

MAY/JUNE 2020

CONNECTION

BROADBAND:
HELPING YOU WORK



FUN WITH FASHION

Monica Bothun
shares her
favorite styles

A LONG-HAUL INVESTMENT

Trig Viessman's dream is
growing on the vine

MAKING A CONNECTION

Broadband links home and
work to the world





— By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO —
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association


Staying well, staying connected

It's late March as I work on my thoughts for this issue. Knowing that the magazine won't reach your mailbox for another four weeks, I asked myself, "What will the world look like in late April to early May?" So much has changed in just the past two weeks, it's hard to imagine what the immediate future holds.

There are, however, a few things I know with great certainty. In this time of crisis, community-based broadband providers across America have stepped up their already deep commitments to keeping you connected. As Americans are increasingly compelled to work or study from home, use telemedicine, and lean on virtual tools to connect with loved ones, the work of your local broadband company has become more essential than ever — for you and for the national economy.

Working with one voice through NTCA, these providers have been on top of national issues such as adopting the FCC's "Keep Americans Connected" pledge, communicating with Congress on the importance of the "Keeping Critical Connections Act," and advocating for support to help small broadband providers ensure internet connectivity when it's extremely critical.

Locally, providers like yours are balancing employee safety with their commitment to keeping networks functioning. In times of crisis, we see more strongly than ever that these providers' investment in building resilient networks — and in the people who operate them — is foundational to our society.

Stay well, stay healthy and stay connected. We will get through this together. 

WE WERE HERE

when our communities needed a modern,
reliable communications network.



WE ARE HERE

to help you stay connected during this
time of national crisis.



WE WILL BE HERE

supporting the recovery through a
broadband network that builds businesses,
creates jobs and drives the economy.

**PROUD TO BE YOUR
COMMUNITY-BASED
BROADBAND PROVIDER**

Unlocking the potential of rural businesses

Story by NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

By turning to digital technologies, more than half of small businesses in rural areas expanded their customer base not only locally but also throughout their state, and about one-third grew their market in neighboring states. In fact, about 16% of rural businesses even used digital resources to expand into international markets.

Those were only a few findings from a study Amazon commissioned from the U.S. Chamber Technology Engagement Center that showed how broadband has the potential to further benefit the economy in rural communities and the nation as a whole.

What's the possible upside of improving access to digital tools such as broadband? Rural small businesses have the potential to be critical blocks in the foundation needed to strengthen the nation's economy.

Increasing the number of businesses adopting online tools and digital services could support thousands of jobs. Businesses with revenue of less than \$100,000 have the greatest potential to benefit.

Increased adoption of technology could be responsible for generating billions of dollars of revenue, and Southern states have the most room to grow.

Results of the study released in 2019 were compiled from a survey sent to more than 5,000 rural small businesses across the country. And the report made three policy recommendations that could help make the projections a reality.

CONNECTIVITY

Selling online depends on internet and mobile phone service. About 27% of rural residents lack access to high-speed internet, compared with 92% of all Americans who can access faster services. The private and public sectors should continue to identify opportunities to expand connectivity through initiatives such as the creation of new infrastructure.

NEW POLICIES COULD EASE CONCERNS OF RURAL SMALL BUSINESSES

66% of rural small businesses say poor internet or cell-phone connectivity negatively impacts their business.

38% of rural small businesses say they can't hire the talent with the right digital skills in their area.

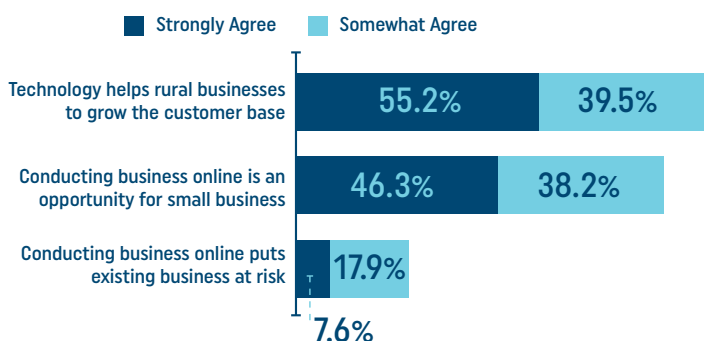
Nearly **41%** of rural small businesses agree that policy-makers should create incentive programs that make it easier for rural small businesses to incorporate digital technology into their daily operations.

