

MARCH/APRIL 2022

CONNECTION

LEARNING
TO RIDE

ROASTING
RULES

‘Wild haired dream’

Michelle Nelson
explores
homesteading





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Strengthening ties

Rural internet providers gain ground


No matter the challenges, NTCA members have a long history of stepping up to extend fast internet service to rural America, allowing residents to work, learn and engage with family and friends online.

Recently, we released our 2021 Broadband/Internet Availability Survey Report, reaffirming the commitment to rural broadband as the industry stands on the cusp of once-in-a-generation investment to bring connectivity to all Americans.

NTCA members responding to the survey indicated that nearly 76% of their customers can receive downstream speeds of at least 100 Mbps. That's up from 67.8% in 2020. Similarly, 55.4% of customers have access to gigabit downstream speed, up from 45.1% in 2020.

A year earlier, 28% of respondents subscribed to services with 100 Mbps broadband or better. Last year, that number was 37%.

These gains appear throughout the communities NTCA members serve, including in critically important broadband service to libraries, community colleges, state universities and extensions. There are 911 call centers and medical facilities that benefit, as well as nearly all primary and secondary schools, along with police and fire departments.

Despite the successes, NTCA members continue to face pandemic-related supply chain issues, leading to slowdowns in installing services for customers and delayed network construction. Still, these companies serving rural America continue to put your needs first, building networks that can change lives and communities for the better. As the 2021 Broadband/Internet Availability Survey Report shows, they're making a difference. 



Back it up

It's as easy as 3-2-1

The reliability of technology, from computers to smartphones, is steadily increasing, which is good because we depend on it more now than ever. From personal photo libraries to essential financial records, digital archives have replaced physical filing and storage systems.

In fact, this information is so important, consider taking a lesson from corporations and data-intensive industries — back it all up with multiple copies in strategic locations.

3

Your goal should be to have at least three copies of your important data — but you'll put each copy in a different location.

2

Two copies of your data should be stored at your home or office. Separate them, though. Keep one copy on a device such as a computer. But keep the second version on an external hard drive. Prices begin at less than \$100 and then go up, based on the amount of data you need to store.

1

Send the final copy to the cloud, which can be both convenient and a hedge against a disaster damaging your home or business. Apple, Google, Microsoft and many other companies offer cloud-based storage solutions. For a few dollars a month, you can get digital peace of mind.

Coordinating those steps is also easier than ever. Modern computer operating systems offer options to automate most of the details.



Are blue light glasses hype or help?

According to the American Optometric Association, the average office worker spends seven hours a day in front of a computer — and that's only when they're on the clock. In our off-hours, we're often squinting at our smartphones, using tablets to catch up on the news or following the twists and turns of the latest best-seller on an e-reader.

After so much time staring at screens, many people experience digital eye strain, also known as computer vision syndrome. Symptoms can include everything from dry and tired eyes to blurry vision, neck pain, headaches and more.

Some folks are turning to blue light-blocking glasses for relief. Available in a variety of styles and a wide range of prices, these glasses purport to reduce eye strain by filtering out the blue light emitted by digital screens.

But are these lenses really all that they're cracked up to be? According to experts, maybe not.

WHAT IS BLUE LIGHT?

All visible light contains the entire spectrum of wavelengths, from red to violet, and each wavelength has its own specific energy level. Blue light has the highest energy level in the visible spectrum.

The sun is the source of most of the blue light we encounter, but blue light is also emitted by fluorescent and incandescent light bulbs and the screens of electronic devices. However, no measurable harm done by the light from digital devices has been documented.

Studies have shown that it's not the screens themselves that are causing eye strain but, rather, how we use them. We blink less frequently when looking at screens and we tend to hold electronic devices, particularly mobile phones, much closer to our eyes than paper documents. Also, glare, reflections and existing uncorrected or undercorrected vision problems can contribute to discomfort, as does focusing on screens for extended periods of time.

So, if blue light glasses won't help, what will? Believe it or not, taking breaks. Most symptoms of eye strain will resolve themselves when you stop using the computer. When you have to be in front of a screen for an extended period of time, experts like those at the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommend the 20-20-20 rule — after every 20 minutes of continuous screen time, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

BLUE LIGHT AT BEDTIME

While there isn't scientific evidence that blue light is responsible for digital eye strain, experts say there isn't any harm in wearing blue light glasses, and they may help at bedtime.

Blue light affects the body's natural waking and sleeping cycle, known as circadian rhythm. During daylight hours, blue light wakes us up and keeps us alert. But when it's time for bed, the blue light from screens can stimulate the brain just when you're trying to wind down for the night. This is why many devices have nighttime settings to minimize blue light exposure after dark. Experts recommend limiting screen time two to three hours before bed, but if you must use your devices in the hours leading up to bedtime, blue light glasses could help ensure a solid night's rest. 📺



Better connected

Why rural broadband outshines the big guys

A high-tech web threads its way throughout our region, extending to homes, businesses, government offices, medical facilities and more. Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone are at the center of that web, the hub linking you to the power of the internet. Together — because you're very much a part of this success — we've created an amazing resource.



KEVIN BEYER
Chief Executive Officer

But have you ever wondered how we stack up against other service providers? I'm sure you see advertisements for national communications corporations, and you may be curious if your local company keeps pace. Truthfully, there's a vast separation between how our cooperatives and corporate-owned businesses operate. Rather than a focus on returning value to faceless shareholders, we prioritize giving you, our neighbors, the best service possible at the most reasonable price.

