that residents count on daily. Serving them is a pleasure for us, but also a duty stemming from our commitment to improving our community.

But, as the survey results make clear, it's not easy.

The results underscore some of the challenges we're so familiar with here at Acira. Almost nine out of 10 telcos surveyed said the high cost of construction and materials is a significant barrier to improving their networks with more fiber. Other barriers identified on the survey included regulations and regulatory uncertainty, delays in receiving orders of fiber optic cable, and the long distances the network has to cover to reach rural residents.

The rural nature of our service area has always been a major challenge. While I've seen numbers suggesting urban and suburban telcos serve more than 120 customers per square mile, most of the NTCA survey respondents reported serving areas with only 1 to 5 customers per square mile.

As you might imagine from those numbers, urban telcos can collect much more money by running fiber to cover a square mile and serving 120 customers, compared with rural telcos only serving one to five customers from the same investment in fiber.

Reading those numbers, some would ask the obvious question: Why build such an expensive network in such a hard-to-serve area?

To answer that, I would refer to that first item I mentioned. You have to look at who we serve: schools, hospitals, fire departments and law enforcement. The institutions you count on all count on us to keep them connected. Without the hard work borne from our decades-long commitment to you, these pillars of our community might not have the connectivity they need to serve our communities.

I'm pleased with the insights the NTCA survey provides, and I'm willing to predict the results of the next such survey: Despite the expense, despite the risks and despite the uncertainty from regulation, telcos like Acira will still be there serving our communities. Thank you for counting on us. ☺

## CONNECTION

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POWERED BY FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY  
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### On the Cover:



Pastor Sarah Carlstrom, of Crossroads Lutheran Congregation in Dawson, prepares before a Wednesday night worship service. See story Page 12.



# Are you having trouble using the telephone due to a hearing or speech disability?

Minnesota Relay is a free telephone service that uses specially trained communications assistants (CAs) to facilitate telephone calls between people with hearing and speech disabilities and other individuals. Calls can be made to anywhere in the world (long distance charges apply), 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. All calls are completely confidential.

To make a relay call dial 7-1-1. Once connected to the relay service, tell the CA the type of relay call you wish to make. Or, you may dial the specific toll-free number for the type of relay service.

## Captioned Telephone Service (CTS)

CTS uses a special telephone with a text display screen so that a person who is hard of hearing can listen to and read captions of everything the other person on the call says. You speak directly to the other person on the call, and a relay communications Assistant (CA) transcribes everything the other person says into captions, which appear on the display screen of your CTS phone.

## Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS)

Internet-based forms of CTS are available for those who would like to use CTS on a computer, tablet, or select smartphones. Go to: [www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/internet-protocol-ipcaptioned-telephone-service](http://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/internet-protocol-ipcaptioned-telephone-service).

## Computer (ASCII):

**1-800-627-3529**

Computer users can access Minnesota Relay. Set your communications software to the following protocols: speeds ranging from 300 to 2400; 8 Bits; No Parity; 1 Stop Bit; Full Duplex. When calling at a rate of 300 or below, follow the above using Half Duplex.

## Hearing Carry Over (HCO)

1-800-627-3529 HCO allows a person who can hear clearly but who has very limited or no speech capability to make and receive phone calls. Using a special text telephone, you type your conversation for the relay CA to read to the other person, and listen directly to the other person's response.

## Hearing User:

**1-800-627-3529**

A hearing person may use a standard telephone or mobile phone to place a relay call and speak with a person who is deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled.

## Internet Protocol (IP) Relay

IP Relay combines text-based relay service with the ease of the Internet – no need for a TTY. You are able to make your relay call using a computer, laptop, tablet, or select smartphones. Go to: [www.sprintrelay.com](http://www.sprintrelay.com).

## Spanish Relay:

**1-877-627-5448**

Spanish speaking persons with a hearing or speech disability are able to make relay calls. This is not a translation service – both parties must

speak Spanish, and at least one party must have a hearing or speech disability.

## Speech-to-Speech (STS):

**1-877-627-3848**

STS allows a person who has difficulty speaking or being understood on the phone to communicate using his or her own voice or voice synthesizer. The CA revoices your words so that the other person on the call can understand them, and the other person speaks directly to you.

## Text Telephone (TTY):

**1-800-627-3529**

This service allows a person who is deaf, deaf-blind, or speech disabled to use a TTY to communicate with the other person on the call.

