

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

CONNECTION

SHARING EXPERIENCES

The adventures of the
Tosel family

ARTISAN TRAIL

Exploring creativity on the
Meander Art Crawl

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

Online connections
inspire photographers



NTCA

THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION®

RURAL CONNECTIONS

By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Building a connected future

As the nation's leaders work to improve the infrastructure that supports our economy and our communities, there is a growing understanding of just how vital broadband service is to rural areas.

It's important rural providers have the resources and regulatory stability they need to connect areas that often have no other options for service. The challenges those providers face go beyond simply building an internet network that must keep pace as the demands of users grow from decade to decade.

Recently, representatives of several cooperatives — among them, Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative, South Dakota; the Yelcot Telephone Company, Mountain Home, Arkansas; and Totelcom Communications, De Leon, Texas — made sure members of Congress heard this message.

Similarly, months of coping with a global pandemic proved the success of rural broadband. Countless households, businesses, schools and others leaned on their local internet providers during these challenging times. However, there is still work to do in deploying networks and delivering robust and affordable services.

This is where public policy can continue to play an important role, setting standards for broadband infrastructure and leveraging the know-how of community-based experts, like the company providing your internet service today.

I've been delighted at the bipartisan nature of these discussions and the understanding that broadband kept the American economy humming during the pandemic. Now, we just need to ensure the lasting investment needed to future-proof this powerful system. 📶

'SIX PILLARS' OF RURAL BROADBAND

Fast internet builds successful communities

Rural broadband's influence extends throughout every community where fast internet networks are available. How many of these "six pillars" of rural broadband play a role in your daily life?



1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Housing values increase and businesses move more product when rural communities have broadband.



2. PUBLIC HEALTH

Instead of driving 50 miles to a health center, a telemedicine visit can bring care into the home.



3. TELEWORKING

Remote work creates fresh opportunities.

4. EDUCATION

Educators from grade school to colleges and universities are reaching students remotely.



5. PUBLIC SAFETY

Broadband networks can improve the communications systems used by emergency responders.

6. QUALITY OF LIFE

Thanks to broadband, young people find rural communities more appealing.



These pillars of rural broadband are based on the work of Christopher Ali, an associate professor in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Virginia. He is also the author of "Farm Fresh Broadband: The Politics of Rural Connectivity." 📖



Better-looking videos are just a few steps away

Thanks to smartphones, recording and sharing videos has never been easier. Whether you're capturing precious moments to share with friends and family, showcasing your talents or documenting a moment the rest of the world needs to see, a high-quality video helps get your message across loud and clear.

Here are some tips to help make sure your next video is your best one yet.

- **Clean the lens** — Sometimes it's easy to overlook the obvious. We're touching our phones constantly. We're taking them out of our pockets and purses multiple times a day, so they're bound to pick up a few fingerprints and smudges along the way. Take a second and give the lens a couple of swipes with a moistened cleaning wipe. No wipes? No worries — a quick breath and a swab with your shirttail can get the job done, too.
- **Orientation** — Make sure to turn your phone horizontally when shooting videos. Shooting horizontally, also called landscape orientation, results in a more aesthetically pleasing experience for viewers, and it looks great across multiple platforms, especially on wide screens. Shooting this way also allows you to capture more of the surroundings in the video.
- **Stabilization** — Nothing is harder to watch than a shaky video. A simple way to make your video better is by using two hands to hold the phone steady. Instead of extending your arms, tuck your elbows in close to your sides and hold the phone closer to your chest. If a professional-quality video is what you're after, consider investing in a tripod or a gimbal to give your arms a rest. Also, many newer phones now include image stabilization features that can correct for inadvertent movements during shooting.
- **Composition** — Take a moment to compose your shot before pressing the record button. For example, if you are making a video in a controlled environment, perhaps filming a tutorial in your home, look around and make sure the background is clear of anything you wouldn't want people to see.
- **Lighting** — When recording indoors have the subject face a window if possible. If there is no natural light, consider purchasing an LED light ring. Light rings have become very popular and are an inexpensive way to make your video look professional. Avoid backlit settings, which can erase a person's features on video and replace them with a dark figure instead.
- **Zoom cautiously** — While the digital zoom option is a nice feature to have, using it while recording can result in an awkward-looking video. Instead, to keep the image crisp, take the time to frame the shot before recording and avoid using the zoom. Unless you're planning to use the zoom distortion as an effect, get as close to the subject as you safely can to preserve the image quality.



Competing for jobs

Fast internet service puts us in the game

Our world is a competitive place, and not just when it comes to sports. The leaders of every town and county understand they're in a fight for one of the most desired assets anywhere — jobs. The opposition isn't just the next county over, either. Every community in the nation is in the game.