TRAINING

There should be a goal of increasing the talent pipeline of candidates trained in digital skills, such as the use of cloud computing and digital marketing. Such a workforce could offset the existing shortage of IT professionals in rural areas.

DIGITAL TOOLS

Increasing the adoption of digital training and digital tools by rural small businesses will allow them to better scale their operations. This study highlights two points: the positive benefits for rural small businesses effectively utilizing digital tools to sell online and the potential for businesses currently underutilizing those digital tools to grow. 🗨️



Source: Unlocking the Digital Potential of Rural America, A U.S. Chamber Technology Engagement Center study commissioned by Amazon.



Essential services? Look at broadband

Early in 2020, we didn't necessarily have any reason to consider what the "essential" goods and services were in our lives. As we know, that all changed this spring when many "nonessential" workers were sent home and we were urged to only leave home for "essential" trips.



KEVIN BEYER

Chief Executive Officer

Amidst this strange season we're in, two things have become crystal clear for me:

1. Broadband and communications services are essential for our community and,
2. When our community counts on our team at ACIRA, our employees shine.

I'd like to use some of this space to say how proud I am of our employees. These men and women helped navigate this unprecedented time for our cooperative, communicated changes with our members and made sure our network did its job connecting all of you.

I'm also proud of our community and would like to sincerely thank the medical personnel, grocery store workers, first responders, civic leaders and others who are still working tirelessly to keep our

community running. Additionally, I would like for everyone affected by the economic impact of the virus to know we have joined the FCC's "Keep Americans Connected Pledge" to ensure our members can stay connected during this COVID-19 crisis.

ESSENTIAL CONNECTION

Part of the reason our team continues to work so hard is we realize what a broadband connection means to members of our community.

Very early on in the coronavirus crisis, we saw government officials, school administrators, pastors and even entertainers embrace digital content.

Some of that information was critical to help students continue learning and keep people safe. In other instances, it may have been purely for entertainment. But I believe that when we were asked to remain in our homes, having access to all of the quality entertainment options broadband provides was a blessing.

The industry statistics I've seen certainly indicate people are putting communication networks to work. National carriers reported seeing a 25% increase in voice phone call activity and a 15% rise in call duration during the first couple of weeks after leaders began encouraging people to stay home. At that same time, estimates indicate traffic on websites grew between 13% and 40%.

At your home, that increase may have been children taking virtual field trips or accessing school resources. Worshippers all across our region went online on Sunday mornings to stream church services. Many people worked from home over their broadband connection — teleconferencing platforms saw a 300% increase in traffic, according to reports in Wired Magazine. Maybe you called a friend or family member to catch up, instead of visiting in person.

From an entertainment standpoint, networks like ours also saw a surge. Nielsen, the company famous for its TV ratings, said that people staying home leads to an almost 60% increase in the amount of TV we watch. Traffic to Netflix reportedly increased by between 54% and 75%, and online gaming sites reported a 400% increase in traffic.

I don't bring all of this up to bore you with statistics, but I wish to underscore a point. The communication network we provide is an essential service both when times are dark and in the brighter days I know are coming soon. ☎

CONNECTION

MAY/JUNE 2020

VOL. 4, NO. 3

Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, © 2020. It is distributed without charge to all of our customers.



POWERED BY FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY
AND FEDERATED TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE

Farmers Mutual Telephone Company

301 2nd St. South
Bellingham, MN 56212
farmers@farmerstel.net
320-568-2105

Federated Telephone Cooperative

201 State Hwy. 9 S. • P.O. Box 107
Morris, MN 56267
emailftc@fedtel.net
320-324-7111 or 320-585-4875

FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY BOARD

Gerald Stensrud, District I, Vice President
Dean Olson, District I
Michael Sorenson, District II
John Plathe, District II, Secretary
Scott Wittnebel, District III, President
Troy Hoyles, District III
Jerome Kallhoff, District IV

FEDERATED TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE BOARD

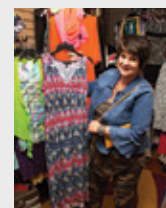
Roger Gerdes, District 1, Vice President
Tim Danielson, District 2, Secretary
Lynn Swenson, District 3, President
Dan Smith, District 4
Nancy Taffe, District 5
Jon Hanson, District 6
Marcia Greiner, District 7

Produced for Acira by:

WORDSOUTH

A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY

On the Cover:



Monica Bothun, a self-professed fashionista, enjoys wearing new fashions as much as selling garments at her store in Dawson. See story Page 12.

