

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020

# CONNECTION

**BROADBAND:**  
HELPING YOU CONNECT



## NATURE'S HARVEST

Pomme de Terre  
Foods is a local  
food hub

### A STRONGER COMMUNITY

Reflecting on values shared  
by cooperatives

### LONG-DISTANCE BONDS

Broadband makes connections  
across the miles





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Broadband matters now more than ever

Rural broadband providers are supporting two critical bills making their way through Congress. One would secure present efforts to keep you connected, while the other provides support for future broadband expansion.

The Keeping Critical Connections Act was introduced earlier this year by U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and Kevin Cramer, R-N.D. This bill would appropriate \$2 billion to help smaller broadband companies who worked with struggling customers during the pandemic and who did not disconnect those who couldn't pay.

As the health crisis and economic shutdown disrupted millions of lives, internet providers across the country took the Pledge to Keep Americans Connected by waiving late fees, opening community Wi-Fi hot spots, and not terminating service to customers because of their inability to pay their bills.

For all this good work, however, our members have seen uncollectibles rise. NTCA members have on average some \$80,000 in accumulated nonpayments by customers since the pandemic hit. These are significant amounts, as these broadband providers are often small companies with fewer than 30 employees. Keeping Critical Connections will help them continue serving their communities.

In terms of long-term deployment, NTCA also supports the Rural Connectivity Advancement Program Act of 2020, introduced by U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-S.D. This bill would set aside a portion of the proceeds from FCC spectrum auctions to fund rural broadband deployment.

These bills will help broadband providers like yours continue their work to ensure every American has access to the communications services necessary in today's world. 📶



Podcast listenership continues to grow as Americans increasingly turn to the audio format for news, entertainment and learning. "Podcasts now reach over 100 million Americans every month," said Tom Webster, senior vice president of Edison Research, whose Infinite Dial research reveals that 37% of Americans listen to podcasts every month.

That's an increase from 32% just one year ago. That number has climbed steadily as more content becomes available to appeal to a wide range of interests.

Two new podcasts have been released this year that address a topic of growing importance: rural broadband.

Heading into 2020, rural broadband had become a major point of focus in the U.S., with an increasing number of state and federal programs aimed at solving the lack of broadband access in parts of rural America. When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted businesses, schools and health care delivery, the need for nationwide broadband access was amplified.



A podcast from NTCA



In February, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association launched its "**Smart Rural Communities**" podcast. The show takes a look at rural broadband providers who are bringing advanced digital infrastructure to small towns and regions through powerful fiber networks. These broadband networks are jumpstarting economic growth, igniting educational opportunities and improving health care in some of America's most remote areas.

"**Rural Broadband Today**" launched in June. This podcast tells the stories of those working to bring broadband internet access within reach of every citizen. The interview-style show presents conversations with elected officials, industry experts and business leaders at the forefront of America's efforts to solve the rural broadband challenge. It's produced by WordSouth — A Content Marketing Company. 📻

Both podcasts can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, or by visiting [www.ntca.org/smart](http://www.ntca.org/smart) and [www.ruralbroadbandtoday.com](http://www.ruralbroadbandtoday.com).



# Can you see me now?

Videoconferencing technologies empower remote work



If you've found yourself logging on for more video meetings at work lately, you're not alone. According to the 2019 Impact of Video Conferencing Report by Lifesize, 48% of business professionals say their use of videoconferencing at work has increased compared to two years ago.

And that study was before a global pandemic drove even more companies to work remotely. Videoconferencing isn't without limitations, but businesses and workers are finding it an essential tool for empowering remote work.

## FLEXIBILITY

With videoconferencing, employees and contractors can work from home while still collaborating with their teams and attending important meetings. The flexibility enables individuals in rural communities to not only have more control over their work-life balance but also "telecommute" to urban companies for better opportunities.

Companies also benefit from the ability to recruit talent from anywhere. Business owners have the freedom to set up shop in rural communities, for example, then employ or partner with experts from around the world.

## CONNECTION

Video teleconferencing not only empowers remote productivity but also helps workers overcome some of its challenges. According to Buffer's 2019 State of Remote Work Study, 19% of remote workers cite loneliness as their biggest struggle when working remotely. Video calls can help.

Compared to telephone conferences, video calls make it easier to form connections. The experience more closely reflects face-to-face

encounters. For example, participants can see facial expressions and body language to better identify how others are responding to their ideas as they collaborate on projects.

## SAVINGS

When teams work over videoconferencing platforms, everyone involved saves time and money. Cutting a commute across town — or in some cases, the globe — benefits people's schedules, companies' bottom lines and even the environment.

Plus, the work itself can be more efficient online. In the Lifesize study, 89% of respondents agreed that videoconferencing reduces the time it takes to complete projects or tasks. People may be more likely to enter an online meeting with an agenda and honor the scheduled start and end times. Plus, they can avoid the interruptions common to in-office meetings.

## OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

Despite its many benefits, videoconferencing isn't without challenges. Not all tech tools are secure, so companies must research available options carefully to protect their employees and data. Team leaders must make an effort to coordinate meetings ahead of time to ensure everyone is online and available. And if any employees lack access to fast, reliable internet, technical difficulties can bring meetings to a frustrating halt.

Despite their drawbacks, videoconferencing platforms are here to stay. In the Buffer survey, 99% of respondents agreed they'd like to work remotely at least some of the time for the rest of their careers. Thanks to the increasingly widespread use of videoconferencing technology, they just might. ☎

## Three options for effective videoconferencing

### 1 ClickMeeting

For interactive meetings and webinars, try ClickMeeting. Presenters can share their screen, run live Q&A sessions to engage the audience and collect valuable attendee data using polls. With an automated follow-up feature, this platform makes it easy to keep the momentum going after a webinar ends.

### 2 Microsoft Teams

For a platform that scales with ease, check out Microsoft Teams. Users can schedule video meetings with a single person or run large webinars and meetings of up to 10,000 participants. A long list of features and functionalities makes it a top choice for many businesses.

### 3 Google Meet

For fans of the Google Suite, Google Meet is a convenient choice that smoothly integrates with other applications like Google Calendar and Gmail. Participants can easily join in from their web browser or dial in to listen from anywhere. This platform has big-business capabilities without the big-business price tag, making it a great option for growing companies.

# Bringing people together when we have to be apart

**T**he farmers, businesspeople and other residents who founded our cooperative knew technology could help them keep in touch with others near and far. For decades, technology has helped them create and maintain these essential human connections.



**KEVIN BEYER**

Chief Executive Officer

Because of the telephone lines we strung across our part of Minnesota, parents could talk with children and grandchildren who had moved away. With that technology, sons and daughters serving their country at military bases from coast to coast had a lifeline back home. If bad weather rolled through, we could call and check on friends and family, and if trouble did strike we could reach help by calling first responders.

Building our phone network connected the people of our communities like never before.

Today, I think those founding members would be amazed at the ways we use the technology highlighted in this issue to stay connected.

Thanks to the broadband network Farmers and Federated provides, we upload photos of our gardens, craft projects or baking creations to share with friends and families within our community or around the country.

We share videos of first steps, birthdays and graduations through social media platforms. Streaming video has allowed us to virtually attend classes or church. Video calls allow us to catch up with friends and families, hold meetings for work or participate in virtual Sunday school.

Even when we use cellular networks to make video calls, it's often the fiber optic backbone we've built that connects the cell towers.

The pandemic has significantly sped up our willingness to adopt such technology. I've seen experts suggest that in the last three to five months, Americans have used virtual meetings, video chat and applications at levels we weren't projected to reach for another three to five years.

Perhaps you've embraced new technology during this unusual year. Even if it's not virtual meetings, many members have, for the first time, tried paying bills over the web or online shopping.

I appreciate your patience and willingness to learn these new skills. I know I'm ready for things to get back to normal, but I'm proud to see the difference our cooperative makes in keeping our community connected — no matter how you choose to do that today or in the future. 🗨️

## OCTOBER IS NATIONAL COOPERATIVE MONTH

Every year, we take time to recognize National Cooperative Month, and I never pass up a chance to celebrate our cooperative story. I will always appreciate the bold decision by the local residents to band together to found our cooperatives. No other companies were willing to invest in a telecommunications network in our area, so they took it upon themselves to bring our region into the modern era. Their cooperative spirit lives on today through our board and employees who proudly continue the tradition of connecting our members through technology. Thank you to our members for your continued support!

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A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY

On the Cover:



Pomme de Terre Foods in Morris carries a wide variety of items sourced from local farms and organic growers. See story Page 9.





## Welcome!

We would like to introduce our new employee, **Katie Eul**. She started this summer as a Customer Experience Specialist. A native of Chokio, Eul graduated from Concordia College with a degree in organizational communications. She spent numerous summers as a camp counselor for Luther Crest Bible Camp. She and her dog, Teddy, recently returned to the area after living in South Dakota for six years. Her hobbies include reading, crafting, and spending time with family and friends.



## Congratulations!

Help us welcome **Dennis Schroeder** as the newest board member for Federated Telephone Cooperative, serving the Hancock exchange.

## Statement of Nondiscrimination

In accordance with the Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs or reprisal or retaliation for prior credible activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

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## Marking a milestone

Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone appreciate the career dedication of **Tammy Dierks**. She is a Service Coordinator and has worked for 20 years serving our membership.

# GET ORGANIZED

*It's easy and fulfilling ... really*

**W**alk into a well-organized home, and you experience a sense of freedom. Freedom from clutter, freedom from chaos and freedom from the claustrophobia that comes from a house in disarray.

People become frustrated when they can't find the things they need, says Liz Jenkins, a certified professional organizer and owner of A Fresh Space in Nashville.

"The visual distractions make it hard to be productive because everywhere you look, there is something that needs to be done," she says. "People who have disorganized homes are often very frazzled people because nothing ever seems to go smoothly for them, and that's caused by the chaos around them that prevents them from functioning properly."