KEVIN BEYER
Chief Executive Officer

Success means bringing any possible advantages onto the playing field, and fast internet service is more than critical. It's essential because it's important to businesses of all types and sizes.

Small manufacturers benefit from speedy internet service because resources from accounting to customer support often flow through the internet. Similarly, video calls are now just a normal part of business life. For communities hoping to recruit these types of employers, fast internet access is mandatory.

Then, think about all the changes we've seen in remote work, which was on the rise even before the pandemic. Remote work is more common than ever, and if you can work from home, our community is highly attractive. After all, the big-city pace isn't for everyone.

So, why not bring those jobs to rural America? That's certainly the plan the West Virginia Tourism Office had last spring when it promised to pay remote workers \$12,000 to relocate to that state. This shows the level of competition we face and how far some organizations will go. I'm not suggesting we should pay people to relocate here, though, because I believe our communities are enough of a draw.

We live in a friendly, affordable and beautiful place. And we have the fast, reliable internet network required to make remote work more than just a possibility. The speed and affordability of our internet service is comparable to — and often greatly exceeds — service in major cities. In many ways, we're a better place for remote work than metropolitan areas.

But it's about more than just jobs. We're also building for the future. Our students can learn the skills they need to be competitive, not only for today, but also for tomorrow. A growing number of colleges and universities offer online courses. Students about to enter the workforce can broaden their horizons without ever leaving home.

But students aren't alone in benefiting from classes accessed via the internet. People looking to grow professionally now have similar resources available that allow them to continue their education and open new doors to either advancement or entirely fresh careers. Many of those classes and other resources are best experienced through live video, which needs a high-speed internet connection.

While our friends in economic development always keep a watchful eye out for opportunities to attract the attention of large employers, one of the things that excites me most is the entrepreneurs: industrious people putting in the hard work needed to kick-start a business.

Our affordable living costs can give young businesses an edge, allowing them to keep overhead lower than their competitors. They can move large amounts of data, share information, hold online meetings and more. Thanks to fast internet access, even home-based startups can link to a worldwide market that was once only accessible to businesses with large staffs in big-city offices.

Throughout the nation, there are signs of vitality in rural economies. For all the reasons I've described, fast internet service is part of the foundation making it all possible. We're in the game, and I firmly believe we're ready to compete. 📶

CONNECTION

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

VOL. 5, NO. 5

Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, © 2021. 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

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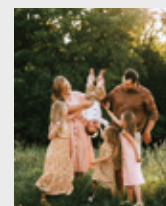
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WORDSOUTH

A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY

On the Cover:



Tronn and Alyssa Tosel share family farm experiences with their children on their Instagram channel. See story Page 9.

October is Cyber Security Month

Top five tips to be cyber aware

1. Keep all software up to date.
2. Use strong passwords, or password management tools.
3. Be careful what you click.
4. Use anti-virus protection.
5. Regularly review activity from online accounts.



Statement of Nondiscrimination

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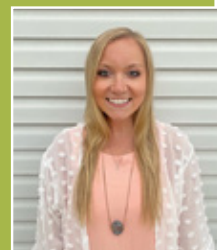
Have a Happy Labor Day

The Farmers and Federated offices will be closed
on Monday, Sept. 6, for Labor Day.

HELP US WELCOME THESE NEW EMPLOYEES

MaKayla Wildung,

who lives in Nassau, Minnesota, recently graduated from Lake Area Technical College. She likes to spend time with family and friends, and she is so excited to join Acira.



Bo Jordan, born in Willmar, Minnesota, grew up in San Marcos, Texas. He recently moved up to Chokio, Minnesota. He did aerial construction

and fiber splicing in Texas before coming to his new home with his fiancé, Miranda. He is thrilled to be a part of the Acira team and to get out into the community.

Soaring above

An incredible recovery of historic proportions

Story by ANNE BRALY

On a clear fall morning, a bald eagle swoops down from its perch overlooking the Mississippi River. With grace and speed, it flies low over the water, snatches a fish in its clawed feet and races away.

This is a common sight along the river nowadays, but it wasn't always. Forty years ago, the bald eagle was nearly extinct. But the species has made an amazing comeback, thanks in part to work being done to educate the public at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota.

Older Americans may remember a time when sighting an eagle was a rare occurrence. The majestic birds were once considered pests, and bounties were placed on their beautiful white heads. By the 1980s, there were just a

few hundred mating pairs in the lower 48 states, says Ed Hahn, marketing manager at the National Eagle Center.

