

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2022

CONNECTION

Gathering Spot

Creating community at
Madison Mercantile

HOCKEY SKILLS

TRIMMING THE TREE



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Rural broadband thrives in 2022

The commitment and professionalism of rural broadband providers creates lasting and substantive improvements, bringing essential services that bridge the gap in internet performance between rural and metropolitan areas. In many cases, NTCA members offer even more robust services than those available in larger cities.

In recent years, Congress has passed billions in funding for rural broadband. I was fortunate to attend a White House ceremony last year for the signing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which included over \$60 billion for broadband projects.

NTCA has worked to ensure this funding goes to communities that need it most, as well as to providers, such as yours, with a long history of servicing their neighbors with the highest-quality broadband.

While broadband expansion is a priority, we've continued our focus on advocacy, including working with the Federal Communications Commission to ensure the long-term viability of the Universal Service Fund. It's a program that helps Americans in hard-to-serve areas keep pace with services found in more densely populated communities.

We've also expanded our Smart Rural Community program to highlight the great things robust broadband access brings to rural America — it's not just cities that are "smart!" Over 240 providers are part of the program. Visit smartruralcommunity.org for more information.

As we celebrate our wins from this year, we're looking forward to an even better 2023. 📶

TO ALL WHO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Thank you

FOR ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Fast internet access is essential for rural communities to thrive in a fast-changing, highly connected world.



High-Speed Internet



Voice Communications



Videoconferencing



Telehealth



Business-level Data Tools



Online Education



Streaming Video & Music

Professionals in your community make this possible — working daily to help you lead a better life.

Thank you for all you do!

Business is booming

Apps help small business owners thrive

Running a small business is no easy task. There's a long list of things to keep track of, from inventory and sales to payroll and budgeting. It can get overwhelming staying ahead of the curve.

Thankfully, there's a wide array of apps geared toward making the life of a small business owner easier. Listed below are some of the best apps in 2022 for small businesses.

POINT OF SALE SYSTEMS

These systems allow small businesses to complete sales and ring up customers. According to NerdWallet, restaurants require POS systems that provide coordination and table management, while a retail store requires inventory management features.

Square — The POS offered by the financial tech company Square meets all these requirements and much more. Square is easy to use, offering transparent pricing, live support and compatibility with iPhone, iPad and Android devices. The first magnetic stripe credit card reader is free, and there is even a free plan available for small businesses that don't require advanced functions. While many payment processors have hidden monthly fees, Square doesn't charge by the month. Instead, you pay 2.6% + 10 cents for each credit card transaction for unlimited devices.

ACCOUNTING AND BUDGETING

Accounting software helps small businesses that may not be able to hire a full-time, in-house accountant. With these apps, you can track profit margins, revenues, expenses and budgets to understand the health of your business.

Intuit QuickBooks — Intuit QuickBooks is the industry standard and leader for small business accounting software in 2022, according to NerdWallet. It offers a multitude of service tiers, so it can easily be scaled to the size of the business it serves. It is accessible anywhere from QuickBooks online to the cloud-based version. Some of QuickBooks' best features include a full suite of reports, double-entry accounting, ease of accessibility and sharing with outside accountants, live service bookkeeping support and easy mobile access. Pricing is \$25 a month with other monthly payment tiers (\$50, \$80 and \$180 respectively).

PAYROLL

Paying employees on time is essential to operating a business. Extra help tracking hours and payments can allow small businesses owners to give attention to many other daily aspects of running their companies.



Patriot Payroll — While there are lots of payroll apps on the market, a majority of them are so high-priced that the cost outweighs the benefit of extra help for smaller companies. Patriot Payroll has an affordable price point — \$10 a month, plus \$4 an employee — while offering the same services and benefits as its more expensive counterparts. These services include a one-month free trial, HR support and coverage for up to 100 employees.

INVENTORY

Tracking inventory is a crucial part of staying ahead of the curve for any business. It is no easy task without help, which is why large corporations dedicate entire teams and extensive software programs just for inventory.

Sortly — With built-in barcode scanning that can track stock across multiple warehouses, Sortly has everything you need to manage inventory on the go. It offers both barcode and QR code scanning, giving you the flexibility to use what works best for your business. It even has an offline mode, so a signal interruption won't slow you down. Keep scanning incoming and outgoing items and seamlessly sync up once you're back online. 📶

Annual reflections

Together, we make our community better

As the final days of 2022 unfold and we enter a season of celebration and remembrance, I enjoy the opportunity to reflect on this place we call home and the role of Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone.