When you consider the technological wonder of it all, it really is amazing. A global system of computers shares digital information, whether it's something as large as a streaming movie or as small as a few lines of text in a social media post. Physical cables link the servers, and some cables even run beneath the ocean.

Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone are the local stops on this system, and we maintain the networking equipment needed to tap those massive streams of information. Then, we provide you access through the lines we've installed across the community — our community.

The differentiation between us and those national companies accelerates as we translate that amazing infrastructure into packages of services you can obtain. As you can see, there are plenty of moving parts, but we work hard to boil all of them down into straightforward, understandable service plans.

Here's one example. Our fiber optic internet network is designed to allow you to upload information as fast as you can download it, a balance so important for how we communicate. Maybe you work from home and share files with the office or rely on videoconferencing. Or, perhaps you're a gamer who wants an edge on the competition. In both cases, that two-way speed is essential. Can performance vary at times? Certainly. Wi-Fi router settings and other variables in the home and at work can make a difference, but our network is designed to serve your needs as consistently as the technology allows. Can all the national companies say the same thing?

Similarly, it can be easy to promise one thing and deliver another. When you do business with Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, we strive to provide what we promise. We want you to take full advantage of our services. Many of the corporate-owned companies do not work that way. In fact, it's common for those national providers to throttle your speed when you start reaching a usage limit. That's just not how we do business.

While we enjoy the advantages of living in a rural community — and there are many — rest assured you have access to a communications network comparable to that of most metropolitan areas. In fact, many of those people living in cities would be envious, not only of the internet services available to you, but also the friendly customer support and honest communications Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone provide. In the end, we are neighbors helping neighbors, and that makes all the difference. 📶

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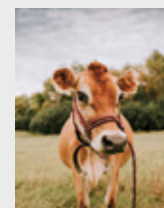
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On the Cover:



Michelle Nelson created a blog to share her creativity and the homesteading lifestyle that she and her family have embraced. See story Page 12.

©Brooke Kern

Do you qualify for the Affordable Connectivity Program

What is it?

- The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC program that helps connect families and households struggling to afford internet service.
- Benefit provides up to \$30/month discount.
- To See if You Qualify and Apply Call: 877-384-2575 or visit [ACPBenefit.org](https://www.acpbenefit.org).

A household is eligible if a member meets at least ONE of the criteria below:

- Has an income that is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines; participates in certain assistance programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC or Lifeline;
- Participates in tribal specific programs, such as Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations;
- Is approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision;
- Received a federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating broadband provider's existing low-income program.

Two Steps to Enroll

1. Go to [ACPBenefit.org](https://www.acpbenefit.org) to submit an application, or print out a mail-in application; and
2. Contact your preferred participating provider, to select an eligible plan and have the discount applied to your bill.



Lifeline
SERVICE

Lifeline is a federal program to help low-income Americans pay for phone or internet services.

You are eligible for Lifeline benefits if you qualify for and receive one of the following benefits:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| •SNAP | •Federal Public Housing Assistance |
| •Medicaid | •Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit |
| •Supplemental Security Income (SSI) | |

Additionally, consumers at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines will continue to be eligible for a Lifeline program benefit. (State determinations of income will no longer be accepted.) There are no changes to the eligibility criteria for tribal programs.

Some states have additional qualifying programs, allowances and stipulations. Check with your local telecommunications provider for information about benefits that may be available in your state.

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, please visit www.lifelinesupport.org or call your local telecommunications provider.

Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone are not responsible for determining who qualifies for these programs or who receives assistance. Consumers must meet specific criteria in order to obtain assistance with their local telephone and/or broadband service, and qualifying is dependent upon government-established guidelines.

**ALWAYS
CALL
BEFORE YOU
DIG**



A JUKEBOX JOURNEY

• *Destinations that are music to your ears* •

The Upper Midwest has produced a wealth of musicians who call Minnesota and Wisconsin home, and Prince may be the first who comes to mind. Then, there's Bob Dylan, whose nasally voice produced hits like "Lay Lady Lay" and "It Ain't Me Babe." But there are other musicians of note who arose out of the Midwest in places outside the hustle and bustle of the large cities.

Every song has a story. Here are some places to learn about them and the artists who put those earworms in our heads, so prepare your road trip playlist and start tapping your toes.

MINNESOTA MUSIC HALL OF FAME New Ulm, Minnesota

For an all-encompassing look at Minnesota's music history, the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame in New Ulm is the place to go. The museum has thousands of pieces of memorabilia that detail the lives of the state's most notable musicians, as well as some not as well known outside the area.