## Video Relay Service (VRS)

VRS allows a person who uses American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate over the phone. The VRS user connects to the CA via an Internet-enabled device with a video camera. The CA relays the conversation back and forth between the parties – in ASL with the VRS user and by voice with the called party. Go to: [www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/video-relay-services](http://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/video-relay-services).

## Voice Carry Over (VCO):

**1-877-627-3024**

VCO allows a person with a hearing disability, but who wants to use his or her own voice, to speak directly to the other party. The CA then types the other party's response, which is displayed on the VCO user's text telephone.

## For More Information on Minnesota Relay Services

[www.mnrelay.org](http://www.mnrelay.org)  
1-800-657-3775

## Emergency Assistance

TTY callers should dial 9-1-1 directly in an emergency. All 9-1-1 centers are equipped to handle TTY calls. Minnesota Relay can process emergency calls, but this may delay the response to your call.

## Billing Options for Long Distance Relay Calls

- Direct
- Collect
- Third-Party Billing
- Carrier Calling Card
- Pre-Paid Calling Card

## To file a Complaint Regarding Minnesota Relay

1-800-657-3775  
Email: [mn.relay@state.mn.us](mailto:mn.relay@state.mn.us)

You will need to provide the date and time of the relay call, the CA's identification number, and the nature of your complaint.

You may also file a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission:

[www.fcc.gov/complaints](http://www.fcc.gov/complaints) Voice: 1-888-225-5322  
TTY: 1-888-835-5322  
ASL via VP: 1-844-432-2275

## Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program

The TED Program provides free specialized telecommunications equipment to income eligible Minnesotans who are having trouble using the telephone due to a hearing, speech, or physical disability. For more information on the TED Program: Website: [mn.gov/dhs/ted-program](http://mn.gov/dhs/ted-program)  
Voice: 1-800-657-3663  
TTY: 1-888-206-6555  
ASL via VP: 1-866-635-0082





# TREE TRADITIONS

Campbell  
Beach Farm

## *Choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms make family memories*

There's nothing quite like the experience of cutting a Christmas tree. There is the crunch of snow underfoot, the fresh scent of pine and the sound of a saw gnawing through wood. For many homes, the tree marks the holiday season, dominating the house with a presence that lasts just a few short weeks while helping to create lifelong memories.

Searching for the perfect tree, cutting it down and bringing it home is old-fashioned family fun. Here are some farms that allow you to cut your own, plus some who do a little extra to celebrate the Christmas season.

### **Campbell Beach Farm**

12989 92nd St. NE, Cavalier, North Dakota

Campbell Beach Farm is one of the oldest Christmas tree farms in North Dakota. Michael "Skip" Kotchman planted the first trees in 1978 to complement his grain farming operation, but it also served two other purposes. First, it made good use of land unsuitable for crops. Second, it helped spread the Christmas spirit around the northeast part of the state. Now, Kotchman's daughter, Margaux Lindsay, says hundreds of people come to cut trees beginning as early as Thanksgiving.

If you don't have your own saw — chain saws are allowed — the Lindsays will provide a hand saw before you head out on the hunt over 5 acres for a tree to carry home and decorate. There are no pre-cut trees. "Coming out to the tree patch, finding the perfect tree and cutting it yourself is part of the experience," Lindsay says.

▲ **Varieties:** Spruce

▲ **Price:** \$25

▲ **Information:** 701-265-4720 or [www.campbellbeachfarm.com](http://www.campbellbeachfarm.com)

### **Brumbaugh's Tree Farm**

13730 Highway 5, Cavalier, North Dakota

It's a bare-bones operation from start to finish, but Craig Brumbaugh is a trusting man who allows folks on his property to cut down their own trees and leave money in a box as they exit. He'll even provide a saw if you don't bring your own.

"It's a self-serve operation," he says. "People can come at their leisure and cut their



trees, and then they're on their honor to leave money."

And most do, he says, adding that there have only been a handful of Scrooges in his years of selling trees.

The 70-acre tree farm is alive with aspens and other hardwoods, but a full 10 acres is dedicated to Christmas trees, a business he took over when he bought the tree farm 18 years ago.

"It's a beautiful area — a mosaic of evergreens and meadows," Brumbaugh says. "Customers enjoy the environment and the family experience that cutting down their own Christmas tree offers."