KEVIN BEYER

Chief Executive Officer

Many of us lead lives where it seems the accelerator is always pushed to the floor. Between raising families, bustling careers, volunteering and embracing active pastimes, everyone is flying through life. But the holidays — while busy in their own way — are a chance to take solace and find respite in traditions like sharing family tall tales, great meals and a few belly laughs. We might even find quiet moments, if we're lucky.

During these times of reflection, I appreciate a theme that runs through our community — neighbors helping neighbors. In so many ways, these connections are what make rural places like ours special. We rally together in hard times. We celebrate good times as a community. We also embrace the teamwork needed to build for the

future, which is at the core of Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone's mission.

I will never forget this company's history or the role it plays, because it's far different than that of the for-profit businesses serving our nation's metropolitan areas. Rather than focusing on stock prices or maximizing profits, Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone were created to support our hometowns. When larger national companies ignored us, calling our communities too rural and small to be a sound investment, our founders stepped up. It began with telephone lines connecting homes and businesses. But the work did not stop there. Now, we provide a suite of modern communications tools and a fast and dependable internet network that would create envy in many of the largest cities.

This network is not something our leaders and staff did. It's a creation made possible by you and the people you see every day at the grocery store or at school events. An elected board of directors — residents who, just like you, depend on our services — set the standards and long-term goals we strive to achieve. We are a company made up of people devoted to helping their neighbors. Few other communications companies can say the same.

Does that make Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone special? Certainly, we're proud of the work we do because it benefits others. However, I fully appreciate that we're far from alone in having a goal of uplifting those around us. Our places of worship, schools, locally owned businesses, first responders and more bring that same spirit to their day-to-day missions.

It's this sentiment that also reminds me to appreciate those who served and sacrificed in the name of our nation. Veterans Day is Nov. 11. Please take a few minutes, at least, to appreciate the sons and daughters of this community who made the choice to serve. Rural areas like ours have a long history of service to the armed forces, something we should never forget. Truly, are there more profound examples of neighbors helping neighbors?

And during this time of celebration, I must thank everyone who is part of the Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone family. Every department — every individual — plays a vital part in bringing you the services you need in this fast-paced world.

From everyone at Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, have a wonderful Thanksgiving and a merry Christmas. 🍷

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POWERED BY FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY
AND FEDERATED TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE

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On the Cover:



Kris Shelstad creatively constructed a gathering place that serves many needs in the Madison community. See story Page 12.

Photo courtesy of Madison Mercantile

HAPPY Holidays & MERRY CHRISTMAS!

The employees of Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone hope you enjoy a holiday season filled with family and friends.

In observance of the holidays, our offices will be closed on the following dates: **Thanksgiving:** Thursday, Nov. 24, and Friday, Nov. 25

Christmas: Friday, Dec. 23, and Monday, Dec. 26

New Year's Day: Monday, Jan. 2

DO NOT CALL REGISTRY

The National Do Not Call Registry gives you a choice about whether or not to receive telemarketing calls. The registry applies to all telemarketers with the exception of businesses with whom you have an existing relationship and certain nonprofit and political organizations.

Commercial telemarketers are not allowed to call you if your number is listed on the registry. Consumers may register their residential telephone numbers, including wireless numbers, on the National Do Not Call Registry at no cost, either by telephone or via the internet.



To register by phone, call 1-888-382-1222. For TTY, call 1-866-290-4236.

You must call from the telephone number you wish to register. To obtain additional information, or to register online, please go to donotcall.gov.

Inclusion of your telephone number on the National Do Not Call registry is effective 31 days following registration.

You may remove your number from the list at any time. Farmers Mutual Telephone and Federated Telephone are happy to provide you with this information, as required by the Federal Communications Commission.

Spreading the cheer!

We're hosting our Holiday Open House on Friday, Dec. 9, from 8 a.m. to noon.

Stop by any of our three offices for coffee, hot cider and tasty treats.

Be sure to sign up for our door prizes. Check Facebook for further details.

SALUTING SERVICE Veterans Day is Friday, Nov. 11.

All of us at Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone are grateful to the men and women who have served in our nation's military. Thank you for your service and your families' sacrifices.