"Wabasha proved to be a special place for bald eagle viewing during the winter when eagles were searching for open water and would gather in the Wabasha area," Hahn says.

Knowing this, local eagle enthusiasts would bring their families and friends to Wabasha on winter weekends to see the birds. This dedicated group eventually organized into EagleWatch. They worked to bring the Eagle Center to life and educate the public about the need to protect our national symbol.

Today, bald eagles are no longer endangered but remain legally protected. Harassment and killing of any eagle — bald or golden — is illegal. As a result, eagle viewing in Wabasha remains strong, Hahn says.

The Eagle Center opened in

a small storefront along Wabasha's Main Street in 1999 and was bestowed with its "National" title by Congress in 2004. The center moved into its current location on the banks of the Mississippi River in 2007. It's a large facility with floor-to-ceiling windows and an observation deck with spotting scopes where people can possibly see bald eagles engaging with their watery environment or nesting in trees.

EAGLE AMBASSADORS

Visitors can have a bald eagle experience inside, too. While the center is not a rehabilitation facility, it is home to several bald eagles no longer able to safely live in the wild. These birds are known as "eagle ambassadors."

There are other nature centers, aviaries and zoos around the country that are home to bald eagles and educate the public about eagles, but the National Eagle Center goes a step further through its eagle ambassador program, presenting the eagles in an open-air space inside the center with no physical separation — plate glass, fencing or mesh — between visitors and the eagles while a handler talks about the birds.

"It provides for memorable, up-close experiences and a wonderful photo opportunity," Hahn says. "All of our eagle ambassadors are permanently injured in some way and cannot be released. The National Eagle Center staff will be their permanent caretakers and work with them to educate the public."





Handler Jarod Lueck brings an eagle to a demonstration for visitors.

Photo courtesy of Linda Hoss.

To do this, the center has dedicated classroom space, two floors of exhibits and an outdoor observation platform, as well as an area with interactive exhibits and programs. The center is also the home of the Preston Cook Collection, which explores the eagle's place in American history and culture.

KEYS TO SURVIVAL

Two of the most common hazards to bald eagles come from man: vehicle collisions and death by lead in the environment, Hahn explains.

"Bald eagles are apex predators at the top of the food chain, so that means that human actions and activity are the only threats they face," he says.

The University of Minnesota Raptor Center — the veterinarian center for the eagle ambassadors — treats many injured wild eagles every year, most of which were accidentally poisoned with lead or hit by a vehicle. Eagles ingest lead through hunting and fishing. When fishing, if a person is using lead sinkers and the line snaps, those sinkers will most likely end up in a fish. If that fish is ultimately caught and eaten by an eagle, the bird will be poisoned.

A similar story plays out during deer hunting season. Hunters using lead bullets will field dress the deer they shoot and leave the gut piles behind, many times with the best of intentions for coyotes,

wolves and birds of prey, such as eagles. But lead is a very soft metal and breaks apart when it hits bone. The tiny lead pieces contaminate the carcass, and when the eagle eats the remains, it doesn't pick out the fragments as it quickly devours its meal. Eagles' stomach acid is so strong that they can absorb the lead directly into their bloodstream.

"A piece of lead the size of Abe Lincoln's nose on a penny is enough to fatally poison an eagle in about four to five days," Hahn says.

So what can anglers and hunters do to help protect eagles? Two things: switch to lead-free hunting and fishing supplies, and slow down and move over when possible when you see an eagle eating roadkill along the highway to prevent a collision.

The National Eagle Center is a private, nonprofit organization sustained primarily by members, private donors and visitors. It receives no government funding for day-to-day operations and is not a part of the national or state park systems.

"Our members, donors and visitors are a critical part of our team and help make our educational mission possible," Hahn says. 🗨️



NATIONAL EAGLE CENTER

50 Pembroke Ave. S., Wabasha, Minnesota
651-565-4989 or nationaleaglecenter.org



Picture this

Ed Hahn, marketing manager for the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota, has been around bald eagles long enough to know a thing or two about the best way to get a photo of America's national bird. Here are several tips:

Do your research and ask around. This is good advice for any hobby you get involved in, especially before you buy equipment. There are plenty of eagle watching clubs, wildlife clubs and photograph groups online and on social media to help.

Be prepared to spend money. Eagles are usually seen at a distance, so longer 600- to 800-millimeter lenses are a consideration for the most serious photographers.

Invest in a quality tripod. A steady shot is essential for a crisp, high-resolution photo.

Be patient and persistent. Bald eagles are wild animals and certainly do not take our interests into consideration during the course of their day.



Students learn about an eagle's sensory awareness.

Photo courtesy of National Eagle Center.



