

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2022

CONNECTION

Gourd-eous pursuit

Sam Ripley's slow-
growing side hustle

COOPERATIVE
APPROACH

FARM STAYS



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Faster broadband benefits rural America

As the chief executive officer of NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, I am proud to represent 850 small, independent broadband providers who are offering some of the highest possible broadband speeds to some of the most remote parts of the country. Thanks to NTCA members, many rural Americans have higher internet speeds than I have where I live just outside Washington, D.C.

We currently have a once-in-a-generation opportunity through billions of dollars of funding recently made available by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other federal programs to bridge the digital divide and bring broadband to those who still lack it. As broadband is deployed thanks to this funding, we must ensure that recipients are using it to provide the best possible services.

Recently, Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel initiated a process to redefine what it means to have broadband-speed internet, raising the standard. This move continues us down the path needed to give rural residents the internet service they not only need but also deserve as they connect to vital resources like telemedicine, online education, employment opportunities and much more.

A new, more realistic, standard provides a range of benefits, including clarifying the true needs of rural areas and the funding required to serve them.

We have long advocated that, as a nation, we need to aim higher and do better when it comes to setting broadband objectives. We applaud Chairwoman Rosenworcel's efforts. We look forward to continuing to work with the FCC and other agencies to bridge the digital divide. 📶

A bridge to the future

Your communications provider is your link to vital resources

The digital world increasingly weaves its way into our lives, replacing formerly physical resources, tasks and tools. Consider restaurants, for example. For some, scanning a QR code with your phone to view the options online has replaced physical menus.

Rapid expansion of digital resources was a trend before the pandemic, but it's only accelerated in the years since.

In an article this year for Wired — “The Digital Divide Is Coming for You” — Bhaskar Chakravorti, dean of global business for The Fletcher School at Tufts University in Massachusetts, described having broadband and mobile internet as table stakes. Without those services, you don't exist digitally, he says.

Your rural internet service provider is committed to bridging the digital divide between you and vital resources like these:

BANKING



STREAMING TV



HEALTH CARE RECORDS



GOVERNMENT RESOURCES



EVENT TICKETS



WEATHER ALERTS



GAMING



HOME SALES AND PURCHASES



COLLEGE APPLICATIONS



What's the password?

How to build — and remember — strong passwords

It's difficult to do anything online without piling up a few passwords. Using the same one for multiple sites can leave your private information vulnerable to cyberattacks, and devising strong passwords full of random letters and symbols can make them impossible to remember.

A good password doesn't have to be unintelligible, but it does need to be random enough to avoid any clear patterns. Here are a few helpful tips for building passwords that will keep your online accounts secure without forcing you to hit the "Forgot my password" link every time you want to log in.

At least 12 characters — the longer your password, the more difficult it will be to crack. In general, you should create passwords with a minimum of 12 to 14 characters. But more is always better.

Change it up — using a mix of different characters like numbers, symbols, capital and lowercase letters makes your passwords stronger.

Avoid full words — using your favorite team's name as a password

doesn't cut it anymore. In fact, you should avoid using any full words you might find in the dictionary. That goes for any common phrases, too.

Diceware — one exception to the above rule is the Diceware method. By stringing truly random words together, you can build a secure passphrase that is easier to remember than a jumble of letters and numbers. To help with this process, search for the Diceware Password Generator. It can randomly select between two and eight words to build your passphrase.

Avoid obvious substitutions — "Password" doesn't become stronger if you change it to "P@ssword." Avoid substituting obvious symbols for letters. If it has occurred to you, it has probably occurred to a hacker.

Go to the manager — if you're having trouble keeping track of all your logins, a password manager can help. Programs like Dashlane, LastPass and Keeper manage your passwords across numerous sites and devices, making it easier to avoid repeats. All you need to remember is one strong password, and you're set. 🗝



Tired of passwords?

Apple may have the answer

At its Worldwide Developers Conference earlier this year, Apple demonstrated a new "passkeys" feature that may spell the end for passwords.