▲ **Varieties:** Black Hills spruce, Colorado blue spruce, Scotch pine, white pine and balsam fir

▲ **Price:** \$15-\$30

▲ **Information:** 701-265-8788



### Cupkie Christmas Village

43550 Co Highway 14, No. 2, Richville, Minnesota

Holiday traditions are made at Cupkie Christmas Village, beginning with a visit and pictures with Santa. Put the kids on a sled and pull them through the fields of trees — there are hundreds nestled in the woods of northeastern Minnesota. The family-owned farm, in business since 1999, offers bonfires, trolley rides around the property, a straw pyramid for climbing, hot cider to warm your bones, a petting zoo, pony rides, live reindeer and more.

Plan to make a day of it. And when the little ones have had their fill, your tree will be shaken, baled and tied to your car for the ride home. Saws are provided, or you can purchase a precut tree. The gift shop is open all year.

▲ **Popular varieties:** Fir, pine and spruce

▲ **Prices:** \$31-\$260

▲ **Information:** 218-346-6164 or [www.christmastreevillage.com](http://www.christmastreevillage.com)



### Riverpine Tree Farm

26887 State Highway 104, Glenwood, Minnesota

Ken Koob and family planted their first trees in 1991 and now have 12 acres of trees ready for you to cut and take home. The farm is in a picturesque, hilly setting with evergreens surrounded by majestic oaks. A small river snakes along one side of the farm, making for a scenic drive as you begin the annual tradition — or perhaps start a new one — of hunting for the perfect tree.

The first weekend of December, Santa comes for breakfast. "He's the perfect Santa, and many families bring their children just to see him," Koob says.

On the second and third weekends of December, the farm offers horse-drawn carriage rides.

The business is primarily a choose-and-cut operation — bow saws are available if you don't bring your own. There are, however, a few precut trees for sale. If you're not ready to take your tree home, you can tag it and come back later. There is a small gift shop that, in addition to gifts of garlands, wreaths and more, is a place where you can warm up with a free cup of hot chocolate and some cookies.

▲ **Popular varieties:** Scotch pine, red pine, balsam fir and Fraser fir

▲ **Price (regardless of height):** \$45, Scotch and red pine; \$55, balsam; \$65, Fraser

▲ **Information:** 320-278-3725 or [www.riverpinechristmastrees.com](http://www.riverpinechristmastrees.com)



### Cornerstone Pines

19180 281st Ave., Grey Eagle, Minnesota

The town of Grey Eagle soars with Christmas spirit when Cornerstone Pines opens for the season. You can visit Santa and Mrs. Claus, tour Santa's workshop, see a petting zoo, enjoy straw tunnels, and take horse-drawn sleigh rides. It all keeps owners Chuck and Kathy Parker as busy as Santa's elves.

The gift shop will be open and serving hot chocolate and apple cider as you pick out a beautiful Christmas arrangement, wreath or garland.

The tree farm opened 10 years ago and is now planted with numerous varieties of trees on 35 acres. Bring your saw or use one the farm provides. The shaking and baling will be done for you.

▲ **Popular varieties:** Balsam fir, Colorado spruce, Scotch pines, Meyer spruce, white pine, Fraser fir, Canaan fir and Koreana fir

▲ **Price:** \$35-\$300

▲ **Information:** 320-732-3299 or [www.cornerstonepineschristmastrees.com](http://www.cornerstonepineschristmastrees.com)

Photos courtesy of the associated tree farms.

# 5 rules for smart online shopping

There's no time like Christmastime to remind you just how important broadband internet is in rural communities. It allows us to share the festivities with friends and family, even if they're far away, and to find that perfect gift with just a few clicks.

These days many Americans even prefer to skip the madness of Black Friday for the convenience of finding Cyber Monday deals. But while the ease of bargain hunting in your pajamas is undeniable, it's also important to know the risks involved with making internet purchases.

When you can't find what you're looking for at a local shop, take a few precautions to protect yourself while shopping online.

**1 Buy from a site you trust:** A popular tactic among hackers is to set up fake shopping websites that can infect your computer with a virus the moment you open the page or can collect your payment information at checkout. If you notice strange URLs, broken language or discounts that seem too good to be true, your best bet is to stay away.

**2 Use a secure connection:** Publicly available Wi-Fi can be a great thing, but its security limitations make it a risky way to shop online. Networks that aren't password-protected make it easy for someone to access your internet activity. If you're shopping, that means hackers can intercept passwords, emails and even payment information.

**3 Keep your computer updated:** Most viruses take advantage of out-of-date software to access personal information, so simply making sure you have the most recent version of your browser and other programs can go a long way toward protecting you.