HI! I'M JADE GEHRKE!

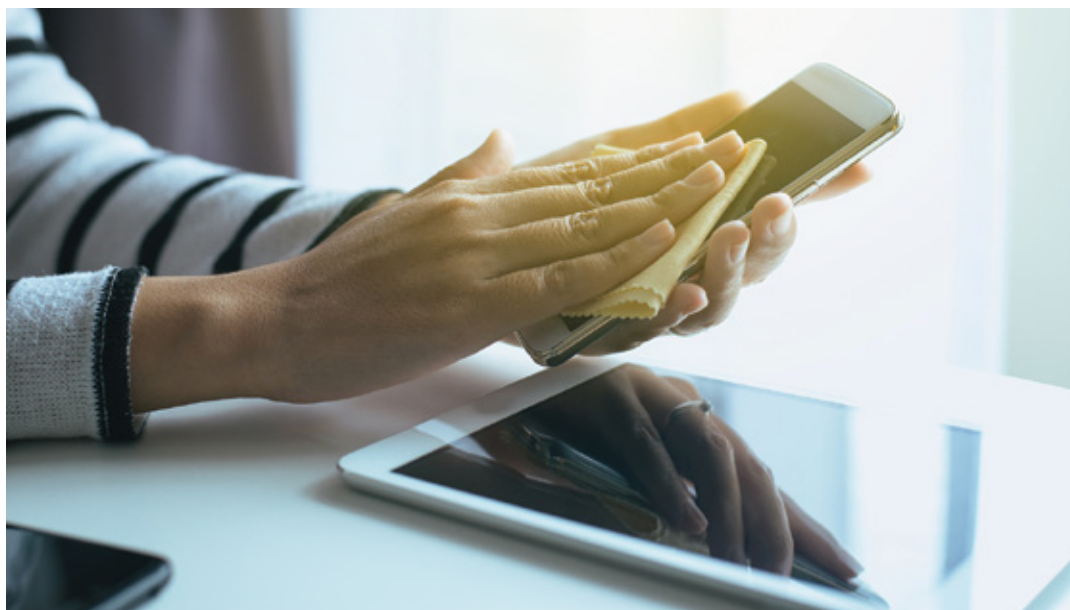
In this column, you'll learn about technology and read simple tips to get the most out of your electronics. For more tips or help with your devices, be sure to read this column in future publications. I'm always happy to help!

DEVICE OF THE MONTH



Surge protector safeguards your devices

Inspiration can strike like lightning. Be sure your desktop and other devices are ready for your creativity and protected from storms and electrical surges. The APC SurgeArrest Essential PE6U21 features a cleverly designed mounting bracket that makes it ideal for desktops or remote workers on the go. It features six outlets, three USB ports and a \$50,000 lifetime equipment guarantee from Schneider Electric. Available with prices starting at about \$32.



Clean up your devices!

Grubby, dusty, dirty, nasty. Even the most conscientious users will sometimes find themselves looking at a high-tech device and realize there's been some neglect. But what's the right way to clean your expensive electronics? Let's take a look at some dos and don'ts.

TELEVISION

The advice on how to clean your TV applies to most screens, including the one on your laptop or your desktop monitor. Unless you're still using an older, glass-tube TV, you want to keep harsh chemicals like Windex away from your screen. Whether you have a plasma, LCD or OLED TV, the advice is the same: Use a soft, dry cloth to avoid scratches. Think of the same kind of microfiber cloth you can use to clean eyeglasses or camera lenses.

You want to clean in a circular motion and not press too hard. If a dry cloth is not enough to tackle fingerprints or other smudges, you can dampen the cloth with a little water. If that's still not enough, a solution made up of a mild dish soap and water — mostly water — should do the trick.

Remember, always apply the water or any other liquid to the cloth, never to the screen.

SMARTPHONE

Befitting a device that will undoubtedly get dropped repeatedly during its lifetime, your phone's screen is a little tougher — and can get a lot dirtier — than other gadgets. Your best bet is still a damp microfiber cloth, but you can safely use a disinfectant wipe to easily eliminate

most germs. Other than wipes, you should keep your phone's screen away from harsh cleaners. Even vinegar could strip the screen's coating.

You can use tape to pull out any dust or other debris stuck inside your phone's crevices. Manufacturers like Apple recommend avoiding the use of compressed air on your device, as it may damage the microphone.

COMPUTER

Whether it's your laptop or your desktop, the best way to clean a computer keyboard is to use gravity and compressed air. First, flip over your keyboard and gently tap it to release any dust or debris. You can then use compressed air to blow out anything that might remain.