Rather than inputting a password for every site you visit, passkeys would use a biometric sign-in like the Touch ID or Face ID that currently exists on iPhones and iPads. Websites and apps on non-Apple devices would provide a QR code that sends authentication to the user's phone or tablet.

Just a month earlier, Apple joined with Google and Microsoft to support the development of new passwordless logins on both mobile and desktop devices. So, even if passkeys don't crack the code, you may not need to juggle passwords for much longer.

The Power of a Cooperative

Your voice guides our mission

When it comes to a for-profit business, some would say a company is what it sells. The nature of the product defines the culture, the business's interactions with customers and how it spreads its message. For instance, a manufacturer with a production plant creating physical goods is fundamentally different than a local real estate agency or medical facility.



KEVIN BEYER
Chief Executive Officer

The day-to-day realities of the many job roles and policies needed to make that product possible can shape how a business operates, how consumers view it and even how employees view themselves. For Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, there's no doubt about our products or the expertise needed to make them possible. Simply put, we know rural communications better than anyone. Our roots are in telephone networks. Technology changes every day, and our cooperatives have been at the cutting edge with our fiber optic network. Decades ago, your board of directors made the forward-thinking decision to invest in fiber-to-the-home, and we're now far more than just a telephone company.

Today, we're a true communications hub using fast internet service to link you to the information you need. Our systems keep pace with the latest innovations to create the best experience for you. Now, telephone services are only a single part of that product mix — one component of the complex, powerful and reliable infrastructure we've created to link our community to all the resources now at our fingertips. Streaming television and music. Telemedicine and online learning. Movies and social media. These are all modern necessities, and we make it possible for you to connect to them.

Our technical experts have the skills to maintain and support the latest systems. We train our staff to not only anticipate the questions you may have about your services, but also to have the knowledge to provide clear answers.

At a very basic level, the services we provide do define Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone — at least in part. You see, we're more than simply a communications company. We are also part of a national community of organizations responsible for bringing services to areas larger national companies would not serve.

Unlike businesses that put profit or stock values above all else, cooperatives proudly go a different direction. We are member-owned — yes, you own a part of this company — and we put your needs and the needs of the communities we serve first.

Does that mean we're not worried about income? Of course not. We're vigilant stewards of the cooperative's finances. In a world of escalating costs and ever-changing technology, that's no small task.

As a cooperative, though, we're also governed by you through a board of directors elected by you. Other communications companies can't say the same, particularly the large national providers. We are part of the community, devoted to making life here better for everyone. In fact, that's a central principle of every cooperative — concern for the community.

We support local organizations and businesses through donations, scholarships and more. The members of our team live here, shop here and enjoy our rural way of life just as you do.

Together we've created Farmers Mutual Telephone and Federated Telephone, and we couldn't be prouder to serve you, our friends, our family, our neighbors and our cooperative members. Thank you. 📞

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POWERED BY FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY
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Farmers Mutual Telephone Company

301 Second St. S.
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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On the Cover:



In 2016, Sam Ripley planted a few pumpkin seeds, starting Sam's Pumpkin Patch. It's grown into a popular fall destination. See story Page 12.

© Magdalena Kucova/Adobe Stock

Unwind this weekend



Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone wishes you a relaxing Labor Day weekend. In recognition of the holiday, our offices will be closed on **Monday, Sept. 5.**

OCTOBER IS CYBERSECURITY MONTH

As your internet provider, Farmers Mutual Telephone and Farmers Telephone want to raise awareness of the importance of cybersecurity to combat phishing and social engineering attacks. Here are a handful of tips:

- **Slow down:** Everyone is busy these days. Don't rush through your inbox clicking on unknown links. Think twice about unfamiliar links.
- **Ditch duplicated passwords:** Consider using a password manager to create unique passwords that help protect your data.
- **Multifactor authentication:** This requires additional identification such as a unique, one-time passcode sent by text or email.
- **Keep software up to date:** Software companies frequently update their products once a vulnerability is found. Setting devices to automatically update ensures you have the latest, and most secure, version.
- **Add antivirus software:** To protect against malware and other email attacks, install antivirus programs and firewalls to defend against compromised websites and online threats.