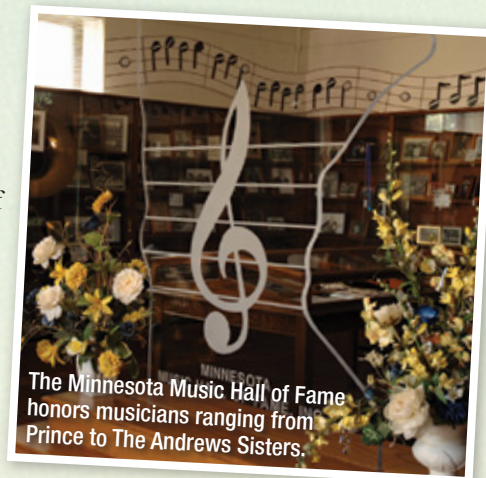
"We love to tell their stories," Hall of Fame's John Kass says of musicians such as Prince, Dylan, Judy Garland, The Andrews Sisters, Bobby Vee, The Trashmen, Eddie Cochran, Whoopie John and Six Fat Dutchmen. The Hall of Fame opened in 1989 to honor those who made significant contributions to the world of music in all genres, from classical to bluegrass and rock 'n' roll to polkas. Each year, a new class of artists is inducted into the Hall of Fame. Among those who joined the ranks most recently are:

- The Peterson Family
- The O'Neill Brothers
- Soul Asylum
- Ernie Coopman
- John and Sara McCay
- John Holmquist

Have any pieces of the state's musical past? The Minnesota Music Hall of Fame accepts any and all memorabilia to add to its collections — musical instruments, records, cassettes, CDs and more.

"Many people love music, so let's all share information about our Minnesota brethren," Kass says.

For tour information, log onto mnmusichalloffame.org.



The Minnesota Music Hall of Fame honors musicians ranging from Prince to The Andrews Sisters.

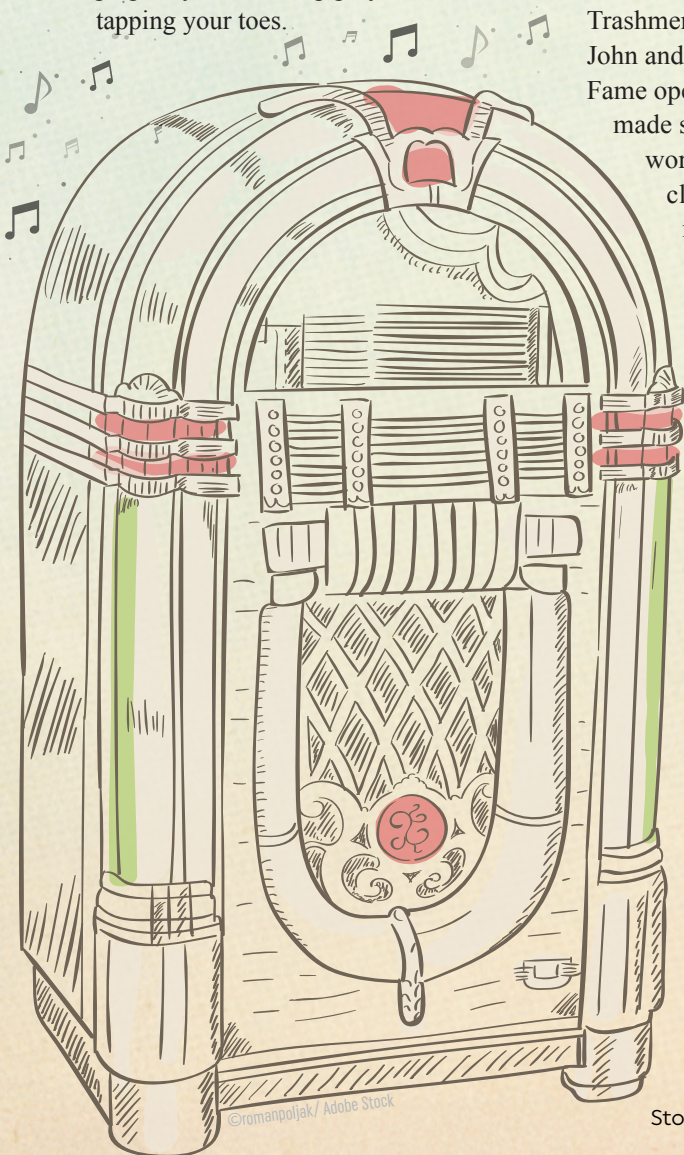
THE JUDY GARLAND MUSEUM Grand Rapids, Minnesota

She may have best been known for her role as Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz," but Judy Garland was also a talented singer. Her film performance of "Over the Rainbow" jumped off the big screen to be a No. 1 hit on the radio.

Garland, whose name at birth was Frances Gumm, was born in Grand Rapids. She spent the first 4 1/2 years of her life in a clapboard house there that now serves a dual purpose as the Judy Garland Museum and Birthplace House as well as the Judy Garland Children's Museum. "People are astounded by what Garland accomplished in her 45-year career," says Janie Heitz, the museum's executive director.



The Judy Garland Museum is in her birthplace of Grand Rapids, Minnesota.



©romantopoljak / Adobe Stock

Story by ANNE BRALY



The summer heat often drove The Andrews Sisters to Mound, Minnesota. Visitors can visit spots the trio frequented.

The Gumm family lived in Grand Rapids for 12 years and in the house-turned-museum for seven years. It was the first home the family owned, Heitz adds. Visitors can expect to see the original carriage and the original test dress for Dorothy from “The Wizard of Oz,” the restored 1892 home of Garland’s 1922 birth and early childhood, original “Oz” artifacts, memorabilia and photographs from Garland’s many movies and radio appearances and more. The museum’s pair of ruby slippers — one of five in existence — was stolen in 2005. The shoes were recovered in 2018, but they are still in the custody of the FBI until the investigation is complete.