Welcome our new employees



SAMANTHA VAN EPS is a customer experience specialist. She has 13 years of experience in customer service. She also has a medical

background and has served as a first responder in Chokio since 2021. She and her husband, Brennan, moved to Chokio in

2017. They have three dogs, Jaxon, Rylee and Charlee.



MELISSE KUNKEL joins our team as a customer experience specialist. She has a background in customer service and as an accounting

assistant. Melissa lives in Madison with her significant other, Todd Siedschlag. She moved from Watertown, South Dakota eight years ago. Melissa has a daughter, Nicole, and two grandsons, Parker and Ryder. Her blended family with Todd includes three additional daughters, Kaitlyn, Kamryn and Karly, and a granddaughter arriving soon.

Don't get your tinsel in a tangle

Story by ANNE BRALY

Decorating the Christmas tree is one of the most beloved holiday traditions, but before you can adorn it with ornaments, take photos of the grandkids beneath its splendid boughs or open presents beside it, you've got to find one.

Visiting a Christmas tree farm can put you in the spirit of the season as you make family memories while supporting a local business. And you'll bring home the absolute freshest trees, wreaths and greenery possible, so everything will last much longer.

"Every year, it becomes more common to hear someone say, 'I used to come here with my parents as a kid, and now I'm bringing my kids,'" says Phil Hartley, owner of Pinestead Tree Farms in Isanti, Minnesota. Phil and his wife, Helen, got into the tree business back in 1983, but it didn't take long for business to outgrow their farm. They bought a larger parcel of land, planted more trees in 1986 and opened for business six years later. Since then, they've had customers return year after year. "Parents have watched our grandkids grow up, and we've watched their kids do so, too," Phil says.

A visit to a tree farm is more than cutting down a tree. At Pinestead, patrons can spend time in the gift shop and be amazed at the Hartleys' model train running full steam ahead anytime the gift shop is open. Phil had a model railroad as a youngster — both of his granddads and his father worked on the railroad, and Phil did, too, for a summer job in college.

His train in the gift shop started as a simple toy that chugged around a tree. Children loved to get their hands on it, though, so up it went on a raised track around the walls. Before long, a second track, several more train cars and scenery went in. Now, it's a popular attraction when folks come to get their trees.

Santa Claus also takes a break from the North Pole to visit, and folks can gather around the campfire and warm up with a cup of hot chocolate or roast a hot dog on weekends. "Next to greeting people, one of the most important things I can do is to hang around the campfire area and interact with them," Phil says.

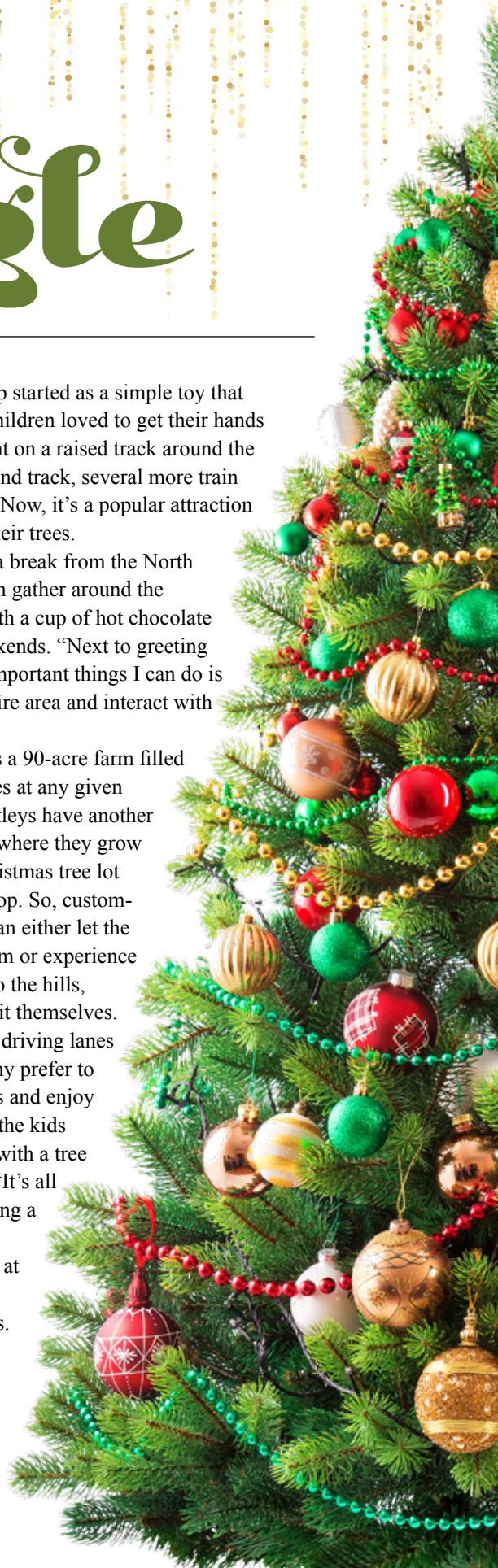
Pinestead Tree Farms is a 90-acre farm filled with 40 to 50 acres of trees at any given time. In addition, the Hartleys have another farm about 5 miles away where they grow trees for their pre-cut Christmas tree lot located next to the gift shop. So, customers have a choice: They can either let the Hartleys cut a tree for them or experience the tradition of hiking into the hills, finding a tree and cutting it themselves. "Although there are wide driving lanes throughout the fields, many prefer to take one of our large sleds and enjoy the experience of pulling the kids along and later returning with a tree on their sled," Phil says. "It's all about creating or continuing a blessed family tradition."