Employee Milestone!

Please help us celebrate **Aaron Roggenbuck's 25-year anniversary** with Farmers Mutual Telephone and Federated Telephone.



October is National Cooperative Month

What makes cooperatives different?

Cooperatives serve an important role in bringing high-speed broadband to rural America. Unlike the for-profit providers, the co-op mission is to serve the membership, following seven basic principles:

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Members' Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern for the Community

Starting early

Exploring the landscapes of rural farm retreats

Story by ANNE BRALY

Cock-a-doodle-doo! It's time to rise and shine. Nothing beats waking up to the sounds of nature, which you may experience by staying on a working farm as landowners across America open their properties to overnight guests.

Farm stays, or agritourism, can range from overnights at U-pick fruit operations to on-farm wedding venues. You might find cabins, rustic accommodations, RV sites with full hookups, rustic campsites, full-service bed-and-breakfast establishments, retreat centers, barns or guest houses. But there's one thing all can offer: exceptional opportunities to connect with the land, the agrarian lifestyle and much-needed R&R.

Karen and Paul Schmidt became the fifth generation of farmers on their Southeastern Minnesota farm near Preston when they moved from Iowa in 1995. It's a large working tract that's certified organic, and one of the couple's goals when they began farming was to teach and share sustainable practices. Five years ago, they purchased an adjoining 60-acre farm that came with an 1890s guest house — it was ideal for the Schmidts to offer farm stays.

The home, Karen says, offers overnight guests a good deal of privacy, and she points them in the right direction, one she hopes will help them gain an understanding of the farm and the land.

"They're self-directed," she says. "No activities are staged for them, but there's always something happening on the farm."

The farm borders Forestville State Park, so wildlife and recreational opportunities are abundant. Hunt for fossils in the creek bed and watch as bald eagles soar overhead. At night, you might enjoy a cup of hot chocolate in front of a roaring bonfire. Feed the chickens or hike the trails. The

setting is beautiful, and the farm animals are engaging. "Learning experiences occur naturally," Karen says. "Many of our guests often seem to be looking for a rural experience in a safe and meaningful way. Our farm has a lot of natural outdoor recreational opportunities. It provides families an opportunity to have outdoor experiences similar to camping in addition to what's happening at the farm."

The guest house comes equipped with a fully stocked kitchen so guests can prepare their own meals. There are four bedrooms with room enough for eight people. The majority of guests come from urban areas around the Midwest, like Minneapolis just two hours north. "We serve as a meet-up for family members coming from distant states and occasionally other countries," Karen adds.

Find out more about the farm at myschmidtfarm.com or book a stay at vrbo.com.

Nightly rate: \$203 (average)



Visitors to Schmidt Farm experience a true working farm, adding to the adventure.



Valley Springs Farm Bed and Breakfast in Reedsburg, Wisconsin, offers soothing scenery and experiences like cooking classes.

Photo courtesy of Valley Springs Farm B&B



Schmidt Farm includes a guest house built in the 1890s.

In addition to offering lodging, Karen and Paul Schmidt work to teach and share methods of sustainable organic farming near Preston, Minnesota.



Photos courtesy of Schmidt Farm.

The following list will give you more ideas if you're thinking of partaking in agritourism:

Dutch Lake Farm Guest House

Howard Lake, Minnesota

This contemporary guest house in Howard Lake offers stunning prairie views and is near Dutch Lake. It's perfect for a base of operations during a stay that may include launching a canoe and checking out the flora and fauna of southeastern Minnesota's waterways. Or enjoy an invigorating hike through the woods and around cornfields and pastures dotted with bales of hay. The farm has more than 80 acres to explore. Mornings call for a full, complementary breakfast after a restful night spent at this private sanctuary — a one-bedroom, one-bath home on the lake.