Garland returned to her childhood town twice. The first time was in 1938, when the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce sent a motorcade to Minneapolis to pick her up and bring her to Grand Rapids to make an appearance. However, because she was under contract with MGM, she was not allowed to sing. Her second trip to Grand Rapids happened 20 years later. This time, she did sing. She fought through a bout of laryngitis to belt out “Happy Birthday” and some of her hit songs on a hot Sunday afternoon in celebration of Minnesota’s 100th year of statehood.

For more information on her acting and music career, as well as information on visiting the museum, log on to judygarlandmuseum.com.

THE ANDREWS SISTERS TRAIL Mound, Minnesota

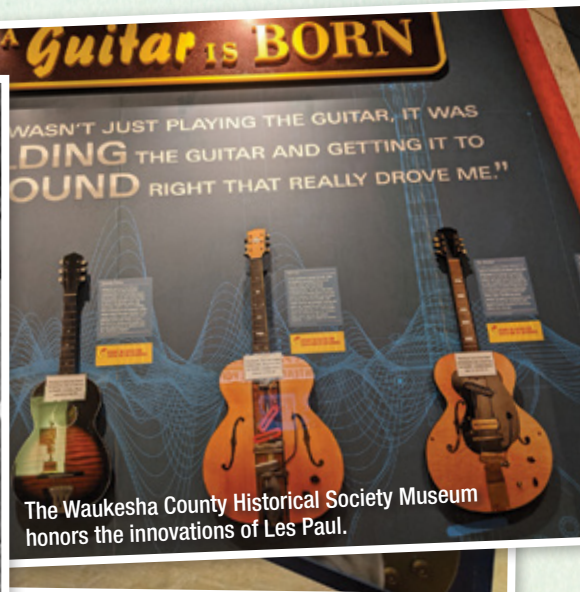
The Andrews Sisters — LaVerne, Maxene and Patty — sang their way onto the stage and into America’s hearts with songs such as “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” and “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree.”

The trio was born in Minneapolis but spent many summers in Mound, escaping the summer heat, says Pamela Myers, a member of the Westonka Historical Society Museum’s board of directors. They stayed with their uncles, Ed Soule and Pete Soule, who owned the local grocery store.

Today, visitors can see some of their favorite places by traveling The Andrews Sisters Trail, a short drive that includes their uncles’ homes, the Chapman Place Hotel where the girls liked to rollerskate, the beach on Cook’s Bay where they loved to swim and Lake Minnetonka where Pete and Ed would sell ice cream to the tourists. The lake was so loved by the sisters that they would return as adults whenever time allowed.

The museum, too, is a stop along the trail. Displays include some of the Andrews Sisters’ costumes and jewelry, awards and notebooks with the order of songs for performances. There is a historical marker at the beginning of the trail with more information on The Andrews Sisters’ connection to Mound and Lake Minnetonka.

For more information, visit myplace.frontier.com.



The Waukesha County Historical Society Museum honors the innovations of Les Paul.

Photos courtesy of the depicted museums.

LES PAUL EXPERIENCE Waukesha, Wisconsin

Les Paul strummed his way onto the American stage with the invention of his Les Paul Gibson solid-body electric guitar. But that’s not all he’s known for, as he and his partner, Mary Ford, made a name for themselves with the 1950s style of pop music they popularized.

“They drew from a range of influences, including swing, radio orchestra, country, jazz and more,” says Bonnie Byrd, executive director of the Waukesha County Historical Society Museum, which debuted its “Les Paul Experience” in May 2013. Paul and Ford implemented sound-on-sound recording that allowed them to build layers of harmony and melody, Byrd explains. The recording process, now known as multitrack recording, came about due to Paul’s inventions.

Museum visitors will see artifacts from many facets of the man’s life and career, from his early harmonica and wire holder to his treasured National Inventors Hall of Fame and Rock ’n’ Roll Hall of Fame medals. And of course, his guitars take center stage, including his 1972 Starburst and the Les Paul Special presented to the artist at his 90th birthday celebration at Carnegie Hall. For more information, visit waukeshacountymuseum.org or lespaulfoundation.org.





Hi! I'M JADE GEHRKE.

With this column, we're going to explore the digital world, specifically how you can get the most out of everything from computers and mobile devices to online services and apps. The possibilities are endless, and I'm here to help.

DEVICE OF THE MONTH



WobbleWorks 3Doodler

Although it's more 3D sculpting than 3D printing, the WobbleWorks 3Doodler is an inexpensive way for kids and teens to expand their projects into another dimension. With intuitive controls and plenty of templates and tutorials available online, the pen-like device allows them to create three-dimensional objects out of liquid plastic. The Start+ model, recommended for ages 6-13, starts at \$49.99, while the Create+ for ages 14-plus is available for \$79.99 at www.the3doodler.com.

End printing hassles



Select the right option for your needs

Even as more and more of our documents and information are stored digitally, a physical copy can be a convenience or an essential for school or work. Home printers offer great quality at an affordable price. But, with so many options on the market, how do you decide what works best for you?

Below are some quick tips on how to make the right choice and to start printing in no time.

INKJET OR LASER

The biggest decision you will make is whether to pick an inkjet or laser printer. Inkjet printers create images by shooting nearly microscopic drops of ink onto the page, with most consumer models featuring separate ink cartridges for black and color ink. Laser printers use toner, which is ink in powder form, and static electricity to melt the ink onto the paper.