The key to organization requires letting go of what is not used, loved or functional, says Houston-based Ellen Delap. She is past president of the National Association of Productivity

and Organizing and a certified professional organizer at [professional-organizer.com](http://professional-organizer.com).

"Work with a partner, and donate those items to a cause that is important to you," she says. "True editing means that you have decided that you have 'enough' and you only need to keep what is essential. This is for all types of organizing in your home, whether it is your kids' clothes or toys, your kitchen, your garage, or your closet. Think of decluttering as peeling the layers of an onion. Go layer by layer until you have what is needed and precious."

There are several areas around the house that are considered clutter "hot spots," according to Delap.

**The garage:** This is one of the biggest hot spots, because it's often the dumping ground for things people don't know what to do with, as well as the last spot anyone gets organized. Garages are commonly not where we park the car. That is where large items are placed before a final decision is made. Those items sit in the garage over a period of time.

When garage-cleaning day arrives, make sure you have plenty of heavy-duty trash bags, basic cleaning supplies, empty boxes for collecting items for donation and plastic containers in varying sizes to categorize and store tools and other items. This type of edit may create space so that you can actually park your car.

**The kitchen and pantry:** This is a challenging area that's the hub of your home. Get organized by creating zones to help you get meals and snacks easily prepared, such as a coffee zone and areas for keeping knives, cutting boards and bowls together. Create a baking zone with your whisks and other utensils in one drawer. Near your stove, store pots and pans.

Pantry organizing starts with editing and decluttering. Empty it all out. Then group items as grocery stores do, in categories like breakfast, snacks, beverages, baking and condiments. Place frequently used items at eye level for adults for easy access. For your kids, use open baskets with food at their level to help them independently access snacks. An organized kitchen and pantry make it a joy to prepare meals together.

**Master closets:** People don't go through their clothes often enough, so things tend to pile on top of each other. Your closet is where you create the start of a great day. Begin with letting go of clothes that are too big or uncomfortable or clothes you would not want to be seen wearing. This is more easily done with a "clutter buddy" who helps you decide if that's your best look, what you love or even what fits properly.



Creating a well-organized space means letting go of items that are not used often.



Edit out what you have seldom worn, and arrange your clothes in categories that work for you. Some of us prefer color to organize our clothes, while some of us prefer to organize outfits. You know what works best for you. If you have multiple closets, cull down to one closet for each season, or have two closets — one for dressy clothes and one for daily wear.

The laundry room: It's easy for things to pile up in a laundry room, such as clean clothes forgotten on a folding table. It's important to establish a laundry routine that sets up days of the week for completing a load, meaning that you get it from the dryer back to the closet in one day. If you stick to it, you'll find your life goes much more smoothly, with no last-minute searching for that matching blue sock.

The home office: This is the room in the house that often becomes a dumping ground for all things. Create a command center where you can triage incoming paper into categories: to do, to pay and to file. Next, organize your files by context, such as home, auto, financial and personal. Finally, create an archive section for papers you need to keep. This section could include taxes, legal documents and those papers you want to keep longer than one year. Move papers throughout your process so that there is a flow.

Remember your goal when you're knee-deep in decluttering your life: to restore the rooms in your home to their original use and intended function. 🗑️

## Looking for someone to help?

Consider hiring a professional like you would a personal trainer or other service provider to make your home a haven and place to relax. The NAPO website — [www.napo.net](http://www.napo.net) — has a directory that helps you find a local professional who can help with organizing, decluttering and even productivity.

## FIVE EASY ORGANIZING TIPS

Professional home organizer Liz Jenkins often finds that clients who are disorganized lead "frazzled" lives. "Nothing ever seems to go smoothly for them because of the chaos around them that prevents them from functioning properly," she says.

**Here are some tips for organizing your living space and, thereby, your life.**

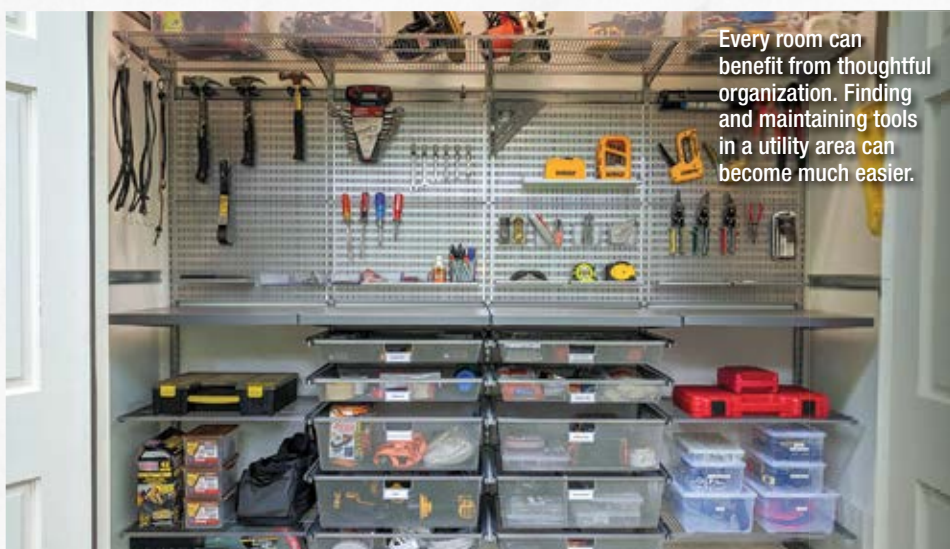
1. Create "homes" for groups of items that belong together, ideally in the spaces where you use them.
2. Use containers to corral groups of items on shelves or in drawers.
3. Label everything!
4. Reduce what you bring into the house. The less you have, the less you have to store.
5. Dedicate time every day to getting and staying organized. Even five minutes tossing unwanted items away every day will make a huge impact in the long run.