Learn more about Dutch Lake Farm House on Facebook or at [airbnb.com](https://www.airbnb.com).

Price range: \$150-\$185 per night

Briggs Outdoors Farm House

Winona, Minnesota

Get ready for a memorable getaway at this farm located about 30 minutes from downtown Winona. The location is filled with family activities and adventures like wood-fired cooking, guided deer hunting, bonfires, hayrides, birding, wilderness survival, animal tracking, meditation, berry picking and stargazing. After a full day of outdoor fun, spend the night in a roomy, three-bedroom farmhouse that can sleep up to 10 guests. It's also the perfect place for events and gatherings. The views of the bluffs are unbeatable, and a stay will put you in your happy place.

Check it out at [briggsoutdoors.com](https://www.briggsoutdoors.com).

Nightly rate: Weekends are typically booked for weddings. Sunday-Thursday, prices are \$150 per night. No charge for kids under 17. For last-minute weekend availability, email briggsoutdoors@gmail.com or call 507-450-9902.

Valley Springs Farm Bed and Breakfast

Reedsburg, Wisconsin

Rock away an afternoon on the front porch of this charming farmhouse and take in peaceful views of the surrounding pastures. Hike the trails along country roads and through the fields. Sit by the campfire at night and enjoy clear, starry skies. And each morning, wake up to a made-from-scratch breakfast. It's all part of a farm stay at Valley Springs Farm.

But there's more. Sign up for a cooking class and learn a thing or two about how foods were prepared and stored "back in the day" by canning and fermenting foods fresh from the garden. Or, learn how to make pies like grandma did, and work on other treats like salsas and scones. Classes are \$25 and include all supplies. Plus, you'll take home whatever you make. Family picnics are available, too, and include burgers, dogs and sides with all the fixings for \$45. And there's lots to do in nearby Reedsburg, from hiking to biking, shopping and dining. There are three rooms available, all with luxury linens. Discounts are available for booking three nights or longer.

Visit the farm at [valleyspringsfarmbb.com](https://www.valleyspringsfarmbb.com).

Nightly rate: \$110-\$132. Family packages with two rooms booked together are \$192 per night. 📍



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 711. 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): 877-243-2823

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. Go to: fcc.gov/general/minnesota-trs.

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: fcc.gov/ipcts.

Computer (ASCII): 1-800-627-3529

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

Hearing Carry Over (HCO): 1-800-627-3529

HCO allows a person who can hear clearly but who has very limited or no speech capability to make 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: sprintrelay.com.

Spanish Relay: 1-877-627-5448

Spanish-speaking individuals 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, deafblind 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: 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
1-800-657-3775

Emergency Assistance

TTY callers should dial 911 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

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:
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. Online: mn.gov/deaf-hard-of-hearing; Voice: 1-800-657-3663; ASL via VP: 651-964-1514

Source: Minnesota Commerce Department

Classic cinema

Morris Theatre provided the original 'screen time' experience

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS



A message of hope as the projector went dark at the beginning of the pandemic.

Movie theaters transcend big screens and popcorn. For rural communities like Morris, the theater is an important cultural resource and gathering place. According to Morris Theatre Cooperative Board Member David Ericksen, it became “the town living room.”

“If you look at advertisements from the '40s and '50s,” David says, “they’re showing two features a night, a couple of shorts, a news special and a serial.”

Built in 1940 by local entrepreneur Boniface Benfield, Morris Theatre adorns the town with its streamline moderne style of art deco design — complete with curved plaster, neon lights and a towering marquee. After the theater’s former owner, Curt Barber, retired in 2008, a group of concerned community members banded together to save the theater by forming a cooperative. Today, the cooperative is preserving the building for future generations.

Bart Finzel, professor of economics at University of Minnesota Morris and founding member of the Morris Theatre Cooperative, says the co-op model is “a way that small towns can hang on to businesses that are vital to the lifeblood of the place.”