ANNUAL MEETING

Process for Farmers Mutual & Federated Telephone

YOUR 2020 ANNUAL MEETING NOTIFICATION AND ABSENTEE BALLOT WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Annual meeting notice.
- Absentee ballot — Only if an election is necessary and if you are unable to attend the meeting, you can vote by mail ballot.
- Candidate profiles — Only if an election is necessary, a profile of the candidates vying for election in each district.
- June 9 — Farmers Mutual Telephone Company annual meeting
- June 11 — Federated Telephone Cooperative annual meeting

Your FMTC or FTC membership allows you to vote for each district on your cooperative's ballot.

SECRECY ENVELOPE ONLY IF AN ELECTION IS NECESSARY

Along with your ballot/notification, you will receive a "secrecy envelope" for absentee voting. Once you have completed your mail ballot, insert the entire ballot into the secrecy envelope. Place your sealed secrecy envelope in the mailing envelope. Sign the mailing envelope, affix postage to the mailing envelope and mail.

MEMBER REGISTRATION CARD AND DOOR PRIZE ENTRY

Each member will receive a member registration card in the mail prior to the annual meeting. Please sign the card and bring it with you to the meeting. Registration will be divided into separate desks based on members' names. Bring your signed card to the appropriate registration desk. Your signed registration card complies with FCC privacy laws and qualifies you for meeting registration, a capital credit refund check if available, a ballot and door prize drawings. Registration will be open from 4:30-6:30 p.m. only!

District Elections

Farmers Mutual Districts — June 9 at 6 p.m.

District 2 — Michael Sorenson

District 3 — Troy Hoyles

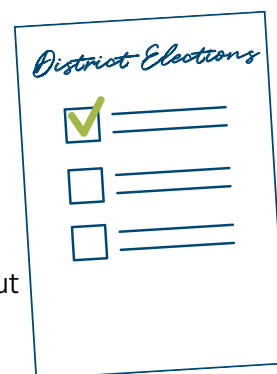
District 4 — Jerome Kallhoff

Federated Districts — June 11 at 6 p.m.

District 4 — Dan Smith

District 7 — Marcia Greiner

If you are interested in being a board member, please see your cooperative bylaws for information about the qualification process.



Serving our COMMUNITY!

Please help us recognize these dedicated board members who have reached career milestones.

FARMERS MUTUAL BOARD

Gerald Stensrud — 40 Years

Dean Olson — 5 Years

FEDERATED TELEPHONE BOARD

Marcia Greiner — 15 Years

Nancy Taffe — 5 Years

Thank you for your service!

Rest, relax and rejuvenate

A vacation does not necessarily require a plane ticket, hotel room or even a tank of gas. In fact, whether you're on a budget or just looking for a way to unplug from the stresses of day-to-day life, there are plenty of relaxing options if you never leave home.

After all, any break is a good break, so here are a few resources, suggestions and tips for those interested in unwinding without heading out.

Explore



► Are you a burgeoning birder? iBird, Peterson Birds of North America, the Audubon Society and others have created apps to help both the novice and experienced birder. Apps may include photos, art-work and birdsongs to help you identify birds where you live. You can even earn an online certificate from birdercertification.org.

► Arbdoy.org offers an online database for identifying trees across the U.S. along with its "What Tree Is That?" pocket field guide. Snap a photo of a leaf and the website will help identify it.

► Backyards are meant for play and family barbecues, but take a closer look. Grab a magnifying glass and learn what's out there beyond the grass. Create a nature trail for kids and learn about the plants, insects and animals living in your backyard.

► Geocaching is a good old-fashioned treasure hunt with a twist. Try the app from Geocaching.com and get out in nature to find "treasures" others have left. You'll also learn some handy navigation skills.



Get playful



- Coloring isn't just for kids. It can help adults reduce stress and anxiety, improve vision and focus, and even sleep better! Best of all, coloring supplies are inexpensive and available at stores and online retailers everywhere.



- Piece together a pretty picture and flex your mental muscles at the same time. Family jigsaw puzzles use a combination of small, medium and large pieces so everyone can join in on the fun. Try puzzlewarehouse.com for a giant selection of puzzles for all ages.