A neat pantry can simplify meal prep and reduce stress.



Group like items into well-marked containers.



Every room can benefit from thoughtful organization. Finding and maintaining tools in a utility area can become much easier.



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!

#### DEVICE OF THE MONTH



### Jabra Elite 75t earbuds

Whether you're working out or working from home, a set of great-sounding Bluetooth earbuds can liven things up. Consider the wireless Jabra Elite 75t earbuds for great performance at a reasonable price. Price: \$180.



# Stay secure

A VPN offers a layer of protection when you're on the go

**P**rivacy and security on the internet are vital as more and more of our daily lives revolve around digital communication and most of our financial interactions shift online. A virtual private network, or VPN, can add an additional layer of protection, especially if you find yourself accessing your data outside your home.

#### WHAT IS A VPN?

At its most basic level, a VPN links your device to a remote computer called a server and allows you to use the internet through that server's internet access. Anyone looking at your internet traffic would only see a secure, encrypted connection to that remote host. A VPN can also keep websites and internet services from tracking your browsing habits, monitoring your search history and knowing your geographic location.

You may not even realize you're already using a VPN. If you're working from home and have access to your company's network, odds are that it's through a VPN.

#### WHY WOULD I WANT ONE?

If you're at home, VPN use for security is limited, since it is highly unlikely a hacker has targeted your home network. But you may still be interested in being anonymous to companies collecting your data for advertising and commercial purposes.

Once you leave your home and start using other Wi-Fi networks, a VPN becomes more important. It doesn't matter how good your passwords are. They won't do you much good

if they're intercepted by a hacker while you're accessing your bank account at a local coffee shop or even a hotel. People with bad intent can set up access points with similar names to legitimate connections, tricking users into unwittingly giving up their information.

#### IS THERE A DOWNSIDE?

Connecting to a VPN may slow your connection to the internet. Most VPN providers will show you a list of server locations along with the expected delay, allowing you to choose the fastest link. If you're using a VPN at home, it may also interfere with connections between your VPN-protected computer or smartphone and some of your smart devices.

#### WHAT'S A GOOD FREE OPTION?

They may not come with all the features that a paid VPN includes, but if you're only using it sporadically, then a free option makes sense. TunnelBear ([tunnelbear.com](https://tunnelbear.com)) has a data limit of 500MB per month, but it is user-friendly, available on desktop and mobile versions, and is backed by McAfee, the security software giant.

#### WHAT'S A GOOD PAID OPTION?

NordVPN — [nordvpn.com](https://nordvpn.com) — is the biggest name in the VPN business for a reason. It provides top-grade security, speedy connections and ease of use across a variety of devices. It can get expensive at \$11.95 a month, but the price drops if you choose annual plans. Most pay services periodically offer discounts, so it may be worth checking out a free option and waiting for a deal. ☑



# Food cooperative adds local flavor

## Pomme de Terre Foods has served Morris for nearly 50 years

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photography by MATT LEDGER

**P**omme de terre translates from French to “potato,” but in Morris, it means much more.

Pomme de Terre Foods has been a part of Morris for nearly 50 years. Students and faculty at the University of Minnesota Morris founded it as a nonprofit food cooperative, perhaps in an effort to keep students from attempting to survive on ramen noodles alone.

The store still serves cooperative members, who pay a small annual fee to join. Currently there are about 50 members, and membership entitles them to a 10% discount. Pomme de Terre Foods is also open to the general public. The store, which offered curbside pickup during the COVID-19 pandemic, averages about 150 shoppers each week.

“This is a lot about access to locally produced food,” says Maeve Maron, who co-manages Pomme de Terre Foods along with Katherine Duram. “We have partnerships with a lot of local producers that you usually wouldn’t find in a larger grocery store.”

The locally produced food available at the Oregon Avenue location in Morris represents part of an evolution of the store. When the cooperative began operation in 1971 as the Prairie Dog Store, it primarily sold cheap foods available in bulk.

While those large-quantity purchases are still available, Pomme de Terre offers items from about 20 farms around the state, more than a dozen of them in western Minnesota. Items are also available from more than a half-dozen farms from neighboring Iowa and Wisconsin.