Cooperatives are viable because of the member-owners’ sense of investment. “If you own something and have some control over it, I think you’re more likely to patronize it,” he says.

Keeping the theater operational requires

the support of members, local businesses, attorneys and the entire community. Without them, David says, “We wouldn’t be here, for sure.”

The community’s work to sustain the theater wasn’t always predictable. Bart describes the chaos that accompanied operating the old film projectors before the theater transitioned to digital. “We had some teenagers who learned the technology ... so there are stories of a film going wild in the projection room and people having to roll the film back together,” he says.

Membership fees support the 82-year-old theater’s operation, maintenance and building rehabilitation. “We’ve been doing something every year or two consistently,” David says. That includes work to the stucco, marquee and concession area, as well as the creation of a second screen. Members benefit from discounted concessions, party rentals and a free movie with the purchase of 10 tickets.

While the theater building may be old, the Morris Theatre Cooperative’s strategies about spreading the word and entertaining customers and members are modern. Morris Theatre uses Facebook, Twitter and email to promote movie showings and events. “We depend on that to get the schedules out,” David says. Looking to the future, high-speed

internet from Acira could even allow the theater to stream live events like Broadway shows, operas and sporting events.

The cooperative model the theater uses continues to work for Morris, as it has for other area co-ops. “Just as local citizens organized their need for telephone service and created the Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone cooperatives a couple generations ago to get the job done, members of the Morris Theatre Cooperative came together to collectively meet a need to keep an important asset in their community,” Bart says.

Morris Theatre will continue to be a hub for the community since the cooperative model empowers members to grow and sustain this important cultural resource. “If you talk to people and kick ideas around, and if you’re willing to give some time and put a few dollars into it, you’d be amazed,” David says. 📺



More than 200 cooperative members have raised \$150,000 to support the Morris Theatre.

Photos contributed by the Morris Theatre

LEARN MORE about the Morris Theatre Cooperative and how you can get involved online at morristheatre.net. You can follow the theater on Facebook @MorrisTheatre and Twitter @MorrisMNTheatre.

Find your wavelength

Podcasts let you tune in to your passions



Podcasts have seen an explosion in popularity in recent years, thanks to their variety and the connections hosts forge with their listeners. If you've never listened to a podcast before, you can think of them like prerecorded radio shows on your favorite topics.

But, because listeners can download podcasts to a phone or computer and play them at any time, audiences can go as deep or as light as they want on a given topic. Podcasts also don't require the full attention video does, meaning you can drive to work, answer emails or cook dinner — all while continuing to enjoy your favorite programming.

In the early days of podcasting, following your favorite show meant navigating a technological obstacle course of downloads and synced devices. Today, the process is as easy as downloading an app.

Apps like Apple Podcasts and Stitcher make it easy to search thousands of the latest podcasts and subscribe to your

favorites for free. If you have the Spotify app, you're already set. Just go to the Search tab and choose "Podcasts & Shows" to start adding new discoveries to your list.

Not sure where to start? Here are a few of our favorites to get you going:

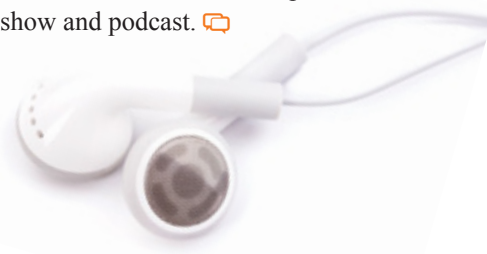
► **"Criminal"** — One of the first true crime hits, even before "Serial" hit the scene, "Criminal" tells the "stories of people who've done wrong, been wronged, or gotten caught somewhere in the middle." Going beyond tales of murder, it takes a critical look at the impact of crime on its victims and perpetrators.