- Pull the board games out of the closet and dust them off. It's time for a family-friendly faceoff. Traditionalists may prefer games like Monopoly, Life or Scrabble, but conservative estimates count tens of thousands of available board games.
- Discover your inner Monet with an online art class. A quick internet search for online art classes yields results of everything from basic drawing to comic book art to figure drawing and more!



Books and music

- Did you know there's a free digital library of classic books? Project Gutenberg offers digital downloads of titles ranging from "Pride and Prejudice" to "Peter Pan." Just visit gutenberg.org.



- If you need help selecting a book to read, do a quick Google search for Time magazine's All-Time 100 novels. If mysteries are your thing, visit theedgars.com for a list of the latest award winners. And for sci-fi fans, pop over to nebula.sfw.org.

- For those who believe "all the world's a stage," playbill.com offers a range of resources, including guides to finding streaming videos of stage performances.
- Check with your local library about e-book selections using apps such as SimplyE and Libby.



Go virtual



- Consider a virtual tour, and begin with a visit to google.com/earth. Search for one of the 31 virtual visits to national parks such as Acadia, Everglades and Joshua Tree. They're fantastic.
- Check out Virtualiteach.com for a guide to online tours of places such as the Louvre, the National Museum of History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and other popular venues across the world.
- Many zoos offer entertaining live webcams, particularly if the viewer catches the animals at just the right time. A great first stop is the San Diego Zoo: zoo.sandiegozoo.org/live-cams.



- And don't miss artsandculture.google.com for tours of The Modern Museum of Art, the CERN laboratory and much more. Seriously, this is a must-visit. ☑



HI! I'M JADE GEHRKE!

In this column, 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!

APP OF THE MONTH



Grammarly

Do your business contacts ever read your social media posts, requiring you to make sure your grammar is perfect? Or does your English whiz friend give you grief if a comma lands in the wrong spot? Consider Grammarly, an online copy editor that can integrate with your web browser. The free account is robust, and a premium version offers additional writing tips and tools for less than \$12 monthly, if you pay for a year in advance.

Get social safely

Social media is a great way to be informed, stay in touch and keep track of what friends and family are up to. But as more and more of our lives are posted on Facebook or captured on Instagram, it's important to be aware of the pitfalls and to know how to best protect your online security.

Consider the following tips on how to stay safe on your favorite social media platform.

- Set a strong password. No password is unbreakable, but don't make it easy on a potential hacker by making yours a common word or phrase. Use combinations of numbers, uppercase and lowercase letters, and special characters. Also, use different passwords for each social media account.
- When given the option to set up security questions to recover your password, make sure the questions you select are not easy for someone to know the answer to, such as where you went to school, the street you grew up on or the name of your first pet. You can also answer those same questions with random words — just make sure you remember them.
- Activate two-factor authentication, which most social media platforms, including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook offer. When you access your account from a device or browser your social media service doesn't recognize, it will ask you to input a code, it sends to you via email or text to confirm your identity. The extra step may be annoying if you access your accounts from different computers or usually block cookies in your browser, but it's a mild inconvenience for security.
- Know who your friends are. Especially on Facebook, it's important to only accept friend requests from people you know. A recent trick is for scammers to take a photo and name from someone you're already friends with and then send you a friend request. You accept and unknowingly give a stranger access to your private posts.
- Know your audience. When posting, Facebook allows you to select who might see your post. If you want something to reach the widest audience possible, choose "public" in the privacy settings, but don't forget to set it back to "friends" once you're done.
- Reconsider taking that personality quiz. Of course you want to know how much of a Libra you are or which Disney character is your spirit animal. But before you go clicking and sharing, make sure you read the fine print on how the information you're giving this application will be used. Most of these quizzes are harmless fun, but giving away some of your data is the price of admission. ☞



Plan of the grapes

Viessman Wines & Estates culmination of a dream

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photography by MATT LEDGER

Turning Dawson, Minnesota, into a wine country destination doesn't seem far-fetched to Trig Viessman.

He spent years behind the wheel driving big rigs in the family trucking business, but he longed for something beyond the road. "I was always looking for a way where I could build a business, work from home and be my own boss," he says.

Viessman and his wife, Sarah, would occasionally order wine with dinner at local restaurants, but he was hardly an aficionado when he planted his first vines back in 2015 at the urging of a winemaker friend in New York.