While laser printers were once confined to the office due to their high cost, there are now plenty of reasonably priced models, although they continue to be more expensive than inkjet printers — at least initially.

The biggest concern with inkjet printers is the cost of the ink. Although you can buy a cheap printer for around \$60, it usually comes with

only a small amount of ink. The cost of replacing the ink cartridges can quickly add up, and some inkjet printers won't even allow you to print in black and white if the color ink is low.

If you're looking to only print in black and white, then a laser printer is the clear choice, even if the upfront cost is higher. However, while there are laser printers that can do color, they typically do not perform as well as comparably priced color inkjet printers.

In short, an inkjet remains the cost-effective choice for printing the occasional photograph or colorful school project. A laser printer does a better — and faster — job overall with text.

OTHER CHOICES

Once you've decided between inkjet or laser, consider if you want a printer with an included scanner or the ability to print on both sides of the paper automatically.

Also, if you want to print from multiple devices, consider buying a printer with wireless connectivity through Bluetooth or Wi-Fi. But if you're just going to set up your printer next to a desktop, then a simple USB cable will do the trick.

Happy printing! ☑

Rarin' to go

Exploring a thrilling new sport

Story By MORGAN SIMMONS

Twelve-year-old Bryce Hardy is what coaches call a natural athlete. He excels at basketball, baseball and football, and as a seventh grader at Chokio-Alberta School, he plays all three.

Last year, Bryce discovered the thrills and spills of bull riding. He and his mother were at a local rodeo where, in addition to watching adult-level bull riding — often referred to as the most dangerous eight seconds in sports — Bryce got his first look at miniature bull riding, featuring cowboys his own age and even younger. With his mother's blessing, he soon gave it a try. Bryce stands 4 feet, 11 inches tall and tips the scales at around 107 pounds. Miniature bulls are bred to be about 500 pounds, half the size of regular bulls. But like their full-size counterparts, they buck with wild determination.

As someone who grew up around horses, Bryce knew what it was like to be bucked off, and he knew how to take a fall. Miniature bull riders wear protective gear like chaps, a padded leather vest and a hockey helmet, but still, watching Bryce hit the ground was hard for his mother, Kim Marty. "At first, I was very anxious,"



Bryce Hardy, and his mom, Kim Marty, at a competition in Mesquite, Texas, in 2021.



In September 2021, Bryce won a championship buckle in the junior division during the Nimrod Mini Bull Bash in Nimrod, Minnesota.

she says. "I knew Bryce was a good athlete, but this was something different. He hit hard. But I could tell something positive was already going on. He clearly loved it."

Bryce had a lot to learn, and he didn't have much time. A few of his friends had miniature bulls he could ride, and he started attending small rodeos. His family even built a bucking barrel, suspended by bungee cords between four posts. Last summer Bryce competed in rodeos in Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota. He won the Minnesota Extreme Miniature Bull Riding Tour Junior Division and placed first in the Nimrod Bull Bash. His most outstanding achievements were second- and first-place finishes at the World Championship Miniature Bull Riding rodeo last October in Mesquite, Texas.

'BE PREPARED'

Part of Bryce's preparation requires using the internet, provided by Federated Telephone, to study other bull riders. He pays close attention to how they square up on the bull and position their legs and hands. "Bull riders need to do their research and know what to expect," Bryce says. "Does the bull spin left or right? It's a little like football when you scout the other team to be prepared."



Kim says she would rather her son ride bulls than bucking broncs. "Horses can buck even harder, and they're more unpredictable," she says. "It's a tradeoff — horses throw you around more, but bulls are more dangerous when you're on the ground."

This winter, Bryce's schedule has included the Patriot Las Vegas rodeo and the Hooey Jr. Patriot rodeo in Fort Worth, Texas. By the start of this year, his winnings reached about \$2,000, but that barely puts a dent in his travel expenses.

Someday, he hopes to turn pro. "The benefits of his bull riding far outweigh my fear of him getting hurt," Kim says. "Rodeo people support each other. They get down and pray together. The other dads and elder cowboys care for the young riders. Everybody competes for the same buckle, but you don't see that in the chutes." 📺

HIT *the* TRAIL

These apps can help you plan your next outdoor adventure

Looking for new adventures this spring? A good internet connection can come in handy when you're planning your next excursion into the great outdoors. From discovering your next destination to sharing every step of the journey, these digital tools make it easier than ever to get out there and start enjoying our world.

Yonder

Yonder helps people find nature-rich destinations off the beaten path. Search the more than 20,000 locations across the United States to find your new favorite hidden gem. Each listing puts just as much focus on the experiences guests can expect during their stay as it does on the price tag. Those experiences can include trekking through a canyon, sampling grapes off the vine or enjoying nearby views. Travelers can book online or in the Yonder app available for iOS and Android.

Tripcast

Share more than just the highlights of your trip with the people who matter most. With Tripcast, available on iOS and Android, you can add friends and family to an interactive photo album that puts every traveler's pics in one place. Post notes, photos and real-time updates that are all automatically added to a trip map. Make your trip public or only invite those who want to share in every step of the journey.

AllTrails

You might be surprised how many great trails there are right in your own community, and AllTrails can help uncover them all. Whether you're looking for a relaxing hike, an invigorating trail run or a challenging, off-road bike ride, you're bound to find something that fits your needs. Browse nearby trails based on their length, difficulty and popularity to find exactly what you're looking for. You can even search for trails that are dog-friendly, have great views or are suited to a fun family outing. You can download the app in iOS or Android.