► **"This American Life"** — "This American Life" has been on the air since 1995, so there are plenty of stories to catch up on. Described as little movies for radio, each episode is also a little different. But they all tell the true, entertaining and often surprising stories of the people and events shaping our American lives.

► **"The Big Picture"** — Struggling to keep up with the latest movie releases? Hosts Sean Fennessey and Amanda Dobbins run down all the movies you need to see while also discussing old favorites and interviewing the people behind them twice a week.

► **"Lore"** — Truth is scarier than fiction in this documentary podcast series that explores the dark corners of history. Gather around the audio campfire to listen in on true historical tales, legends and folklore biweekly.

► **"Sound Opinions"** — Chicago music critics Jim DeRogatis and Greg Kot know everyone's a critic. Each week, they get together to discuss music's greats, talk shop with artists and share their opinions on the latest releases on this independent radio show and podcast. 📻





The newest spectator sport

Streaming platforms like Twitch let gamers build massive followings

Gamers have thriving online communities, including platforms like Twitch, that give millions of fans from around the world a place to share their knowledge and experience, while also providing countless hours of entertainment.

WHY WATCH INSTEAD OF PLAY?

Staying up to date with the latest and greatest video games can be expensive and time consuming. Sometimes game descriptions and reviews aren't enough — it's better to see a game in action. Avid gamers can check out a Twitch stream to see if a game is right for them, gain insight into a game's features, and find updates and creative fixes to problems. Many people subscribe to Twitch channels just for the entertainment value.

It's also a way to engage with others in the gaming community. Live broadcasts

feature an interactive chat where viewers can talk with the streamer and other viewers. These connections with like-minded people and interesting personalities keep people interested and coming back for more.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF STREAMING YOUR GAMING?

There are many incentives for live-streamers. The revenue potential can be sky high — some streamers have built careers, earning millions and striking deals with game publishers to get exclusive early access to the newest games.

The higher a streaming channel's subscriber count, the more opportunities the streamer has for exclusive marketing partnerships. Viewers can also donate to the channel during the broadcast. The biggest Twitch streamers get most of their income from paid subscription fees. 💬

While the Twitch website and app are still the most popular, other platforms have sprouted up as well.

YouTube

YouTube's gaming section, youtube.com/gaming, has functions similar to Twitch, and it's gaining popularity with amateur streamers because its optimized search engine makes it easier for a beginner's content to get noticed.

The audience is shared with YouTube, so the potential pool of viewers is vastly greater than on Twitch. For streamers, YouTube has greater potential for earnings from advertisements.

Facebook Gaming

Facebook Gaming is growing as existing Facebook users check out the video gaming hub that can be easily accessed through the main social media site or FB.gg.

There's also a Facebook Gaming app enthusiasts can download to discover content, connect with other gamers and casually play mobile games. Like the other popular streaming platforms, Facebook allows users easy access to uploads from their favorite streamers. But, like its main site, Facebook Gaming users can join groups and like topics to tailor their timelines to their specific interests.



Carving His Niche

Sam's Pumpkin Patch teaches life lessons of personal growth

Story by JEREMY WOOD

Sam Ripley had a pretty good idea of what to expect when he first planted pumpkin seeds on the family farm. The Minnesota soil and summer weather have been converting seeds into harvests since long before the entrepreneurial teenager imagined starting his business.

But Sam, now 17, had no way to predict the explosive growth of Sam's Pumpkin Patch from a simple roadside stand to an essential fall destination for families in western Minnesota and beyond.

"Last fall, we just posted about it on Facebook, and we didn't really know what would happen," Sam says. "We had no idea how many people might show up. We ended up having at least 500 people on some days, and close to

5,000 people came for the year. We were selling out of everything. It was a huge success."

"Everything" at Sam's Pumpkin Patch includes numerous varieties of U-pick pumpkins and gourds, light concessions and hot State Fair Mini Donuts. Visitors can also enjoy a tractor hayride, the barrel train, a petting zoo and much more.