### HEALTHY GROWTH

What began as a cheap alternative for college students at UMM Morris is now often a healthy and sometimes organic option for anyone who wants to support local producers. “We sell a lot of meat and eggs that are grown locally, and I think that’s important to us as managers,” Duram says. “That kind of represents the growth that the store has gone through in terms of the demand from our customers. That’s what they’ve asked for and supported.”

Those wishing to support area farmers or buy organic products can find locally grown and sourced meat, produce and eggs, along with local honey, syrup and even popcorn from Big Stone Farms in Graceville. Customers can also place special orders through the store, which orders weekly from its suppliers.



Bulk foods at Pomme de Terre include a wide assortment of coffees and teas, spices, and grains. “We have so many different grains,” Maron says. “I think there are many more than you’d find in a bigger grocery store.”

The coffee brands at Pomme de Terre Foods include Peace Coffee and Sovereign Grounds, both from roasters in Minneapolis, and Twin Cities Blend. The coffees are available alongside more than 20 different brands of teas. ☞

### About Pomme de Terre Foods

511 Oregon Ave., Morris, Minnesota  
320-589-4332

#### Hours:

Tuesday-Friday: 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Sunday-Monday: Closed

Online: [pdtfoods.com](http://pdtfoods.com)





# Far from home

Broadband connects families across the globe



Story by KALEIGH COX

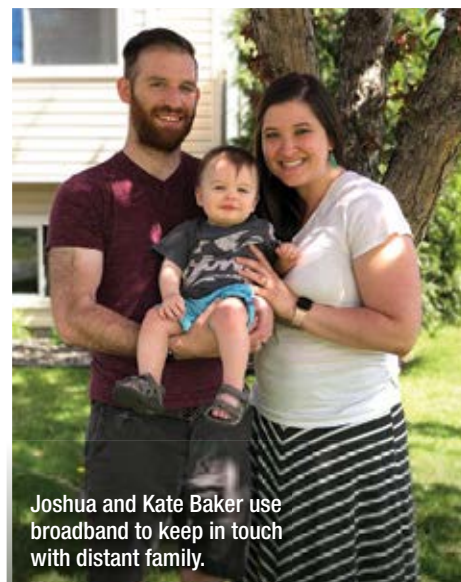
For Joshua and Kate Baker of Minnesota, welcoming their first child in 2019 was a time of joyful celebration and anticipation. Joshua Baker's parents, however, weren't close enough to celebrate in person, as they still live in his hometown over 1,000 miles away in New York.

Fortunately, the Bakers had broadband internet, so when they found out they would be parents, they turned to FaceTime to share their news. "With FaceTime, you get to see their emotion," Kate Baker says. "They were very excited!"

The Bakers are not alone. With the arrival of fast, reliable broadband, people aren't just connecting to the internet. They're connecting to one another. When families find themselves spread across the globe, the ability to connect instantly is a particularly special gift.

When their son, Micah, was born, the Bakers continued to use online apps and tools to keep his grandparents involved in his life. Planning a trip to meet in person would take significant time, money and coordinated effort. But the internet makes it easy to spontaneously pop on and connect anytime, just as two families living in the same town might do.

The Bakers also invited his parents to join Cluster, a social media app that enables users to share photos, videos and other updates with a small, private group of family and friends.



Joshua and Kate Baker use broadband to keep in touch with distant family.

Joshua Baker's mom, Faith Baker, was delighted. "We love to be as connected as we can," she says. "I can struggle with the separation and feel that we miss so much. I appreciate how they've found ways to overcome that."



Even 10-month-old Micah seems to appreciate the technology. “He recognizes his grandparents and understands who they are,” Kate Baker says.

She says being a new mom is busy, but staying connected online is worth the time and effort. “We’ll send pictures and keep communicating that way. It makes his grandparents feel included,” she says.

## STAYING CONNECTED

For Jess and Sarah Curry in Texas, broadband wasn’t available in their early days of starting a family. As a military family navigating deployments, it was hard to stay connected. Jess Curry has left on deployment nine times over the past 20 years, and during those times, he would have to wait in line for an opportunity to check his email every few days. Even when videoconferencing technology became available, the inability to use it at home complicated things.

“We’d get all dressed up and drive to post to do a scheduled 15-minute video call,” Sarah Curry says. “There was so much pressure, and it seemed the kids would inevitably be melting down during the call. I would drive away feeling like I was supposed to be grateful, but I was miserable knowing my kids had cried through the call — and that seeing their dad for just a few minutes would only make them cry more.”

Thanks to advances in technology and a stronger internet connection, the most recent deployment was nothing like those early years. “He has Wi-Fi in his room and office, so we can talk on FaceTime every few days,” Sarah Curry says. “In between calls, the kids love using Marco Polo to record and send video messages

for their dad to watch and reply to when he can. Before, it was hard for the kids to be put on the spot and think of all the things they needed to say to him. Now, they can send what they want to say when they think about it. Especially for my teenagers — that’s been really helpful.”

With the steady communication, each kid’s relationship with their dad feels more natural and ongoing, even during deployment. He’s more present for the little moments, like when their 15-year-old daughter’s dance class tried to teach a parent to dance.