Star Walk

Make a night under the stars even more exciting with this augmented-reality star chart that tracks over 200,000 celestial objects. Open the app and point your phone at the night sky to see constellations traced right before your eyes and learn about the mythology behind them. Track planets or the International Space Station, and even get notifications for major astronomical events on iOS and Android devices.

Recreation.gov

For those seeking an extended stay in the wild, Recreation.gov is a great starting point. The site and its official app are both built to help travelers find and reserve campsites at national parks, forests and other federally designated properties across the country. Browse amenities and nearby activities for each site, as well as ratings and reviews from those who have stayed there.



Find your Little Free Library

An online map guides readers to book boxes

Take a book. Leave a book. That's the simple, powerful idea behind more than 100,000 Little Free Libraries scattered across the globe.

Todd H. Bol, who created the first Little Free Library in 2009, founded a nonprofit of that name to help people access books at no cost, no matter where they live. A key goal of the Little Free Library organization is the promotion of literacy.

The effort is driven by volunteers who build small, waterproof library boxes, find the libraries a home in their yards or other appropriate spots, and seed them with books. You don't have to share a book before taking one, and you don't even need to return the book you take. It's all on the honor system. But, please do consider contributing a book or two, because that's how the library system grows.

**Do you want to find a Little Free Library near you?
For a searchable map, visit littlefreelibrary.org/ourmap.**

E-READERS

Are you the type of avid reader who enjoys keeping a couple, or maybe even a couple dozen, reading options handy at all times? E-readers were made for you.

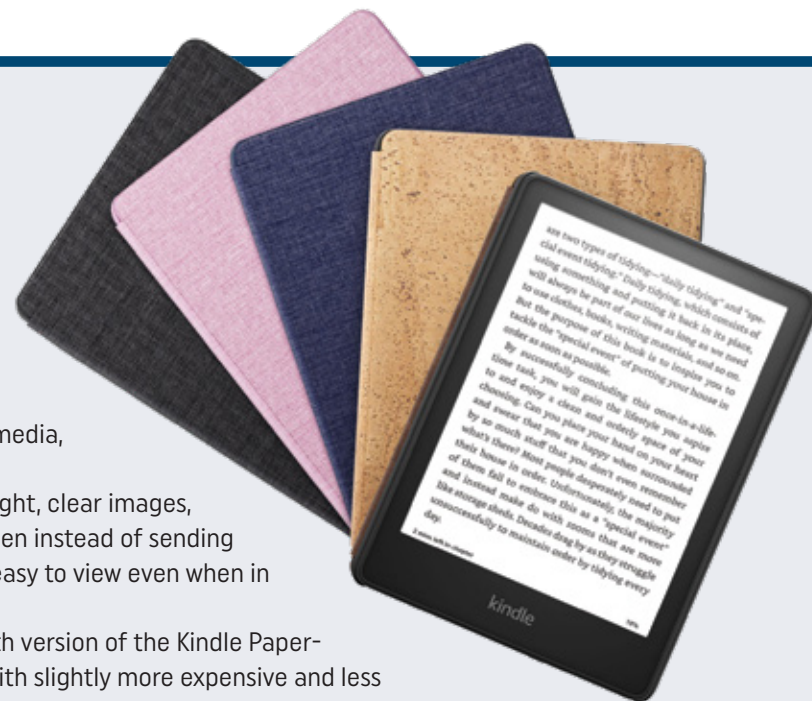
E-readers' screens are more eye-friendly than those of do-everything tablets like iPads. And there's another key advantage to e-readers — fewer distractions. There are no notifications, social media, games or email.

While the screens of phones and tablets emit light to create bright, clear images, those of e-readers, such as the Kindle, direct light toward the screen instead of sending it outward. Eye strain is lessened, and the e-readers typically are easy to view even when in direct sunlight.

Amazon remains the e-reader leader. The company is on the 11th version of the Kindle Paper-white, which was updated late last year. The price is about \$140, with slightly more expensive and less pricey versions also available.

With a Kindle, you can tap into the Amazon library to purchase and store online books. While companies such as Apple offer bookstores, those are not available on Kindle devices.

There are also non-Kindle e-readers, like the Clara HD by Kobo. The company has its own e-book store. You can't reach the Amazon bookstore through a Kobo device, but you can get books through software such as OverDrive, which is used by many library systems. A Clara HD is available for about \$118 from online sites such as Walmart.



Bonus tip: Do you ever want to read the classics, for free? Project Gutenberg makes it possible, providing digital versions of books whose copyrights status allows free distribution. Visit gutenberg.org for details and to browse the library.

'Wild-Haired Dream'

Michelle Nelson gets back to her roots

Story by MATT LEDGER

Michelle and Daniel Nelson enjoy time with their children, from left, Briggs, Braedyn and Braxton.

Mother's Day is often a time of reflection, with a few cherished gifts from the kids and memories of adventures from long ago. In 2018, Michelle Nelson had something different in mind. The mother of three decided to start a completely new chapter for herself and a new lifestyle for her family. It's been her 'wild-haired dream' for a while.