TAKING ROOT

Sam planted his business's first seeds in 2016, when he decided to develop an acre of the family farm to operate a small roadside pumpkin stand. In 2020, he began accommodating private groups who wanted to pick their own pumpkins for jack-o-lanterns and fall-themed décor.

Last year, he added another acre of pumpkins as well as the ancillary activities and opened to the public. Guests

came from near and far to celebrate the season. "We had one person who was visiting here from Australia who wanted to come to my pumpkin patch," Sam says, adding that he's welcomed many guests from far-flung locales like Sioux Falls and the Twin Cities. "It's a pretty big honor to have people come from so far away. Making all these different, new connections and seeing all the smiles on faces makes me so happy. When kids are leaving crying in their parents' arms because they want to stay, that's a good feeling."

The payoffs — both financial and emotional — haven't come without sacrifice. Sam says he planted and watered the entire patch by hand last year, using a walk-behind tiller to prepare the soil





Youngsters experience the personal touch of the petting zoo.



Children enjoy a tour of the farm during a field trip.



Sam Ripley has spent several years growing a pumpkin patch at his family's farm.

for 5,000 seeds. He tilled the land with a tractor this year, with help from a few friends and family members. In the fall, he'll work from 3 to 10 p.m. each day after school to get ready for the harvest.

"There's just so many different things that need to be done," he says, adding that he will hire a group of helpers in the fall to operate the patch. "I wanted a pumpkin patch because it has so many different ways to bring in revenue. That's why I try to find a way to do as many things as I can."

Sam's idea couldn't have sprouted without the assistance of his parents, who acted as chauffeurs until he got his

driver's license and lent their signatures to business-related paperwork. Another source of inspiration and mentorship is his grandfather, who owns Ripley's Inc. in Erhard, the family excavation business where Sam works part time. "My grandpa has really helped me out with some of the things that need to get built," he says.

A NEW SEASON BEGINS

Sam is working on adding activities for the 2022 season, highlighting gemstone mining as something he'd like to offer. He's also hoping to expand the concessions menu to include more hot food and has plans to grow and pop his own popcorn. He will update the business's website, Facebook and Instagram pages as he finalizes ideas.

Eager guests can also log on to find updated information about the opening date, business hours and more. The exact opening date will depend on the growth of the crop throughout the summer, but Sam is hoping to welcome visitors on the second or third weekend of September.

Fiber internet from Farmers Mutual Telephone helps with his marketing, which is mainly digital. The business's Facebook page has more than 1,000 followers. "We try to be really active on Facebook, so we grow that way," Sam says. "But it's a small community, so word of mouth is always going to be the biggest thing."

While the patch will be open for customers mainly on weekends, Sam will continue to host school field trips on the farm on Friday mornings.

Sam is excited for 2022, though he says he isn't sure about the long-term plan for the pumpkin patch. He is starting his senior year of high school and intends to go to college with an eye toward owning his own business as a full-time venture. "Obviously, we're doing the pumpkin patch this year, but after this year, I can't really guarantee what's going to happen because I'm not sure where I'm going to go," he says. "I wanted to do it for sure this year and then see what happens — see how this year goes and then take it from there." 🍵

Photos contributed by Sam Ripley



Hundreds of pumpkins dot the landscape at Sam's Pumpkin Patch.

It's time to go LOW AND SLOW



Cooking ribs at a low temperature for a long time tenderizes the meat and adds delightful flavor.

The aroma of smoke wafting through the air as meat slowly cooks goes hand in hand with a lazy summer afternoon. Smoking is not the same as grilling. There's a science to it that scares off some cooks, but break it down step by step, and you can become quite adept at making tender briskets and fall-off-the-bone ribs.

Smoking, more commonly known as barbecuing, takes time and patience. Defined simply, the technique takes a tough piece of meat and cooks it slowly over indirect heat for extended periods — often 12 to 16 hours and sometimes even more — while the smoke flavors the meat and gives it its mouthwatering flavor and texture. Any expert will tell you that the key to the best barbecue — that kind that wins competitions — is cooking it low and slow.