Compressed air can also be used to deep clean your desktop computer, which, especially if you keep it on the floor, can be a magnet for gunk. You should at least clean out the fan on your power supply and case fans by holding the blades still with a pen or pencil while you apply compressed air. 🗑️

► **One last bit of advice:** Don't forget to turn off and unplug any device you are going to clean.

Down on the farm

Instagram page provides mom with popular social media outlet

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

There was always something going on at the Tosel family farm near Holloway — things Alyssa Tosel thought would be worth sharing online.

Over the past year, her Instagram account, [andonthatfarmtheyhadafamily](#), has chronicled slices of life from the Tosel household — Alyssa, her husband, Tronn, and their four “stair-step” children, three girls and a boy, ranging in age from 2 to 8.

“I always had friends who would kind of giggle at just the craziness that I have at my house with these little kids and the things they get into,” Alyssa Tosel says. “I feel like the best way I’ve survived motherhood is just laughing about a lot of those things and not taking it too seriously.”

Some of those friends urged Tosel to



Alyssa Tosel gives an online review of a new beverage.



Alyssa and Tronn Tosel share family farm experiences with their children, from left: Emersyn, 4; Kadence, 8; Hilary, 6; and Briar, 2.

Photos courtesy of Krista Jo.

start a web presence, primarily using the photocentric Instagram platform to tell her family’s sometimes funny stories and provide suggestions and life hacks for other moms. About a year later, the [andonthatfarmtheyhadafamily](#) Instagram page has nearly 3,000 followers. The idea seemed even better as the COVID-19 pandemic dominated life in 2020.

“We were home all the time — even more than usual,” Alyssa says. “It was kind of an outlet for me to interact with other moms and not feel so alone. It sounds a little cliché, but I’ve met a lot of moms through social media who have reached out to me and said, ‘Hey, I love that idea. Thanks for sharing.’ Or they ask me questions. I feel like I’m a little bit of a veteran mother, but I’ve learned from other moms, too. It’s just a fun space.”

The Instagram page started out simple enough, but because of its growth Tosel has been able to partner with industries to review and promote their products to her targeted audience — other moms.

Tosel says none of it would be possible without the high-speed internet and accompanying technology that made it out to the family farm outside of Holloway.

“Having reliable, high speed internet on our farm here in rural Minnesota is a luxury that we do not take for granted. Being able to run our seed business and my page right from home is effective because of the great service Federated provides us!” Alyssa says.

“Farming has changed so much, and we have to be able to have internet service that is always working well,” she says. “We have never had an issue. All of our TVs are run off of Wi-Fi, and we’ve been really fortunate to have good connections on my phone for my page. It’s kind of crazy to think that in your back pocket, you always have the internet.”

Catch the latest on the Tosel family adventures here: [instagram.com/andonthatfarmtheyhadafamily](#).

NEW PERSPECTIVES

Jason Stitt sees rural Texas through a different lens

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Jason Stitt has always seen the world a little differently. Through the lens of his camera, he likes to find new views of the places other people might pass every day without a second thought.

"Photography helps me to view the world in ways most people don't get to. To look at things from different angles, different perspectives and to see things in a way that others may not," he says. "Mostly, it's an outlet for me to be creative and to show the world the beauty of God's creation, whether that be people or nature."

Now, with the help of the internet, he can encourage others in his community to find their own individual perspectives. Social media has been a place for Stitt to grow as a photographer by sharing his work, asking questions and engaging in critiques with other professionals. He even runs his own Facebook group, Tyler Area Photography, with more than 600 members dedicated to growing the

photography community in Tyler, Texas. "I'm still learning and growing and will never stop," Stitt says. "We don't have lots of photography shops like you might find in bigger cities. So almost all of my continuing education and growing the craft relies on the internet."

Stitt caught the photography bug 18 years ago while living in California. Working as a graphic designer, he started submitting his shots to a stock photo website before becoming a full-time photographer two years later. After moving back home to New Zealand with his family, Stitt discovered his passion for landscape photography. But it was only a few years before the cost of living caught up with them. They didn't want to give up the opportunity to have his wife, Ruth, home-school their children. So, Stitt took his newfound talent for capturing natural beauty to Tyler, where he could continue pursuing his career while supporting his family.