**4 Buy on a mobile device:** Mobile apps have become one of the safest ways to buy online for one simple reason: It takes more work to hack them. While a cybercriminal can design one virus to infect visitors to multiple sites, they have to design a specific attack for each app. That extra hassle means mobile apps tend to be safer than websites, and every major retailer has one.

**5 Use credit instead of debit:** If you get stuck in a fraudulent online transaction when using a debit card, getting your money back can be difficult since it comes directly from your checking account. If you use a credit card, that money belongs to the bank. Not only can you be sure the bank will do everything it can to protect itself, but also if you report a fraudulent transaction in a timely manner, you won't be on the hook. ☞



**HI, I'M JOHN WEEDING!**

In this column, in each issue, you'll learn about technology and read simple tips to get the most out of your electronics. For more tips or help with your devices, be sure to read this column in future publications. I'm always happy to help!



## DEVICE OF THE MONTH: AMAZON DASH BUTTONS

These small, battery-powered devices might not look like much, but they're the future of shopping. Just pair them with the Amazon app and select a specific product you buy on a regular basis, such as laundry detergent, paper towels or even your favorite snacks. When you're running low, press the button and Amazon Prime\* will deliver the product you need to your door in two days.



\*Amazon Prime is a subscription service.



# Rustic charm

BY DREW WOOLLEY

The sight of an old barn once conjured the same image for Tom Ludvigson as it does for many others: scrap wood. That changed several years ago while tearing down an old outbuilding used for livestock.

After selling that lumber and seeing how it looked once it was cleaned up, he was blown away by its unique quality. "It's something about how the wood finishes; it's just totally different in the way it looks," he says. "You can't really find that in most new wood."

Ten years ago, that passion for aged wood led him to create his own furniture and home decor out of the material. Today, he and his wife, Delite, sell those handmade pieces from the T&D Barnwood Rustics storefront in Dawson.

Delite Ludvigson says their ultimate goal is to offer everything customers might need for their home, and they're pretty close already. Barnwood Rustics offers beds, end tables, kitchen islands, cabinets, ceiling tiles, trimming and much more, all made from wood they harvest themselves.

## NEW USES FOR OLD WOOD

A few years ago, the Ludvigsons would get as many as 100 calls a year about barns throughout Minnesota and neighboring states. For the most part, people are happy to let Tom Ludvigson take whatever wood he wants in return for the time and labor

of tearing down an unwanted building.

These days their supply is robust, allowing him to be more choosy about which barns he wants to harvest. Most often, he seeks buildings with pegged timber and vertical siding because they are easier to tear down and the wood can be used for a variety of projects.

Afterward, the wood from each barn is stored together to make sure every piece of furniture has a consistent look. Nails, shingles and any other construction materials found in the wood are also removed. That process is time-consuming, but it pays off in the end.

"Where the nails come out, it leaves a black mark in the wood. When it's finished, it just pops and becomes really pretty," Delite Ludvigson says.



Tom and Delite Ludvigson have turned his love of making handcrafted furniture and decorations into a business partnership that keeps both of them busy in their Dawson store.

## BUILDING A BUSINESS

Most of Barnwood Rustics' customers are local, but recently the Ludvigsons have explored wholesale for some of their smaller, easier-to-ship items. To help promote the store, they launched a website and have redoubled their efforts to maintain a Facebook page. Those projects would not have been possible without internet service from Farmers Mutual Telephone Company.

"It seems like that's the future," Delite Ludvigson says. "Everything is connected to the internet or online these days, so we are really trying to focus on that."

Ultimately though, the best promotion is still word of mouth, and Delite Ludvigson

believes her husband's work speaks for itself to anyone who visits the store.

"Each one is a piece of original art in a way," she says. "The different ways the woods age create their own beauty. That's really a specialty that can only be found with handmade products like these." 🗨️

*Learn more about*  
**T&D BARNWOOD RUSTICS**

*Website*  
**WWW.BARNWOODRUSTICS.COM**

*Facebook*  
**@TANDBARNWOODRUSTICS**

# GADGET Gift Guide

BY LUIS CARRASCO

The holidays are a time to get together with family and friends and share joy and laughter and maybe a gift or two. There are few sweeter feelings than making someone happy by giving them what they've always wanted. Of course, you can also enjoy the time-honored tradition of hint-giving by leaving this magazine casually open to this page, maybe even draw — casually, casually — a giant red circle around your favorite gadget. Either way, get ready to enjoy a high-tech holiday with those you love.