"My husband, Daniel, was not on board with it," Michelle says. "He actually took his pickup to work that day so that I couldn't go and pick up this milk cow, but I am stubborn and determined enough." She hitched up a trailer to her Ford Expedition and drove four hours to Rochester, spending \$1,500 on a milk cow named Brie and its calf, named Buddy, along with various milking supplies.

Michelle soon had more cow's milk than she knew what to do with. At first, she fed some to the pigs. Then, she started making simple cheeses and butter to use at home. The "homesteading" journey she had envisioned for several years had officially begun. "Homesteading can mean different things for everybody," Michelle says. "We're not prepping for doomsday, it's more or less this beautiful way of life — cultivating values that you normally wouldn't."

She grew up in the traditional farm setting where crops and cattle are generational careers. "Homesteading isn't about farming for profit," she says.

This rural return-to-the-land pursuit is grounded in the same skills that the original American settlers depended on. "It creates a lot of internal joy and peace to have a source of connection with creation, and it can become a very spiritual retreat from the noisy world and hurried people that we are surrounded by," she says. "It has brought so much gratefulness to our hearts."





FAMILY VALUES

Michelle and Daniel were high school sweethearts, of sorts. She attended Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley High School, and he went to Chokio-Alberta High School, but the two systems joined together for sports. She played softball and he ran track, and they met in the lunchroom waiting for the school buses.

They attended college together, with Daniel studying taxidermy and Michelle receiving a degree in graphic design and marketing.

“We were both living and working in Fargo, North Dakota,” Michelle recalls. “Once we had our firstborn son, Braxton, we knew we wanted to raise him on a farm where he would have room to run and just be a kid.”

She began to embrace the possibilities of homesteading after inheriting cattle from her father, Todd Tritz, in 2017. She sold the cattle to purchase their 13-acre farm, near Morris. A year later, she photographed a wedding for a family friend as a barter deal. “He gave me one bred heifer, and I purchased another as a way to bring cattle back on our property,” Michelle says.

Her next purchase — a cattle dog — led to a new business venture, which continues to this day. “I always thought it would be fun to breed puppies,” Michelle says. Most of the profits from selling the dogs go to support the homesteading on the farm.

“It definitely takes everyone working together,” she says. “Daniel mends the fences, and he built our shop, but otherwise, he does maintenance on machinery and bales hay.” Michelle does more of the daily chores and feeds the animals. Braxton and his sister, Braedyn, are now completely responsible for the “chicken chores,” caring for 10 laying hens in a small coop.

“Kids need to be put in uncomfortable situations to prepare them for the real world,” Michelle says. “I can already see the fruit of our labor coming through with each of them in how they view the world and doing jobs.”

SHARING INSPIRATION

At the beginning of the pandemic Michelle began to share in a blog about her ambitious homesteading life. “Being a photographer at the time, I wasn’t able to do many photo shoots. So, my blog became my escape from everything — motherhood, home-schooling the kids — and turned my creativity on to something.”

For the blog title, she combined the name of her first milk cow and her own golden locks to form “Brie & Blondie Homestead.”

She primarily shared ideas with other homesteaders and those curious about a self-sustaining lifestyle. The first post was about homemade sauerkraut. She followed that with a series of do-it-yourself cleaning supplies, ranging from laundry soap to a surface cleaner she made with vinegar and essential oils.

Michelle later made video tutorials on churning butter, baking crusty bread and even how to milk a cow, which she featured on her “Brie & Blondie Homestead” YouTube channel. Other how-to videos feature her in the kitchen with her kids, with subjects such as making cake muffins as a way to celebrate the arrival of spring. “People really resonated with what we shared and found a lot of common ground,” she says.

Red Wing Shoes, Duluth Trading Company and several local Minnesota companies sent various products for Michelle to include in photos and posts. She could see long-term potential for advertising with their side businesses.

‘AN AWAKENING’

It wasn’t long before chores that ordinarily took 30 minutes were lasting several hours as she photographed, recorded video, edited content and rendered it for her blog and YouTube channel. It didn’t stop there, as she would cross-promote on Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest, and then engage with people commenting on the posts.

Six months in, she was left with a dilemma. Wedding clients had begun to return, and business was returning to normal. “It definitely became a struggle when reality opened back up and I could go back to work,” she says. “Keeping up with the blog was a full-time job at that point, and I wasn’t able to keep up with everything.”

The homestead blogging was feeding her creativity, but she found that the time-consuming nature of content creation was interfering with other routines. She has since taken a hiatus from the blog after a few such realizations. In her last blog post, titled “An Awakening,” she shared concerns of just how much social media was impacting her values — how scrolling through feeds and galleries of endless shiny new objects had disrupted her contentment and even skewed her reasoning. “All of a sudden, my time was not my own,” she says. “I was operating life on unhealthy breeding grounds, wanting and wishing for more than what I had.”

VERSION 2.0?

Michelle found the online conversations to be rewarding, though the frequency of notifications did interfere at times. “My phone would constantly be dinging, and you feel compelled to get back to these people right away because you feel like you’re in a face-to-face conversation with them,” she says.

“What I did not enjoy about it is that it took away a lot of my inner peace of homesteading because I was on my phone so much,” Michelle says. “I found myself very addicted to seeing how many people liked a post or how many people reshared one. There wasn’t that in-person communication, so it felt like I had friends online.”

A year later, she still appreciates the connections she made with others in the online homesteading community. But she has had to shift priorities with the birth of their third child, a boy named Briggs.