"I put in about 100 vines to see if they would grow or not, and they grew phenomenally," says Viessman, 39. "Then, in 2018, I put in another 4 1/2 acres."

Viessman's Wines & Estates was born, and it's grown to more than 5 acres and around 3,500 vines. "This is the third year," Viessman says. "It's what I was looking for — something to do where I could be my own boss and try something different — something new, something exciting."

THE GRAPE EXPERIMENT

While the prospect of owning and operating a vineyard and winery in rural Minnesota was exciting for Viessman and his family, the learning curve was steep. Not everything about winemaking is red and white, so there was certainly a lot to learn about the centuries-old craft.

"I asked a lot of people who are in the business for advice," Viessman says, and visits to some of the dozens of vineyards and wineries in the state provided insight on how to navigate the ins and outs of the new venture.

Viessman also reached out to the University of Minnesota, which has a wine grape research program that is recognized as one of the top in the U.S. The university

Trig Viessman uses Brianna and Frontenac Gris grapes to produce his wines.



began a wine grape breeding program in the 1970s and opened its own research winery in 2000 at its Horticultural Research Center to study and develop cold-hardy wine grapes.

Researchers at the university have cultivated more than 12,000 experimental vines capable of surviving in Minnesota's cold climate. "All my grapes have been produced by the University of Minnesota to withstand the winters here," Viessman says. "A lot of them can survive down to 35 degrees below zero. If I took a grapevine from California and planted it here, it probably wouldn't survive the winter."

The university's research and online presence have been invaluable, Viessman says.

"I do a lot of reading on the internet from things that they've posted and the things they've learned," he says. "I go on their website frequently just to see if there are any updates on anything. They're still producing different grapevines. I'm waiting for them to come out with one called 'Cotton Candy.'"

As the name represents, Cotton Candy grapes taste much like the popular spun-sugar treat. They are sold at grocery stores but haven't been developed for growing in Minnesota vineyards yet. "I'm hoping in the future they will," Viessman says. "I think that'll be a really good seller if they can come up with a cold-weather cotton candy tasting grape."

GETTING STARTED

Viessman's winery venture grew from his plantings of Frontenac Gris, Itasca and other grapes developed at the University of Minnesota. Viessman also planted Bluebell, an early grape akin to Concord and more suited for jellies, jams and juices.

Last year, the result was about 2,500 bottles of wine under the Viessman Winery & Estates label. "It was trial and error," Viessman says. "I'm learning as I go, and I had some really good bottles — and I had some really bad bottles, so I ended up having to dump a bunch down the drain."

The first bottles have been sweet and mildly sweet wines, which Viessman prefers. He will continue to experiment with grapes and the wines they make. "We'll see what our customers like," he says. "If they want dry wines, I'll make dry wines."

None of the bottles from that initial batch could be sold because the winery was still going through the permitting process. But Viessman pushed ahead with more juice from the vineyard fermenting and construction ongoing on a tasting room and event space, production area, shop and covered crush pad.

Beyond the wine, Viessman says he has big plans to turn the property into an event venue and attraction offering food, jams and jellies, all under the winery's brand. "We're hoping to get some smaller weddings at first and then maybe some more weddings and events out here, as well as hosting wine tastings," he says. "We'll have a small menu with a full kitchen. But that's all down the road." 📞

Viessman's Wines & Estates

2496 160th St. Dawson, Minnesota



A trusty solution

Broadband creates a key resource

Access to fast internet service is an increasingly important resource, a realization playing out in large and small ways for rural communities across the nation. And state and local governments are striving to make it easier for residents to take advantage of new communications resources.

For many, the benefits created by access to broadband are deeply personal, and the choices made by one Tennessee family illustrate the possibilities.

Aaron and Becca West lived in Spring Hill, a Nashville suburb, when a national communications provider brought high-speed internet to their neighborhood. Aaron West took advantage, working from home and eliminating his 45-minute commute to a software company. Also, the new technology allowed him to grow his own business, an audio and visual consulting company serving churches.

When the family opted to relocate to the more rural area of Crossville, Tennessee, they did not leave behind the opportunities made possible through broadband. The local telephone cooperative, Ben Lomand Connect, provides 1 Gbps internet service through a fiber

optic network. And the couple took advantage.