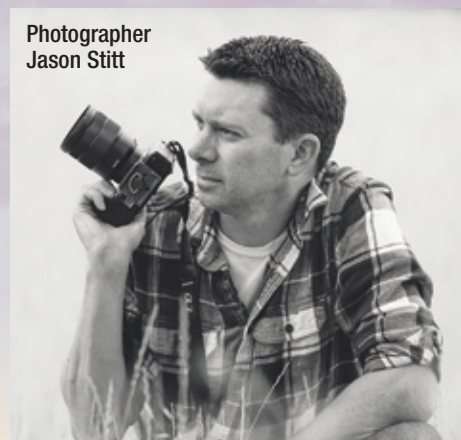
"I am an introvert by nature," he says. "So I really enjoy the quiet solitude of being out in nature with just my camera gear."

IN FOCUS


When Stitt and his family were deciding where to relocate on their move back to the States, there was one must-have for his business: a strong internet connection.

"That was one of the most important factors in choosing a place. It had to have a reliable and fast internet connection," Stitt says. "Ninety-nine percent of my business I get through either my site or social media. So without the internet, I lose all of that."

Photographer
Jason Stitt



He isn't exaggerating. About a year and a half after moving to Tyler and gradually building momentum as a professional photographer, Stitt and his family visited New Zealand for five weeks to see his parents. Stitt stayed away from social media during the trip and returned to find business had ground to a halt.

"I felt like I had just lost all the momentum I had built while we were gone and had to start all over again," he says. "Now, ideally, I try to post something every weekday to keep business relatively steady and keep getting inquiries. If I'm not posting regularly, those inquiries just stop happening." 



Getting the shot

Whether you're just starting out or a seasoned pro, Stitt offers some pointers to make your photos stand out.

- **Shoot, shoot, shoot** — As with any learned skill, the best way to hone it is to do it. Get out and take as many photos as you can to develop a better idea of your interests and style.
- **Be intentional** — Ansel Adams said, "You don't take a photograph, you make it." Photography is art, and good art requires forethought and planning. Think about what you want to capture and how you want to photograph it.
- **Study the greats** — Look closely at the work of photographers you admire. Figure out what it is about their work that appeals to you and then try to emulate it.
- **Master the light** — Light is the single most important factor in photography. More than determining how bright or dark your photos are, controlling light also decides the tone, mood and atmosphere of your images.
- **Learn to edit** — Don't neglect learning how to use your editing software. In today's world, the ability to edit well is one of the elements that makes for a great photographer.
- **Find your community** — Locate a local camera club or Facebook photography group to join. These can be great places to meet like-minded people from whom you can learn and grow.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The internet is full of resources for aspiring photographers and professionals alike. Whether you're looking to manage your shots or learn a new skill, there's something for everyone.



- **Education** — Even the best photographers have something to learn. For professional courses, Stitt turns to sites like CreativeLive and Improve Photography. If you're looking for something to peruse at your leisure for education and inspiration, he recommends Scott Kelby's blog.
- **Editing** — With Adobe's Photography package, anyone can get access to professional-grade software like Photoshop and Lightroom to edit and organize your photos on any device — all for little more than some streaming subscriptions.
- **Website builders** — Every photographer needs a place to share their work with the world. Popular website builders like Squarespace and Portfoliobox make it easy to show off your best shots and even to sell your work.
- **Storage** — As all those photos pile up, you'll need somewhere to keep them. Flickr offers a substantial 1 TB of free storage, while services like Dropbox and Google can provide up to 16 TB of space as your portfolio grows.



Watercolor paintings by Nancy Bergman.



Andy Kahmann of A to Z Letterpress Printing explains how to make hand-printed linoleum block prints.

Strolling among studios

Visitors flock to the annual Meander Art Crawl

Story By ANNE BRALY

Kristi Fernholz loves the outdoors and the native prairies that spread out across the Minnesota landscape. So, with a sharp eye, she takes her Canon camera and lenses — whatever equipment she may need — to capture the different patterns she finds outdoors. “Nature’s patterns are intriguing,” she says.

Fernholz lives near Appleton along the Minnesota River. She doesn’t have a home studio or shop. So each fall, she sets up a temporary studio in the community center of nearby Milan for the Meander Art Crawl. It’s a weekend visitors can spend touring artists’ studios — about 40 in all — and seeing them demonstrate and display their work.

Meander Art Crawl is organized through the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Committee, which Fernholz serves as planning director. “It’s the only show I do each year,” she says. “It gives me a venue for the public to view and buy my photographs, as well as a chance to interact with the public.”

“The demonstrations, along with some unique studio spaces, keep bringing people back year after year,” says Brad Hall, an artist who helps organize the annual event. Strangers are welcomed into home studios, and shops and restaurants morph into studios. Some of those studios are close together; this year, there will be six of them within a three-block radius of downtown Granite Falls. Other locations stretch all the way to Ortonville, Minnesota.