“We called up Dad and used the screen on the computer,” says Sarah Curry. “She taught him this dance, and they did it together on a split screen. He was in his uniform doing plies and other ballet moves. He’s going to do what it takes to connect with his daughter, even if it means he has to pirouette in his room.”

## OPEN COMMUNICATION

In many families, the internet allows children to connect with people they may never have met otherwise. When Linda Martin of North Carolina adopted her son Max in 2008, people around her discouraged her from pursuing an open adoption.

“We wanted him to be able to ask questions and learn about his family history, but we had a lot of pushback,” Martin says. “People said that birth parents move on and lose interest.”

Thankfully, that hasn’t happened, she

says, and connecting online has helped. When Max was an infant, Martin shared photos and updates over email. As he grew, he began to pursue his own relationship with his birth mom, starting with phone calls with Martin present. Now, at 11 years old, Max likes using online apps to stay connected.

“We text a lot, and we use Instagram’s video call feature to talk face to face. I tell her everything, and I like to hear what’s going on in her life, too,” Max says. He shares pictures of his cat, gives updates when he loses a tooth and even made an excited video call when he landed the role of the Nutcracker in his ballet company’s production. He also gets to learn about his birth mom’s life. “She told me she went to Coachella the day after she found out she was pregnant with me,” he says. “So, technically, I can say I’ve been to Coachella.”

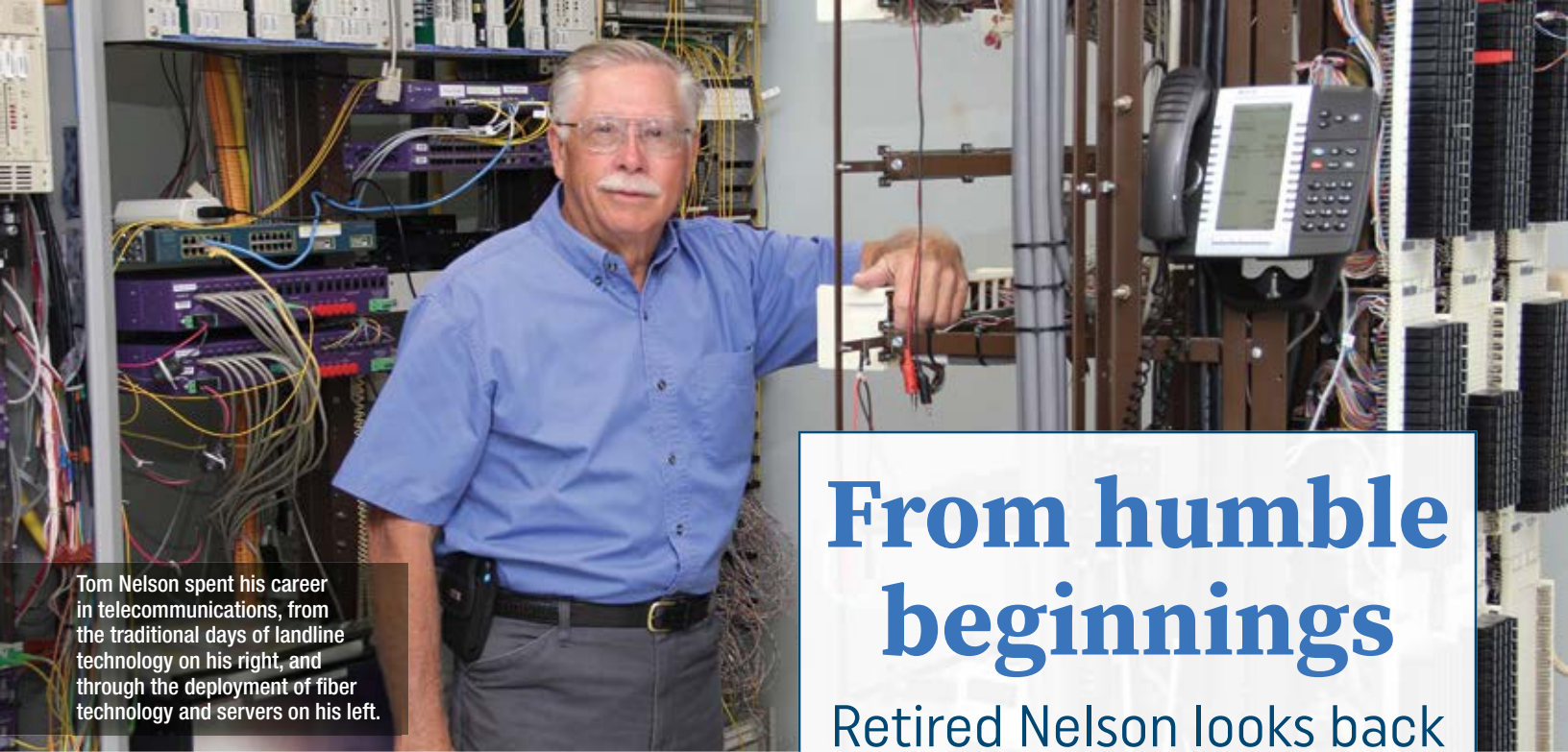
While Martin acknowledges that an open adoption isn’t right for everyone, she’s thankful for the ways her son has been able to know his birth mom. They met in person for his birthday last year, and the foundation of connecting online helped Max overcome any hesitations and enjoy the meeting. “It was really fun!” he says.