There's still more to do at Pinestead. Find out more at Pinesteadchristmastrees.com. 📱



Santa and Mrs. Claus visit Pinestead Tree Farms.

Photos courtesy of Phil Hartley





An elf helps lead families to the Fraser fir field.



Wreaths and other greenery make fragrant holiday decorations.

TREE FARMS ACROSS THE MINNESOTA

Goldenman Christmas Tree Farm, Zimmerman

Assortment of trees plus a gift shop and outdoor wedding chapel.

► goldenmanchristmastrees.com

Hinkemeyer Tree Farm, Rice

An assortment of trees. Mail letters to Santa, make s'mores at the campfire and take a horse-drawn carriage ride.

► hinkemeyertreefarm.com

Jan's Christmas Trees, Clear Lake

Assorted trees, plus horse-drawn carriage rides, bonfire and gift shop.

► janschristmastrees.com

Happy Land Tree Farms, Sandstone

This farm's trees have won grand champion prizes at the Minnesota State Fair multiple times. Hike or cross-country ski to find the perfect tree. Enjoy coffee, cider or a horse-drawn sleigh ride, then warm up in the gift shop or next to the bonfire.

► happylandtreefarms.com

Plants Beautiful Christmas Tree Farm, Parkers Prairie

Assorted trees, plus a snow hill for the kids and a fire ring for warming cold hands or roasting hot dogs from the concessions counter. On weekends, take a horse-drawn sleigh ride and get photos with St. Nick.

► christmastreesandwreaths.com

Fresh and so clean

Naturally, a newly cut tree is going to be fresher than one that's been on a lot for a while, but it still needs some TLC. Here are some tips to help your tree last the season:

- 🌲 Start with a healthy, vibrant tree. You're going to get that from a tree farm, but be sure to cut off any lower or dead branches.
- 🌲 Make a clean, straight cut across the bottom. Most tree farms will do this for you and drill a hole in the bottom if you have the kind of tree stand that needs one.
- 🌲 Water, water, water. Get the tree in water as soon as you come home, and continue to water every day.
- 🌲 Keep the tree cool and away from any heat source that will dry it out.
- 🌲 Use LED lights. They don't get as hot, though they won't give the traditional light you may desire.
- 🌲 After Christmas, recycle your Christmas tree. Many towns offer a free service that turns them into mulch.

Ready to share your videos?

Find the option right for you

Sharing a video can be as easy as posting it to social media, but what if you want to share privately with your friends and family? Here are some of the best services available.

YOUTUBE

This is the big in hosting videos. Once you upload a video on YouTube, you can designate your video as “private,” which means only those who have been invited can view the footage. The limitation on this method is that only up to 50 people can receive access.

The second way is to upload your video as “unlisted.” This means it will not show up on any search, but anyone with the link, which you can share through email, can watch it.

VIMEO

A YouTube competitor, Vimeo offers similar privacy options but also includes a password feature. However, you’ll need a paid subscription for the more comprehensive security features. The free version allows you to upload up to 500MB of videos per week for a total of 5GB per account. Premium plans range from \$7 to \$75 a month.

Why would you choose paid Vimeo over free YouTube? Vimeo supports better-quality audio, better video encoding and a higher bit rate.