A WORK OF ART

Folks come to see the works of painters, potters, woodcarvers, jewelers, printmakers and photographers — and that’s not all. There are fiber artists, scrimshaw artists and masters of many other types of media on tour.

Hall is a watercolor and printmaking artist who creates a letterpress calendar every year in partnership with Andy Kahmann, another

artist on the Meander Art Crawl. Hall carves the linoleum blocks, and Kahmann prints them, along with the calendar, on 100-year-old printing presses in his letterpress shop in Montevideo.

Kahmann is also known for his naughty “Bad Andy” greeting cards. “It can be hard to resist purchasing one of them when one of his cute grandkids are selling them,” Hall says.

You’ll find Hall in the studio of his Episcopal church-turned-home, built in 1889. With 20-foot ceilings and stained glass windows that flood the studio with colorful light, it’s a showplace that brings people back every year to see the family who lives in a church, along with Hall’s prints and watercolors.

“I’m usually doing a watercolor demonstration while my wife is serving coffee and homemade cookies,” he says. “I think the year before the pandemic, we gave out 45 dozen cookies.”

Neva Foster is a watercolor artist who focuses on florals, landscapes and abstracts. She’s also the artist on the cover of this year’s Meander Art Crawl brochure, a publication that details the artists, their studios and locations, as this is a self-guided tour. “This is the one show I do each year,” Foster says. “It gives me some visibility.”

Foster lives in Ortonville and will set up her studio in The Red Barn, near Clinton. Meander weekend is the only time the barn is open to the public.

Meander Art Crawl is a chance for visitors to value life at a slower pace, to appreciate lifestyles in a rural community and to see the magnificent colors of fall along the upper region of the Minnesota River. Art lovers — some new and others repeat customers from all over Minnesota and the surrounding states — come to Meander each year. “Many people who have never been out here are impressed with just how lovely it can be,” Hall says.



Kristi Fernholz captures the soft side of nature's beauty with prints she sells at the Meander and at Billy Maple Trees in Milan.



Audrey Arner hand paints vivid barn stars that she sells during the Meander and at Moon Stone Farm.

Photo contributed by Tara Sternfels and the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission.

IN THE BEGINNING

The Meander Art Crawl's first year was 2004. It was the creation of a group of artists who were involved in other regional shows and had heard about similar art crawls in other communities, along with some people from the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission.

"The UMVRDC has also been instrumental in keeping our show going all these years," Hall says. But it's the Meander steering committee — a group of artists — who have kept the show running, he says. "We had no idea if it would be successful at the time, but it has turned into a very popular, well-attended show. That first year, we were overwhelmed by the turnout."

THE INTERNET CONNECTION TO ART

Last year's Meander Art Crawl was a virtual one with an online auction. The year before, it was a live event with upward of 2,000 art lovers attending. This year, it's live again and, as always, scheduled for the first weekend in October. Just as many visitors — if not more — are expected to attend.

Whether online or live, however, Meander Art Crawl would not be the success it has become without Acira internet, which Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone

powers. "Facebook is great for marketing Meander," Fernholz says. "Our website is very important, as well. It helps us get people to sign up to get our brochure, among other things."

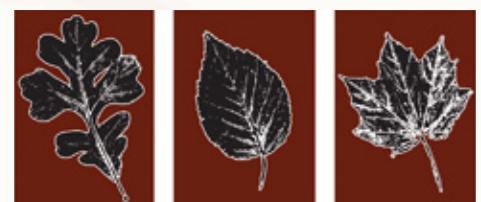
And besides being vital for Meander, internet access is important to the artists themselves. "It's very important for me as an artist for both social media and my website, as well as communicating with potential customers via email," Fernholz notes. "I need good speeds for uploading to my website." But it also works as a learning tool, teaching artists new techniques, finding training, filling out grant applications and networking with other artists. 📺



Brad Hall rolls ink onto a block print he carved.



Tokheim Stoneware is ready for visitors.



2021 Meander Art Crawl

A self-guided tour of art studios along the Minnesota River from Granite Falls to Ortonville.

Friday, Oct. 1, noon-6 p.m.; Saturday, Oct. 2, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.; Sunday, Oct. 3, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

www.artsmeander.com or Facebook

Palate pleasers

Pears make perfect sweet and savory dishes

Pears add a dose of seasonality to dishes this time of year with a sweetness that's nuanced and subtle yet plentiful. But understanding which type of pear is best for what use will help you choose wisely from the fruit you'll see in the produce section of your local market.