"I've had the company for about nine years, but I couldn't operate it the way I can operate it now," West says. "The fiber was so huge for the contract work. It was so much easier to communicate. When we were looking for homes here, we immediately ruled them out if they didn't have high-speed internet access."

Broadband has also helped the career of Becca West, a teacher by training. She connected with a program called GoGoKid, allowing her to use the internet to teach English to Chinese students. The arrangement also made it easier for her to home-school the couple's two daughters.

While fast internet access improves their connectivity to the world, the family also experiences its capacity to create a deeper connection with each other. "We're all here together, and we're very intentional about doing things together," Aaron West says. "We're able to go to parks and libraries. We're freed up to focus on our family instead of it being career first and family second."

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Stories such as that of the West family are only the beginning. The full potential of broadband remains untapped, and states nationwide can benefit as fast networks reach rural areas.

Last year the U.S. Chamber Technology Engagement Center released results of a study commissioned by Amazon that found Texas could add as many as 23,433 jobs in rural communities over three years. And hitting that mark



Becca West teaches English to Chinese children via the internet.



Aaron West,
a Tennessee
resident, in his
home office.

Her employer is based in Minneapolis, but she works from home. The need for high-speed internet connectivity is a necessity. “We connect via phone, and we hold meetings on Skype,” she says. “It works. It’s very slick.”

Like other telecommuters, she enjoys the freedom to get up and move, to go walk the dog or to pitch in a load of laundry. “It definitely makes life easier,” she says.

Rob Schierman says that freedom is part of the draw for telecommuters who live in Bayfield County or those considering relocating there. “The younger workforce doesn’t like to be married to a desk or a location,” he says. “They’re a little bit more fluid in their lifestyle and like to be where they can hop on a bike trail or go fishing or go kayaking. They can take advantage of the resources in Bayfield County — we’re uniquely situated along Lake Superior and close to a lot of undeveloped areas where recreation is still plentiful.” 📺

could generate an additional \$6.6 billion in annual sales and \$963 million in annual wages.

While the Lone Star State leads all states in potential gain from broadband growth, both Ohio and Mississippi could also see significant gains. The study emphasized that achieving the potential growth would require investments such as an increase in rural broadband and cellphone access, as well as growth of the number of people with digital skills necessary for these jobs.

With so much potential at stake, local communities are incentivized to promote broadband-based jobs, even if that means updating local regulations, as one Wisconsin county has done in recent years.

EMBRACING OPPORTUNITY

Once, home-based businesses in Wisconsin’s Bayfield County were required to secure permits to operate. Now, the county takes a more common-sense approach as the description of a home-based worker evolves.

“We’ve recognized the direction of

business in America today and around the world,” says Rob Schierman, director of planning and zoning for Bayfield County. “We created some breathing room for when a business would need a permit and when it doesn’t. We’re creating opportunity while still protecting the integrity of neighborhoods.”

The area was one of the first to receive the state’s Telecommuter Forward! Certification, one step in promoting work-from-home jobs and taking advantage of the internet network of Norvado, a telecommunications cooperative in Cable, Wisconsin.

“We’re providing a means to try to stimulate some of that employment activity coming to Bayfield County and to take advantage of the fiber optics that we have here with Norvado,” Schierman says.

The issue is personal for Schierman and his wife, Jennifer, who understand the benefits of telecommuting.



Jennifer
Schierman
telecommutes to
the city.

PASSION FOR Fashion

MONICA'S APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES FULFILLS DREAM IN DAWSON

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photography by MATT LEDGER

Monica Bothun calls her customers her “fashionistas.” After more than a decade in business, the owner and operator of Monica’s Apparel and Accessories in Dawson also calls them her friends.



Monica's Apparel features an array of clothing styles and fashionable shoes.

“When people shop in my store, I get a relationship with them,” Bothun says. “It’s not about just coming into my store and buying something. You’re buying an experience, too.”

Visits to the boutique, which sits outside of Dawson’s business district and is adjacent to Bothun’s home, may include dark chocolate sea-salt caramel candy or an annual customer appreciation day that features an all-day lunch menu from Bothun’s own kitchen. Bothun’s contribution always means her special touch and love for fashion.

“The key to success in a little town is that people turn into your friends, and they spread the word,” Bothun says. “You know how negativity spreads? I think we’re trying to make good things spread.”