GOOGLE PHOTOS/APPLE ICLOUD

Google Photos, included in every Android phone and tablet, is an easy way to share video. It offers the ability to create a shared folder with your family and friends and notifies each member when there is a new image or video. Google Photos can also be accessed on the web, and there is an iOS app.

For those who prefer to stick to Apple devices, iCloud allows users to share a folder, which can be viewed, downloaded and updated across devices. iOS users can also create a shared folder inside their Photos app by going to “albums” and hitting the plus sign in the top left corner.

DROPBOX

One of the most popular cloud storage options also makes it easy to share a video folder with family and friends, either by granting them individual access or by creating a link that anyone can use to view the folder. Dropbox’s free service limits users to 2GB of storage, but that should be enough for most family users. Those chronicling every day in their lives may want to splurge on an upgrade. Paid plans

start at \$9.99 a month, giving you 2TB of storage space.

FACEBOOK

Wait, wasn’t social media off the table? Not if you use Facebook Messenger, which allows you to create groups where you can privately share photos and video. You can easily add and delete members to the group, and Messenger can notify everyone about new content. 

SERVICE OF THE MONTH

Financial tracking apps like Truebill (truebill.com) and Trim (asktrim.com) help keep your finances in order by showing you where your money is going. You can even save some cash by canceling unused digital subscriptions and negotiating for lower prices.

These apps are easy to use and offer free services, although they usually ask for a percentage of any savings you earn from bill reductions.



Trevyn Carr, 12, hustles to make a play a summer league tournament with the Minnesota Mustangs.

Photo courtesy of Rochelle Rehm

Get a grip

Hockey dad creates a product to help his son

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Darron Carr's inner child — one who spent winters skating on a Minnesota pond — and the grown-up engineer he became have invented a device for building hockey player's skill.

Darron, a Morris resident, founded Filthy Fives in 2021 after becoming frustrated with a lack of hockey training tools for his young son, who was starting his journey in organized youth hockey. He looked at old-school methods of teaching stickhandling to young players and thought there must be a better way than PVC pipe or cardboard cylinders fitted over hockey sticks — and Five Rite trainers and Filthy Fives, a name that references good stickhandling skills, were born.

"What we came up with here is more like a rubber material — it bounces back and acts like a hybrid of the good features of the PVC and cardboard material combined," says Darron, a former mechanical engineer now in sales. "Stickhandling is muscle memory, and the goal is to train the lower hand not to squeeze too tight. The Five Rite opens that hand up so the stick moves and turns

more freely. You can still pass and shoot with it on the stick and do more with training than just stickhandling."

The idea is to teach younger players to grip the stick loosely while still maintaining control. The Five Rite sleeves fold around the stick and are adjustable, so all ages can use them. They fit youth to adult sticks and most hand sizes. Although Darron designed them initially for hockey, lacrosse players can use the Five Rite sleeves, too. The idea occurred to Darron in 2019, and he created a couple of prototypes. But, after seeing an ad for a training aid in USA Hockey magazine, Darron and his family decided to take the plunge into a full-fledged business.

The product in the ad was more of the same with better marketing, he says. He wanted — and needed — something different. "I spent a couple of years playing around with different things," Darron says. "Tubes that slide on wouldn't fit over the grip if there's a big knob taped over it. Retaping grips wasn't fun for me, and it's not fun for a lot of other dads either."

The Five Rites eliminate that difficulty by folding around the stick and then

adjusting to fit the stick and players' hands. About a year into running the part-time business, Darron says he's still learning the ins and outs. He attended the Let's Play Hockey Expo in St. Paul as a vendor and has delved into marketing for the first time, primarily using social media and filthyfives.com to get exposure for his products. The website includes an assortment of related apparel, including a "Dangle Maker" off-ice stick ball for training and a deodorizer called "Filthy Dust." Darron says he has other ideas he intends to patent and market in the near future.

With more time, exposure and work, he hopes Filthy Fives and Five Rites will become go-to names for training in the ever-growing youth hockey and lacrosse markets and that they'll someday be a full-time family business. "I'm cautiously optimistic," Darron says. 🗨️

FILTHY FIVES ONLINE

🌐 FilthyFives.com

📘 facebook.com/filthyfives

📷 instagram.com/filthyfives

The Carr family showcase the Filthy Fives products during a hockey trade show. From left, 9-year-old Lauryn; her mother, Michelle; Trevyn; and Darron.