## 'STAR WARS: JEDI CHALLENGES'

Remember that scene in the original "Star Wars" where Luke wears a helmet with its blast shield down and deflects lasers from a training drone? You'll look about as silly as he does but feel 10

times cooler as you wear this augmented reality headset and battle the likes of Darth Maul, Kylo Ren and Darth Vader himself. Along with lightsaber duels with your favorite bad guys, "Jedi Challenges" also lets you play a strategy game and even holochess. The kit comes with a lightsaber controller, an AR headset and a tracking beacon, but you still need a compatible Android or iOS smartphone to run the game app. **Available at Best Buy or [Lenovo.com](http://Lenovo.com) for \$199.99.**

## AUTOMATIC PRO

Plug an Automatic Pro adapter into any car's standard diagnostics port to monitor everything from its location to engine diagnostics from your smartphone. The Automatic Pro app can tell you the problem behind that check engine light, keep an eye on your family's progress while they're on the road, and even call emergency services automatically if there's a crash. **Available at [automatic.com](http://automatic.com) and Amazon for \$129.95.**



## ECHO SHOW

The Amazon Echo launched in 2014 as slightly more than a glorified Bluetooth speaker. But it quickly added functions and partner apps that have made it the device to beat as the nerve center of a smart home or as a viable personal assistant. The Echo Show adds a 7-inch touchscreen, which means now — along with the Echo's ability to type up your emails, control your smart home devices, shop on Amazon, etc. — you can use YouTube, make a video call, look up a recipe or watch the news. **Available on Amazon for \$229.99 or a two-pack for \$360.**



## LEGO BOOST CREATIVE TOOLBOX

This 840-piece set lets you build five progressively more challenging models and is basically a starter robotics kit. Although it's recommended for children ages 7 through 12, it's hard to imagine adults who won't have fun helping put together everything from a robot that dances and tells jokes

to an automated production line that builds smaller Lego models. The kit comes with Bluetooth connectivity; two motors; and tilt, color and distance sensors. A tablet is needed for instructions and to program your creations. **Available at [Lego.com](http://Lego.com) and most retailers for \$159.99.**





# Kid-friendly streaming

## A world of content and parental control



**M**y kids will never know the agony of waiting until Saturday morning to watch their favorite cartoons. Nor will they ever need to adjust the “rabbit ears” to make the screen a little less snowy. Thanks to DVRs, streaming and high definition, my kids have access to their favorite shows every day of the week in crystal-clear quality.

For those of you who are curious, streaming has nothing to do with water in a creek. It’s all about watching videos over the internet. Some people prefer this method of TV, as it allows them to watch the shows they want when they want, without having to sit through lots of commercials. I must admit, I love that there are fewer commercials during kids shows as it reduces the amount of “Mom, I want THAT” I typically hear when the kids see their favorite shows. So how do you “stream”? There are three key things you need:

**1** A high-speed internet connection, preferably a broadband connection for the best signal. A 10 Mbps connection would be enough speed if you only have one or

two devices connected to your internet. However, you will probably want at least a 25 Mbps connection if you plan on using the internet for other things while you stream a show. If you want to stream on several devices at once, you’ll need an even faster connection.

**2** A device with streaming apps installed, such as a smartphone, tablet, computer, or a streaming stick attached to your TV such as Roku, Amazon Fire TV Stick or Apple TV.

**3** A streaming app that has the content you want to view. There are several different streaming apps available, with Netflix being one of the most popular.

If you already subscribe to Netflix for your own viewing, you can set up profiles for different members of your household. You can assign a “teen,” “big kid” or “little kid” status to your children’s profile. This keeps them from viewing shows that may be inappropriate. However, if you are looking to just stream content for kids, there are many other free options out there that would be just as good, if not better than what Netflix offers for kids. 📺

### Here are some streaming apps I recommend for kids:

- **YouTube Kids** – A good option for bigger kids who know how to search for the types of shows they enjoy.
- **WATCH Disney** or **WATCH Disney Junior** depending on the age of your kids – Includes episodes of all your kids’ favorite Disney Channel shows.
- **PBS Kids** – Has all your kids’ favorite PBS shows including “Sesame Street” and “Curious George.”
- **PlayKids** – A good option for entertaining preschool-aged children.

*As I’ve mentioned before, screen time should just be a small part of your kid’s day. By choosing how your child watches their shows and how they access them, you maintain a little more control over what they are seeing and learning.*



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*Parenting  
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### Need help setting limits for your kids’ screen time?