Cooking over high heat tends to dry the meat out very quickly. Any moisture within the meat is essentially blasted out, leaving it tough, dry and difficult to chew. Smoking meat slowly at a low temperature, on the other hand, keeps the moisture from evaporating too quickly, allowing you to achieve the perfect combination of tenderness and juiciness.

Here are two recipes that are good for beginners.

The 3-2-1 rib recipe is one many home smokers use. This method is easy and generally foolproof, creating ribs that are so tender you can pull the meat off the bone with your fingers. And pork butt is basically a no-brainer. Just rub it down with your favorite blend of seasonings or use the recipe that follows. Place it on the smoker and within just a few hours, you'll have tender pork perfect for sandwiches. Add a side of beans and some potato salad, and you'll have the makings of a beautiful, tasty summer dinner.



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

Photography by MARK GILLILAND | Food Styling by RHONDA GILLILAND

3-2-1 RIBS METHOD

1 rack of ribs
Your favorite rub
Your favorite barbecue sauce

STEP THREE:

Liberally coat the ribs with rub and allow them to “marinate” while you bring the smoker to 225 F. Place the ribs in the smoker, and add whatever wood chunks you want — cherry or hickory are popular. Smoke the ribs for 3 hours, maintaining the 225 F temperature. If you are smoking thinner back ribs, you may want to smoke them for just 2 hours. Any longer, and you may find the ribs dry out too much.

STEP TWO:

The second stage is when the

meat tenderizes. Remove the ribs from the smoker and wrap them tightly in foil. This steams the meat and the result is tender, juicy ribs. Just before closing each rack of ribs in the foil, put a little bit of beer or apple juice in with the ribs. This helps the steaming process. Put the ribs, wrapped in foil, back in the smoker for 2 hours at 225 degrees.

STEP ONE:

This final stage is when you sauce the ribs. Use your favorite barbecue sauce to liberally coat the ribs on both sides before placing them back in the smoker for a final hour. The result should be a rack of ribs you'll never forget.



SMOKED BUTT

Smoked pork butt is a good one for beginners. The meat is not expensive, and the result is a mouthful of summer.

- 1 (7-8 pound) bone-in pork butt
- Olive oil
- Water

Dry rub:

- 1/4 cup light brown sugar packed
- 2 tablespoons black pepper, coarsely ground
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon dried minced onions
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Spritz:

- 1/4 cup apple juice
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar

Prepare the smoker: Fill the hopper of your smoker with wood pellets, applewood, hickory, pecan or cherry. Start the smoker on the smoke setting for 5 to 10 minutes. Increase heat to 250 F.

Fill a small baking dish with water and set aside.

Prepare the pork butt: Place all dry rub ingredients in a small bowl and stir with a fork to combine. Place pork butt on a baking sheet and rub the entire butt with olive oil. Sprinkle the seasonings over it and rub them in, covering every bit of the butt.

Place the baking dish filled with water on the grate on one side of the smoker.

Fill a small spray bottle with the apple juice and apple cider vinegar and set aside.

Place pork shoulder on the grate and close the lid. Keep the smoker temperature around 250 to 275 F while smoking during these first several hours. Smoke for approximately 4 hours, spritzing with the spray bottle every hour.

Check the internal temperature of the pork using a meat thermometer. By this time, the pork should be at least 145 F.

Completely spritz the pork one last time and carefully wrap it in aluminum foil. Place pork back into the smoker and lower temperature to 225 F. Smoke pork about



A perfectly cooked pork butt is a great start to a summer sandwich.

another 4 hours, but do not spritz during this stage of cooking.

Check the internal temperature of the pork shoulder using a meat thermometer. You're looking for your pork shoulder to be about 200 F. Anywhere from 195 to 205 F is a good range. Remove pork from the smoker and let rest for at least 20 minutes but up to 2 hours. Shred or chop as desired. 🍴

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