Photo courtesy of FILTHY FIVES

Darron Carr, seen here with his son, Trevyn, founded Filthy Fives in 2021.

Photo courtesy of FILTHY FIVES

Your connected gift guide

6 gift ideas that make the most of your high-speed internet

The holiday shopping season is here, and there has never been a better time to find the perfect gadget that takes advantage of your high-speed internet connection. From tools that make working from home look good to devices to unwind with, high-speed service will help these gifts shine for the techie in your life.

1. Google Nest Hub, \$50

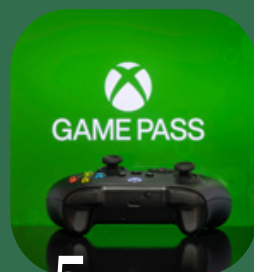
Give the gift of better mornings with the Google

Nest Hub. Designed for the bedside, it can track sleep quality, update you on the weather and your calendar, stream music and video and control any smart home appliances you might have. It even has a built-in light sensor to make sure the screen is never too bright. Let's see an alarm clock do that.



2. Sonos Roam, \$180

The Roam is the perfect portable speaker for anyone on the move. Stream music, podcasts and more with great audio quality and take them from one room to the next with ease. Roam's Wi-Fi support automatically joins any other Sonos speakers around the house and also works as a smart speaker, connecting to Amazon's Alexa or Google Assistant.



3. Kindle Paperwhite, \$140

For the bookworm in the family, the Kindle Paperwhite is still the best e-reader around. The glare-free display is just like reading on real paper, while the 2021 model adds a warm light option to make reading at night easier on the eyes. Purchase new books or download old favorites in seconds without ever leaving your

favorite reading chair.

4. Logitech C920S Webcam, \$74

More people are working from home than ever before, so help the remote workers in your life look good while being productive. This Logitech webcam will offer a big upgrade over any built-in camera. It's also ideal for the livestreamers, offering great video quality at an affordable price.



5. Xbox Game Pass, \$9.99/month

If you're giving or receiving an Xbox Series X, Game Pass is a no-brainer. Essentially Netflix for games, the service offers hundreds of games on demand, from the biggest Xbox exclusives available on launch day to creative indies from your favorite developers. Download games in minutes with a fiber connection and discover something new.

6. Apple AirTag, \$30

Know someone who's always losing their keys? These tiny Bluetooth trackers are here to help. Attach them to your keys or anything else you're prone to misplacing, and the AirTag will leverage the network of nearby Apple devices to locate it — in some cases, within inches. For the Android user, the Tile Mate is just as handy.



Tasty app-etizers

6 digital tools to level up your kitchen skills

Even the most experienced home cooks can use a little inspiration now and then. Fortunately, it's never been easier to find. The wide variety of cooking apps and websites available today make it easy to plan meals and even eat healthier. Whether you're looking to ditch the stacks of faded recipes, make something new or find video instructions to walk you through every step, these tools will bring a little extra flavor to your kitchen.



SideChef — If you're just starting out in the kitchen, SideChef is great for learning the basics. A cooking novice created the app for beginners, and it does away with fancy culinary terminology and instead offers dynamic guidance through recipes, providing step-by-step photos, hands-free voice commands and built-in timers. There are over 18,000 interactive smart recipes to try out, so pick your favorite and get cooking.



Food Network Kitchen — Craving something you just saw on the Food Network? The Food Network Kitchen features recipes from fan-favorite personalities and food writers, along with prep time, cook time and difficulty level. Any fan of the network will feel right at home in the app, which lets you search more than 80,000 recipes for categories like grilling, baking, kid-friendly and dairy-free.



Cookpad — For those looking for a more social cooking experience, Cookpad offers a community of home chefs around the world. Discover new ideas, share photos, ask questions and exchange advice. You can even take part in cooking challenges or online cooking classes. And since Cookpad's user base is global, there are plenty of international recipes to satisfy an adventurous palate.




Forks — From vegan lifestyle site Forks Over Knives, the Forks app offers over 600 recipes for anyone sticking to a plant-based diet. What the app lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality, convenience and ease of use. There are new recipes each week, and you can export your favorites to have a ready-made shopping list for your next grocery trip.



Mealime — Meal planning can be a headache, but Mealime makes it easy. The app curates recipe suggestions based on your preferences to help you find healthy new favorites. They're all guaranteed to take 30 minutes or less to cook, but you can also import recipes from the web to add more options.