Healthychildren.org has an interactive Family Media Planner that can help you establish guidelines for when it’s OK and not OK for your children to use their electronics.



Each Sunday, Dave Evink monitors the mixing board and records each service, which is also broadcast online.

# Devotionals On-Demand

## CHURCHES USE TECHNOLOGY TO REACH WORSHIPPERS

BY DREW WOOLLEY

Some churches struggle to attract young parishioners, but at Federated Church in Morris, they congregate outside. Since her parish was designated as a PokeStop for the popular mobile game “Pokemon Go,” Pastor Lauren Hauger has had to find new ways to accommodate the groups of digital monster-hunters drawn to the building.

“I get people coming by my church and hovering in the underpass. They just sit out there and play,” she says. “Now, we have coffee that we serve out there or Kool-Aid stands and signs that let people know we’re having a Poke Party.”

Not every church can be a landmark for a popular mobile game, but churches across the region are taking advantage of technology to reach their congregations.

According to the Barna Group, a research organization focused on spiritual development, more than 65 percent of churches now use projection screens during services, and 96 percent of pastors use a computer in some way at church.

In particular, streaming and archiving services using high-speed internet from Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone

have become popular tools to involve people who can’t make it to church.

“We wanted to find a way to reach people with the gospel who maybe aren’t able to make it to the church building,” says Sarah Carlstrom, pastor at Crossroads Lutheran Congregation in Dawson. “That can mean shut-ins who can’t come in because of their health, people who are traveling, or people who aren’t yet comfortable visiting because they’ve been hurt or who don’t know anything about the church.”

### HELPING HAND

When Carlstrom first began researching the idea of streaming services from Crossroads in real time, the primary challenge was finding the right equipment



at an affordable price. Then providence intervened.

Her husband, Justin, caught wind that a nearby church was upgrading its own system, giving Crossroads the chance to purchase the old one at a fraction of the cost.

With the help of a team made up of three adult volunteers mentoring four teenagers, the church has been able to stream services live for the last year and post them online for anyone who can't tune in during the service.

"We had a grandma and grandpa who couldn't make it to a baptism because they were in Florida," says Carlstrom. "I told them about the livestream, and they were able to worship and be a part of their grandchildren's baptism from all the way across the country."

Not every church has access to the equipment needed for online streaming, but many churches still find ways to better reach parishioners. Both Federated Church and Hancock Christian Reformed Church, for example, record services and upload them online for people to watch later. Dave Evink, a tech volunteer at Hancock, even burns the services to DVDs for members without computer access.

"The main reason we started making the recordings was for people who couldn't attend or who wanted a copy of a special

event," he says. "Our church members who can't leave home or are in a nursing home really appreciate it."

For Hauger, making sermons available online has also allowed her congregation to engage more deeply with Scripture. "There are a lot of reasons why people watch online," she says. "Some people are visually oriented, others can't sit through a whole service because they have little children. Sometimes they just want to hear the sermon again because it didn't apply to them at the time, but it does later."

### A GIFT FROM GOD

Most pastors are used to looking out at their congregation and recognizing the faces in the pews. While that experience can't be replicated for church members viewing a service online, Crossroads does what it can to track those viewers and to help them engage in the worship experience.

Carlstrom keeps an eye on the church's online viewership and has found that they get anywhere from 20 to 50 streaming visitors each month, in addition to those who watch the service later.

The goal is for remote members to feel as if they're participating in the service, not just becoming passive observers. The tech volunteers at the church try to make sure the camera zooms in on the sanctu-