But there’s more to the boutique than tasty chocolates, fashion advice and conversations among friends. “I’m very handy in emergencies,” she says. “If someone needs a black dress or pants for choir at school or whatever, I’ll open up and take care of them. I’ve seen, as my customers become my friends, that they care about me.”



"I'm just passionate. This is my passion, so I just want that to show through."

Monica Bothun,
owner of Monica's Apparel and Accessories

Monica Bothun enjoys wearing new fashions, selling garments and talking about trends during her weekly radio show on KLQP.

FROM THE BEGINNING

After 23 years in one job, Bothun says her circumstances changed. She had knee replacement surgery and began looking in mid-2007 at what the future might hold. The country was in the midst of a recession, but Bothun was undaunted. "I didn't even think of that at the time," she says. "It was more of a necessity and a dream."

Her husband, Kevin, asked one day what her dream job might be, and she had a ready-made answer. "I said I wanted to have a boutique by the ocean," she recalls. "He said, 'Well, we're not moving.' We have this upright pool in the back, and he said, 'That's your ocean. Why don't you do a store here?' And that was possible because we live in a duplex."

After quite a bit of planning and putting together a small business plan with the help of resources Bothun found through the state of Minnesota, Monica's Apparel and Accessories was born. "I went to all the avenues I could — for everything that was available to me for free to help me get started — and six months later, I opened up the doors right here of a full-service clothing store," she says.

Bothun says there were plenty of doubts as she worked on crafting a business plan and fretted over marketing and how to transform part of a duplex into a retail space. "What if they don't come? What if they don't come shopping here?" she recalls asking herself. "And my husband just said, 'You'll be fine.'"

That confidence served him well in this case.

Bothun is a self-professed "shopaholic," so she was a natural on the merchandise end. She also fell in love with marketing, using what was then a new social media platform called Facebook to promote the small store in the duplex three blocks off Main Street. "I figured something like this was more intimate and had more of a boutique-type feeling," she says.

She also says that while she believes she has inspired other people who have opened boutiques in small towns outside of Dawson, she has something no one else in similar businesses has.

"I use this special word that no one can copy — I say I 'Monica-ize' it," she says. "I took my business, and I Monica-ized it."

Bothun made visits to local organizations and businesses to sell and gauge reaction to her products, and she produced the cash flow for the improvements she wanted to Monica-ize her retail space. That early face-to-face marketing earned money for Monica-ization and got her business and new brand in front of customers before she opened her doors.

'FASHIONISTA FRIDAY'

Bothun and her fashionistas, some of whom are merchandise models for her boutique's Facebook posts, may celebrate fashion every day, but every other Friday turns into "Fashionista Friday" on local radio in Dawson.

On the first and third Fridays of the month, 92.1 KLQP-FM Madison-Dawson plays host to Bothun's 15-minute radio show. The business relationship with Q-92 FM and its advertising representative and sports announcer Paul Raymo started out with an advertising package that included spots on local sports programming, but it evolved into "Fashionista Friday."

"I said, 'You know, it'd be fun to have a local talk show someday,'" she says. "And they said, 'I think you should do that.'"

A little while later, the show was born. "I said, 'That was so awesome!' I was so excited," Bothun says. "It's for 15 minutes, and I talk about fashion."

The unscripted show, which started out monthly and then expanded to twice a month, is also Monica-ized for listeners. "I take my merchandise into the station so I'll have something to talk about for 15 minutes," she says. "We talk about what's hot and what's not. It's more informational, and I think people like it because I have so much enthusiasm. I'm just passionate. This is my passion, so I just want that to show through." 📺

Golden and delicious

A fried fish tradition

Something fishy's going on every Friday at the Hungry Peddler in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The kitchen is a whirlwind of activity. The dining room is no different. It's fish fry Friday, a tradition in many restaurants across the Midwest, and the Hungry Peddler has been doing it since it opened in 1976.

Walk through the doors, and you'll see dozens of fish lovers gathered around tables. The smell of fish frying to a golden finish wafts through the air. Mouths begin to water for the tanginess of tartar sauce and the creamy crunch of coleslaw.

"If you leave here hungry, it's your own fault," says Carrie Siam, who comes to the Hungry Peddler almost every Friday with her husband, Rick, for the all-you-can-eat fish fry, along with a Pepsi or two. Located in an old brick building that's been home to pubs and restaurants for more than 100 years, the Hungry Peddler is next to a busy four-lane road outside the mainstream of downtown La Crosse.