Michelle is considering a return to the online marketplace. The Nelsons are looking into selling whole hogs online or offering a subscription-based plan for families that want to bring the farm-to-table experience into their own homes. 📺



Roasting

can yield the perfect taste and texture

Explore the nuances of a common cooking technique

A perfectly roasted cut of beef is a thing of beauty. A deliciously roasted chicken surrounded by colorful roasted vegetables is Instagram worthy. But how do you get these cuts of meat to reach these levels of perfection?

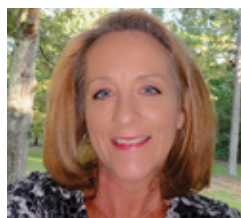
Roasting is an age-old culinary technique that takes relatively tough cuts of meat and, like magic, turns them into tender, mouthwatering bites. It all has to do with cooking low and slow. There's a marked difference between roasting and baking. Baking transforms liquid — batter — into solids like cakes and cookies. Roasting does the opposite, taking meats and vegetables and breaking down their sinewy fibers into a near-gelatinous state.

Here are some simple tips to consider when roasting.

Bring food to room temperature before roasting: Tempering food is a simple but critical step that involves bringing an ingredient to room temperature so that it cooks more evenly. When roasting whole chickens, turkeys, Cornish hens and other birds, keep in mind that white and dark meat are best cooked to different temperatures.

To ensure your bird is roasting properly, position different parts toward hotter or cooler parts of the oven, or cover the breast with foil. It's important to rest meat after roasting, particularly larger cuts that continue to cook after you take them out of the oven. Letting the meat rest for 10 to 20 minutes is usually sufficient. Rested meat will cut more easily.

Remember that size matters: When roasting vegetables, cut veggies into pieces of the same size to ensure even cooking. The best meats to roast are large, tough cuts, such as pork shoulder. Don't roast thinner, less fatty cuts of meat such as boneless, skinless chicken breasts — they'll dry out. Good vegetables to roast are the heartier ones like beets, carrots, potatoes, squashes, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and sweet potatoes. 🥘



FOOD EDITOR
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PERFECTLY ROASTED RIB-EYE

- 1 (4- to 5-pound) rib-eye roast
- Olive oil, optional
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1-2 teaspoons black pepper, crushed or ground

Before roasting, bring the meat to room temperature. Preheat the oven to 325 F. If the roast is very lean, you may want to drizzle 1 to 2 tablespoons of olive oil over it. Sprinkle salt and pepper over the roast, then place it on a wire rack on a baking sheet. Keep in mind that your cooking time depends on the size of your roast.

Bake for approximately 25 to 30 minutes for every pound of meat for the roast to be cooked to medium. Adjust accordingly for your preferred level of doneness.

You should use a meat thermometer to determine when the roast is done. Push the thermometer all the way into the center of the roast. The ideal temperature for medium is 140-145 F, and the meat may become tough if cooked to well done, which is 155 F and above. Remove the meat from the oven when the inside temperature is about 10 degrees less than your desired level of doneness, because it will continue to cook as it rests.

Let the roast rest for at least 15 minutes, tented in aluminum foil to keep it warm, before carving to serve. Makes about 10 servings.

GARLIC BUTTER ROASTED CHICKEN

- 1 (4-pound) whole chicken, at room temperature, giblets and neck removed from cavity
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 lemon, halved
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 whole head of garlic, roughly peeled and cut in half horizontally through the middle crosswise
- 3 fresh whole rosemary sprigs

Preheat the oven to 425 F. Line a baking tray with foil, or lightly grease a roasting pan. Pat the chicken dry with paper towels.

Pour the melted butter, olive oil, wine and juice squeezed from one of the lemon halves over the chicken, under the skin and inside the cavity. Season the chicken liberally with salt and pepper on the outside and inside the cavity, then sprinkle the parsley over it. Rub the minced garlic over the chicken, mixing all the ingredients together over the chicken and under the skin.

Stuff the garlic head into the chicken cavity, along with the rosemary sprigs and the squeezed lemon half. Tie the legs together with kitchen string. Place the chicken, breast-side up, onto a baking sheet or roasting pan and roast for 1 hour and 15-20 minutes, basting halfway through cooking time, until its juices run clear when you pierce the chicken thigh with a skewer.

Baste again, then turn on the broiler to high and broil the bird for 2-3 minutes or until the skin is crisp and golden. Keep an eye on this process, because it can burn quickly.

Remove the chicken from the oven, cover it with foil and allow it to rest for 10 minutes before serving. Drizzle it with the pan juices, and serve it with the remaining lemon half cut into wedges or slices.



Roasted Vegetable Medley

- 3 zucchini squash, cut lengthwise into fourths, then sliced into bite-sized pieces
- 3 yellow squash, cut lengthwise into fourths, then sliced into bite-sized pieces
- 1 red bell pepper, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 red onion, cut into wedges
- 8 ounces whole mushrooms
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar, or more to taste
- 1 tablespoon rosemary leaves
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

Preheat the oven to 450 F. Spray a large baking sheet with cooking spray.

Mix all of the cut-up vegetables and garlic in a large bowl. Add olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Toss until all the vegetables are covered. Add rosemary leaves and salt, and toss again.

Roast the vegetables for 30-40 minutes, stirring once, until they are brown on the outside edges and tender on the inside. Makes 6-8 servings.



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