They hope to meet again when he turns 13, but in the meantime, he’s thankful for opportunities to share his life with her online. “We talk a lot now, and I get to tell her everything,” Max says. ☺

When Jess Curry was on deployment with the U.S. Army, broadband helped his family stay in touch.



After adopting Max, left, Linda Martin of North Carolina used broadband to help him stay in touch with his birth mother.



Tom Nelson spent his career in telecommunications, from the traditional days of landline technology on his right, and through the deployment of fiber technology and servers on his left.

# From humble beginnings

## Retired Nelson looks back at cooperative's history

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photography by MATT LEDGER

**T**om Nelson was one of four Farmers Mutual Telephone Company employees when he went to work for the company in 1979, and over the years he watched the scope and reach of communications in rural Minnesota evolve and grow.

From party lines to high-speed internet connections, and a partnership between Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone Cooperative, the cooperative always looked ahead. Because October is National Cooperative Month, Nelson took the opportunity to look back at Farmers Mutual and his years there.

"They were leaders in the area as far as cooperatives and telephone companies go," Nelson says of the early days. "They serviced two exchanges, which was unheard of at the time. They replaced all of their overhead telephone service and party lines with buried cable and single-party service. That was a leader at that time. They've continued to do that."

### TEAMWORK

Early on in his career, Nelson says no one at Farmers really had defined responsibilities. With only four employees, everyone chipped in and did whatever had to be done. By the time he retired in 2011, Farmers had just recently began working with Federated and grew to 24 employees (under the Acira employee group), and Nelson still didn't have a defined title.

But he worked on the front lines, making sure customers had the services they needed in the fast-changing world of telecommunications. Nelson says the decisions and forward thinking of the cooperative ensured that its rural and small-town service areas did not get left behind.

Among those decisions was the installation of fiber-optic cable and switches in the late 1980s. "When I started, we were single-party service, which was very good. But, it was limited on what you could do with the technology," Nelson says. "In 1987, we installed the first fiber cable for our exchanges."

The fiber cable and switches remained in place until an update in 2010 that allowed development of high-speed internet. The cooperative had correctly predicted its members would move more and more toward cellular phones and internet devices as primary needs. "We were told years back that voice traffic would not be very important going forward," Nelson recalls. "It was hard to believe that, until cellphone coverage became saturated in the area. Then, you could see that voice traffic had disappeared."

While larger companies ignored rural areas for the most part, Nelson says cooperatives like Farmers and Federated banded together to improve their services. "They had a very small spot on Earth out there in a rural area. But if they worked together on all those projects, they could expand and offer services that others couldn't and offer better service. They had large rings of fiber cables so all of our traffic was protected. If you had an outage of any kind, whether it was a cut cable or what have you, it would reroute traffic and keep everybody connected. Doing that took a lot of cooperation among those companies." ☎

**"They had a very small spot on Earth out there in a rural area. But if they worked together on all those projects, they could expand and offer services that others couldn't and offer better service."**

- Farmers Mutual Telephone retiree Tom Nelson on cooperatives working together to provide service to rural communities





# 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 to facilitate telephone calls between people with hearing and speech disabilities and other individuals. Calls can be made to anywhere in the world, 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 communications assistant 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 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 smartphone. Go to: [www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/internet-protocol-ip-captioned-telephone-service](http://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/internet-protocol-ip-captioned-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; and 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 phone calls. Using a special text telephone, you type your conversation for the relay communications assistant 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 smartphone. 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 communications assistant 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, 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 relay communications assistant via an Internet-enabled device with a video camera. The communications assistant 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 communications assistant 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 911 centers are equipped to handle TTY calls. Minnesota Relay can process emergency calls, but this may delay the response to your call.

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 calling from and to phone numbers, 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. [mn.gov/deaf-hard-of-hearing](http://mn.gov/deaf-hard-of-hearing) Voice: 1-800-657-3663 ASL via VP: 651-964-1514

# STEAK 101

## Restaurant quality at home

**Y**ou take the family out to a fancy restaurant and order the steak, and there goes your budget for the week. It's an amazing steak that sends your taste buds on a trip through culinary heaven — an experience you're not likely to forget. So you go home and try to reproduce it, and it's a costly disaster. It's still less expensive than a night out at your favorite steakhouse, but the flavor is much less memorable.

What went wrong? How do restaurants get their steaks so tender, so flavorful, so perfect?

Phil Barbatsis, owner of Phil's Tara Hideaway in Stillwater, Minnesota, has a simple answer. "It's the heat," he says. "Most homes don't have stoves or griddles that can get as high as those in restaurants."