There's a brief window of downtime on Fridays around 4 p.m. in between the lunch rush and the dinner hour. By 4:30 p.m., though, a wait line will be forming, and the phone is ringing for reservations.

Fish is served across the world, but the Midwest turns fish fry into a verb. It's a way of life. Here's a look at its most important elements.

THE FISH

With all the lakes and other waterways snaking their way through the Midwest, it's little wonder that anglers abound, providing restaurants and home cooks with an abundance of fish, and many restaurants use local catch. But at the Hungry Peddler, there are simply too many diners to depend on local fish, so cod is brought in by the truckload to satisfy the masses for the all-you-can-eat fish fry. The restaurant does offer catfish and walleye, but not as an all-you-can-eat special.

"Friday is our busiest day of the week, for sure," says Hungry Peddler manager Kevin Arnold. "It's the day when about 90% of our orders are for fish." The batter is light, not overpowering the flavor of the fish. All it needs is a splash of malt vinegar and a light plunge into a small container of tartar sauce.

THE TARTAR SAUCE

Forget the ketchup. What's a fish fry without the tartar sauce? There's just something about the crunch of fish followed by the creamy tartness of tartar sauce that makes your taste buds dance.

The best tartar sauce is made from scratch, and the recipe is so simple you'll wonder why you ever bought it off the shelf. It's usually made with mayonnaise and pickle relish, but try amping the flavor by dispensing with the pickle



Sami Heller serves the signature meal at the Hungry Peddler in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

relish and adding capers and a dab of horseradish for a little kick. And when your plate of fish comes with a lemon wedge, squeeze some lemon into your tartar sauce for an all-in-one experience that augments the savory flavor of the fish.

THE POTATOES

Here's where decisions must be made. Do you want fries with that, or do you prefer a baked potato dripping with butter and sour cream? Leave your diet at the door. This is a fish fry, and calories don't count.

Whether they're crinkled or hand-cut, french fries are the most-ordered style of potato. At Hungry Peddler, they come crinkled, crispy and hot — the perfect addition to the delightful crunch of the fish.

THE COLESLAW

Somewhere between the fries and fish lurks that little bowl of coleslaw. But don't let its size fool you. Coleslaw is big when it comes to the perfect side dish at any fish fry.

Everyone has a favorite recipe. Some prefer a mayonnaise-based slaw sweetened with just a touch of sugar, while others crave a tangier, vinegar-based variety. One thing both versions have in common, though, is the crisp, cold cabbage that cools the taste buds after a few bites of freshly fried fish.



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

Crispy fried cod

- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons seasoned salt
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup dark beer
- 1 1/2 cups panko breadcrumbs
- Peanut or corn oil for frying
- 1 1/2 pounds fish fillets (cod or walleye)

In a shallow dish, mix the flour and seasoned salt. In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs and beer. Place bread crumbs in a large resealable food-storage plastic bag.

In an electric skillet or deep fryer, heat about 2 inches of oil to 350 F. Coat both sides of the fish fillets with the flour mixture, then dip them in the beer mixture, letting excess drip back into the bowl. Place 1 or 2 pieces of fish at a time in the plastic bag with the bread crumbs. Seal the bag and shake to coat completely.

Fry the fish in batches in the hot oil about 4 minutes, turning once, until golden brown. Drain on paper towels and serve hot.

Tangy tartar sauce

- 1 cup good-quality mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup finely chopped dill pickle
- 3 tablespoons chopped green onion
- 1 tablespoon drained capers
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon dried tarragon
- 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

Combine all the ingredients, mixing well. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Serve with fish. 🍷



≡ SAVE THE DATE. YOU'RE INVITED! ≡

THE FARMERS MUTUAL ANNUAL MEETING
& *Customer Appreciation Picnic*

Tuesday | June 9 | Dawson-Boyd Public School

THE FEDERATED TELEPHONE'S ANNUAL MEETING
& *Customer Appreciation Picnic*

Thursday | June 11 | Morris Area Elementary School

☆ BRING YOUR REGISTRATION CARD

☆ REGISTER FOR DOOR PRIZES

☆ RECEIVE A FREE GIFT

APPRECIATION PICNIC: 4:30 P.M.

BUSINESS MEETING: 6:30 P.M.