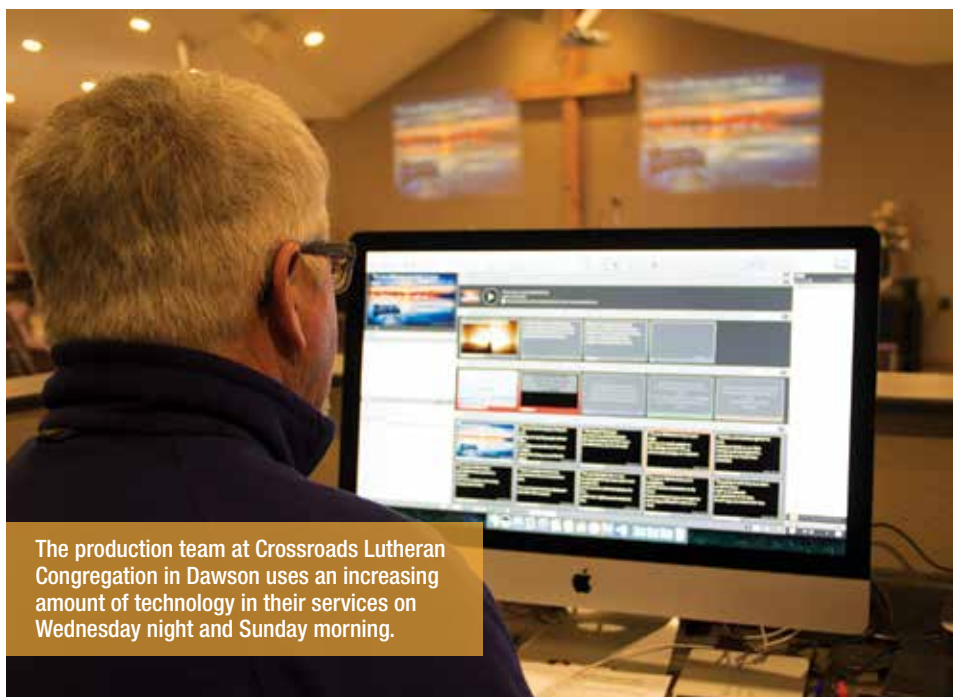
ary's screens when a song's lyrics or a Bible verse is displayed.

"That way you aren't just panning out to watch other people worship, you have all the tools you need to say it or sing it with us," Carlstrom says. "We want to welcome people. We want to tell them we're glad they came to worship with us, not just that we're glad they are watching."

Sometimes that welcome extends to places she never would have expected, as many of her parishioners travel south during winter's coldest months. "On our way to Texas in January, we noticed it was time for church, so we pulled into a community park somewhere in Kansas," says Loren Femrite, a Crossroads member who fled the cold of Minnesota in an RV with his wife. "We had a good signal, so we turned on our hot spot and laptop, poured a cup of coffee, and watched Pastor Sarah via livestream."

Ultimately, Carlstrom sees technology as another gift given to her to help spread the Gospel, one that helps her church put its talents to use and reach more people.

"I just think the biggest thing is that the technology is a tool," she says. "Any tools that God has given us that we can use to glorify him and further his kingdom, we want to be good stewards of that." ☞



The production team at Crossroads Lutheran Congregation in Dawson uses an increasing amount of technology in their services on Wednesday night and Sunday morning.



**"WE HAD A GRANDMA AND GRANDPA WHO COULDN'T MAKE IT TO A BAPTISM BECAUSE THEY WERE IN FLORIDA. I TOLD THEM ABOUT THE LIVESTREAM, AND THEY WERE ABLE TO WORSHIP AND BE A PART OF THEIR GRANDCHILDREN'S BAPTISM FROM ALL THE WAY ACROSS THE COUNTRY."**

**—SARAH CARLSTROM, PASTOR AT CROSSROADS LUTHERAN CONGREGATION IN DAWSON**

# Californian on the prairie

**J**ennifer Rorich and her husband, Mark, split the holiday season between their home in Ashley, North Dakota, and her native state of California. But there are two things common to Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations in either location: family and great food.

“Both holidays absolutely revolve around food. Both are spent with family, friends and loved ones — and, of course, involve a feast of a meal,” Rorich says. “For Thanksgiving, my dad usually cooks a big spread that he spends days in advance planning. In the past few years, I have also started cooking some side dishes. For Christmas, we always spend it at my in-laws’ house in North Dakota. My mother-in-law is in charge of the meal, and it is always wonderfully prepared. I am lucky to have good cooks in both my own family as well as my husband’s.

“I learned to cook from watching my dad,” she continued. He is truly a genius in the kitchen and can watch food shows and remember ingredients without even having to look up a recipe. Of course, most of what he cooks rarely uses a recipe. It’s just a little of this and a little of that. I have fond memories of watching him cook,” she says.

Mark Rorich is a third-generation farmer in an area of North Dakota known as the “Iron Curtain,” where a group of original settlers remains known as Germans from Russia.

“They have their own dialect of German as well as their own traditions, especially in the kitchen,” Jennifer Rorich says. “They have their own food staples and recipes that I’ve enjoyed learning how to prepare. I love the fact that generations



Ever since California native Jennifer Rorich married her husband, Mark, a third-generation North Dakota farmer, they’ve been blending their family traditions.

Photo courtesy of Shannon Rosan.

later we can carry on the traditions and recipes that are important to my husband’s heritage and family.”