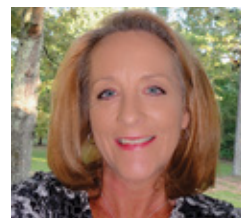
Any type of pear is good to eat as long as it's ripe enough to bring out its sweetness. But when it comes to using pears in cooking, the variety you choose matters. Do you want the pear to retain its shape when poached? Or do you want it to melt into a sauce? Just remember your pear ABCs — Anjou, Bosc and Comice.

Anjou is an all-purpose pear that can be grilled, roasted or eaten as a snack.

Bosc pears are best for poaching, as they maintain their shape well when cooked.

Comice pears are best used raw, as their tender flesh will not hold up well under heat. They are a sweet pear to pair with cheese.

The best way to ripen pears is on the counter at room temperature, a process that requires patience, since the fruit can take up to a week to reach its sweet peak. Once fully ripe, pears may be stored in the refrigerator for up to a week, if they stick around that long before being used in any of the following recipes.



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



Pear & blue cheese salad

- 12 cups torn romaine lettuce
- 2/3 cup balsamic vinaigrette (homemade or store-bought), see note
- 2 medium pears, sliced (Comice suggested)
- 2/3 cup crumbled blue cheese
- 2/3 cup glazed or salted pecans

Place romaine in a large bowl. Drizzle it with vinaigrette; toss to coat. Top with pears, cheese and pecans. Serve immediately. Makes 10 servings.

Note: If you can't get enough blue cheese, substitute blue cheese dressing for the balsamic.



PEAR & GORGONZOLA PIZZA

- 1 (16-ounce) package refrigerated pizza crust dough
- 4 ounces sliced provolone cheese
- 1 Bosc pear, thinly sliced
- 2 ounces chopped walnuts
- 2 1/2 ounces Gorgonzola or blue cheese, crumbled
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives

Preheat the oven to 450 F. Spread the pizza crust dough on a medium baking sheet. Layer provolone cheese on the crust and top the cheese with Bosc pear slices. Sprinkle walnuts and Gorgonzola cheese over the pears.

Bake for 8-10 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and the crust is lightly browned. Remove the pizza from the oven, top it with chives and slice to serve.

PEAR PANCAKES

- 1 1/2 cups baking mix (such as Bisquick)
 - 1 medium ripe pear, peeled and finely chopped
- 2/3 cup old-fashioned oats
 - 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
 - 1 cup milk
 - 2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted
 - 1 egg
- 1/2 cup butter or margarine, softened
 - 2 teaspoons powdered sugar
 - Maple syrup, if desired

Heat a griddle or skillet over medium heat. Grease it with butter or vegetable oil if necessary.

In a large bowl, stir the baking mix, chopped pear, oats, brown sugar and 1 teaspoon of the cinnamon until blended. In a medium bowl, beat the milk, melted butter and egg with a fork or wire whisk. Add the milk mixture to the dry ingredients, stirring just until moistened.

For each pancake, pour about 1/4 cup batter onto a hot griddle. Cook the pancakes until bubbles form on top and the edges are dry. Flip, then cook the other side until golden brown.

While the pancakes are cooking, make cinnamon butter: In a small bowl, mix 1/2 cup butter, the powdered sugar and the remaining 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon. Serve the pancakes with cinnamon butter and syrup.

BAKED PEARS WITH WALNUTS

- 2 large ripe Bosc pears
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup crushed walnuts
- 2 teaspoons honey
- Vanilla ice cream or whipped cream, optional

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Cut the pears in half and place them on a baking sheet. You may want to cut a sliver off the uncut side so that they sit upright.

Using a measuring spoon or melon baller, scoop out the seeds. Sprinkle the pear halves with cinnamon, top them with walnuts and drizzle 1/2 teaspoon honey over each one.

Bake for 30 minutes. Remove from the oven, let them cool slightly and serve the pears topped with ice cream or whipped cream, if desired.



PEAR CLAFOUTIS

Think pear cobbler, only easier.

- Salted butter for the dish
- 2 ripe but slightly firm Anjou pears (about 1 pound total)
 - 1 cup half-and-half
- 3 eggs
 - 1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
 - 1 teaspoon orange zest
 - 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg
 - 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
 - 1/2 cup flour
 - Powdered sugar

Peel, core and slice the pears lengthwise about 1/3-inch thick. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Butter a shallow 3-quart baking dish and arrange the pears over the bottom — they will rise to the top as the batter bakes.

Put half-and-half, eggs, granulated sugar, vanilla, orange zest, nutmeg, salt and flour (in this order) in a blender and whirl until very smooth and frothy, 1 minute. Pour the batter over the pears.

Bake until the clafoutis is well browned and a little puffed, about 50 minutes. Let it cool on a rack about 15 minutes. Serve warm, sprinkled with powdered sugar.

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