Barbatsis took over Tara Hideaway in the 1990s, reopening a restaurant residents of Stillwater have loved since it first arrived on the outskirts of town in 1929 as a chicken joint. It burned two years later but was rebuilt and opened as a speakeasy. It's also been a beer-and-burger eatery. But when Barbatsis opened his take on Tara Hideaway and attached his name to it, Phil's Tara Hideaway became a restaurant for fine dining in spite of decor that would seem more fitting in a camp setting — a log-cabin frame with a green metal roof, wooden tables and chairs in two dining areas, and a weathered wood deck on the outside for dining al fresco.

It opens at 4 p.m., and within minutes the gravel parking lot outside starts filling.

Barbatsis' parents arrived in America from Greece and brought their culinary heritage with them, instilling in their son an appreciation for Old World foods and cooking styles. He brought these qualities



High heat is the secret to a great steak, says Phil Barbatsis, owner of Phil's Tara Hideaway in Stillwater, Minnesota.

to the table when he opened Tara, but he also added to his menu a selection of steaks ranging from filets to sirloins, ribeyes and New York strips.

We sat down with Barbatsis to find out what it is about restaurant steaks and why it's not always possible to replicate the flavor at home.

## Q&A

**Q: You mention heat as the primary factor in getting a good steak.**

**A:** It all has to do with the temperature of the griddle at the start. Here, we heat it up to 600 F. Not every home stove can do that. But it also takes experience. The people here are good at what they do.

**Q: What's your favorite cut?**

**A:** New York strips — they just taste good and don't have a lot of fat on them. If people want fat, they should order a rib-eye.

**Q: What about seasoning? Don't restaurants season their steaks more liberally with salt than you might think necessary?**

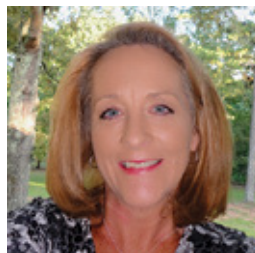
**A:** We do season our steaks, but not with too much salt because we use lemon pepper and garlic powder. We don't need to use salt because lemon pepper has so much sodium in it already.

**Q: Restaurants usually cook their steaks on a griddle. Many homes don't have them. What kind of cookware is best for steaks?**

**A:** Cast iron is a good substitute. You can get cast iron really hot and then sear the steak on both sides.

**Q: What kind of fat would you use for steaks that have little fat, like your New York strips?**

**A:** Butter. Just put some butter in the pan with your steak. It's a wonderful thing.



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



# MAKING THE GRADE

Cooking a really good steak at home is possible if you know what to do. Here are some tips from the National Beef Council.

The best steakhouses use USDA Prime, which accounts for just 2% of overall beef production in America. Demand from restaurants for this grade makes pickings slim for consumers, so look for Choice beef for your steaks.

Aging beef is a time-consuming task that can take weeks to perform at the best restaurants. The average cooks cannot do this, and there's a high risk for food spoilage if it's done improperly. Ask your butcher for a source for aged beef. Or, if you're friendly with a steakhouse chef, ask if he or she would order extra for you. But be prepared to pay a high price.

Most big steakhouses broil their steaks using infrared broilers that produce incredibly high temperatures. While you can buy similar equipment, it isn't necessary for a great steak. What you do need is very high heat in direct contact with the meat. This is why you need a good quality pan such as cast iron with its intense heating properties.

The basic process is to preheat the pan as hot as you can get it. Drop in the steak for 2 minutes. Flip, add butter and put the pan into a hot, preheated oven for about 5 more minutes, depending on how you want your steak done. This is a smoke-filled process that can be done on a really hot grill outdoors to keep smoke out of the house. ☑



## 'STEAKHOUSE' STEAKS

*This recipe is adapted from one by Food Network's Ina Garten.*

- 2 (8-ounce) filet mignons
- 2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided

Set the steaks out on the counter at least 30 minutes before you plan on cooking them to take the chill off. Preheat the oven to 400 F.

Pat the steaks dry, and then brush each steak with the oil. Mix the salt and pepper on a plate. Roll each steak in the salt-and-pepper mixture, liberally coating all sides.

Heat a well-seasoned cast-iron skillet

over high heat — as high as your stove will go. Open your window and turn on your fan, because this is a smoky process. Once the skillet is very hot, add the steaks to the pan. Sear them evenly on all sides, getting a nice brown crust all over. It should take about 2 minutes per side to get a good sear.

Remove the pan from the heat, place a pat of butter on top of each steak, and then transfer the skillet to the oven. Cook the steaks until the internal temperature reaches your preferred doneness — 120 F for rare, 125 F for medium-rare and 135 F for medium.

Remove the steaks from the skillet and cover them tightly with aluminum foil. Allow them to rest at room temperature for 10 minutes before serving.

*a special*  
**THANKS**  
*to our*  
*teachers*



**We recognize the extraordinary dedication of our educators.**

- ✓ Your efforts encourage our community.
- ✓ Your commitment and cooperation serves as a beacon of hope.
- ✓ Your hard work brings the promise of a bright future.

*Thank you!*