Jennifer Rorich writes about her food adventures at [prairiecalifornian.com](http://prairiecalifornian.com), a blog that did not start out focused on food. It began as a vehicle for sharing stories about meeting her husband and moving to North Dakota. “But after being hounded time and again on social media about my recipes, I decided to start sharing some of them. I was amazed at the popularity and interest there was in recipes, specifically those from my husband’s German-Russian heritage,” she says. “My blog today now serves as a hub for all things food and farming, the two main things that our lives revolve around.”

Baking gifts from her kitchen for holiday giving has a special meaning for her. “It gives a deeper meaning to give someone something I made with my hands,”

she says. She bakes cookies for her mail carrier and for the delivery people who bring packages to go beneath the tree. Neighbors look forward to the caramel and cinnamon rolls she makes from scratch and delivers to their doors.

“I always tell people that I show love through food,” she says.

Heartland cuisine, she has learned, is simply “the way people have always eaten,” she says.

Here are some of her favorite recipes for sharing with friends and family.



FOOD EDITOR  
**ANNE P. BRALY**  
IS A NATIVE OF  
CHATTANOOGA,  
TENNESSEE.



## POPCORN CAKE

- 3/4 cup popcorn, unpopped
- 1 (10-ounce) bag of marshmallows
- 24 caramels, unwrapped
- 1/2 cup margarine
- 1/2 cup roasted peanuts
- 1/2 cup plain M&M's

Pop popcorn. This will yield 12 to 14 cups popped. Place in a large bowl that has been sprayed with cooking spray oil and remove any unpopped kernels. Heat the marshmallows, caramels and margarine until melted together, stirring until it is smooth. Pour the melted mixture over the popped corn and mix well. Add the peanuts and the M&M's. Stir to combine. Spray a bundt or angel food pan with cooking spray oil. Press mixture into pan and let cool completely. Cake should harden. Slice and serve.



## HOLIDAY SHORTBREAD

- 8 ounces (1 cup) butter, room temperature
- 2/3 cup powdered sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 2 cups flour

Heat oven to 325 degrees. Using a stand or hand mixer, cream the butter for several minutes until it is light and fluffy. Mix in the powdered sugar and vanilla. Beat on medium speed until well-mixed and smooth. Detach bowl from stand mixer. Add in the flour, using a spoon to combine. Knead the dough in the bowl until smooth. It may be necessary to add a tablespoon of water.

Spray the shortbread pan with nonstick vegetable spray. Place the ball of dough firmly in the middle of the pan. Working from the center out, firmly press dough into the pan. Pierce the entire surface with a fork.

Bake for 30-35 minutes or just until shortbread is lightly browned. Let

shortbread cool in the pan for 10 minutes. Loosen the edges with a knife and flip onto a cutting board. Cut the shortbread into serving pieces while it is still warm. Makes about 16 cookies.

**Note:** If you don't have a pan, you can also roll the dough out into a 1/2-inch thick circle on a lightly floured surface. Transfer round to prepared baking sheet. Using fingers, press dough evenly over bottom to edges of pan. Score the circle with a knife into eight even wedges and pierce with a fork all over. Bake until shortbread is cooked through and pale golden, about 30-35 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes and cut along scored lines to cut shortbread into eight even wedges.

## DAKOTA KUCHEN

*A traditional German dessert that doubles as a coffee cake for breakfast.*

- 2 cups warm milk
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 (1/4-ounce) package yeast
- 6 cups flour
- 1/2 cup oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs

### Filling:

- 1 quart heavy cream
- 6 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- Dash salt
- Fruit or topping of choice (such as thinly sliced apples, peaches, apricots or pears, prunes or even chocolate chips)
- Cinnamon-sugar mixture

Mix all dough ingredients together well. Form dough into one large ball and place in well-oiled bowl. Cover and set in a warm place to rise until doubled. While the dough is rising, combine all filling ingredients (except fruit and cinnamon-sugar) in a small saucepan over the stove. Cook on medium heat, stirring until thick. Set aside and let cool. Prepare your fruit of choice. Divide dough into 8 balls and roll to fit into 8- or 9-inch pie pans. Lay fruit on top of dough and add filling (about 1/2 cup each kuchen). Sprinkle with cinnamon-sugar. Bake at 350 degrees for about 20 minutes. Custard filling will set as kuchen cools. Store in refrigerator or freeze once kuchen has cooled completely. 📦

# CAUTION: WINTER SPEED ADVISORY!



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