Cook with Amber — Teenage cook Amber Kelley has been encouraging kids to get in the kitchen since 2012. Today, college keeps her pretty busy. But her YouTube channel, Cook with Amber, still features years' worth of videos that walk kids through their own healthy and delicious kitchen adventures so you can make dinner and memories together. 



A rural re

Madison Mercantile is a hub for revitalization

Story by KATIE NORRIS

What do you get when a small town, local people with big dreams and high-speed internet collide? Madison Mercantile owner Kris Shelstad found out when she bought a 15,000-square-foot building in Madison that she actually purchased endless possibilities.

The building Madison Mercantile inhabits had a past life as a hardware store and lumberyard. Now, it's a place of opportunity for local artists and entrepreneurs, as well as a space where community members can come together and help one another. "Our core mission is to bring arts, culture and innovation to our town in an accessible and inclusive way," Kris says.

A COMMUNITY HUB

Madison Mercantile opened its doors in January when a couple of artists moved into studio spaces. Then, the coffeehouse

opened in February. Now, it's grown as a venue for events and coworking with an art gallery, stage, wellness room, workshop and commercial kitchen.

"The first thing I did was have the internet installed," Kris says. Because of this, a group meets at Madison Mercantile to participate in a virtual exercise class. Another user of the space is launching an online newspaper covering regional sports.

This fully accessible, sprawling building continues to add entrepreneurs and nonprofit groups, and community members have approached Kris along the way with new ideas for how to fill the space. "The barriers to entry for your new startup are taken care of, and nothing should get in the way of your creativity," she says.

Kris' 30 years serving in the Army prepared her for the challenges Madison Mercantile presented. "I'm comfortable in chaos and doing a lot of things at once," she says. She moved back home to Madison from Austin, Texas, in 2020 after her husband passed away because she wanted to "go home and hang out with my people," she says.

She cares about Madison and its people, which is why Madison Mercantile started as a coffee shop and art gallery and blossomed into a dynamic community hub. Her niece, Megan Ronglien, helped with the project since its inception,

working as the operations and social media manager. "I think every little town needs a place like this," Kris says.

And the future is brimming with possibilities. A group of people is interested in creating a local food co-op — a place to sell local grains, honey and produce. There's a brewery slated for the space, and Kris is also planning to have a dedicated "Zoom room." "What I'm envisioning is Grandma can come in and have coffee with all her grandkids spread all over the United States," she says.

One of the unique features of Madison Mercantile is how it brings together community clubs and nonprofits. Kris says the space is reinvigorating group like the Madison Arts Council, Madison Community Foundation, Narcotics Anonymous, Bible studies and a caregiver support group that used to meet in people's living rooms. One group, a local chapter of the Men's Shed Association, is just getting started.

THE MEN'S SHED

The Men's Shed is an international nonprofit that creates a workshop space for predominantly older men to form friendships while working together on a project. Madison resident and founding member of the local chapter David Jerpseth describes the club as "a holistic approach to men's therapy."

"There are a lot of men that have come off the farm or even had shops in their garage when they were younger but when they downsize, they lose the ability to work on projects that they want," David



Students in the Little Blessings Preschool at Faith Lutheran Church visit the Madison Mercantile to learn about local businesses.

naissance

Customers start the morning off with coffee at Madison Mercantile.



Photography contributed by Madison Mercantile

says. He moved back to Madison after his wife died in 2018.

When David found out Kris bought the house across the street from him, they became instant friends. David shared his wisdom with her when she started her journey to open the Madison Mercantile. “She invests a lot of herself into this project, and people see that,” he says. “When you really think about what she’s tried to do, it’s really powerful.”

For David and others in the community, Madison Mercantile became a space to build friendships. One of the Men’s Shed members recently built regulation-size cornhole game boards, which local boys ride their bikes over to play. Another man built a miniature barn and retractable fence that sold almost as soon as he displayed it.

The group has a variety of projects ahead, including constructing birdhouses and building beds for local children. Kris sees the building’s proximity to the fairgrounds as an opportunity for the men to assist local youth with projects

for the fair and 4-H. “When these guys get going, they can be extra grandpas or dads for people who don’t have them,” she says.

Now, with increasing access to high-speed internet, Kris hopes the remote work revolution keeps fueling Madison’s renaissance. “Living in a small town doesn’t mean you’re cut off from the world — it just means your house is a lot cheaper,” she says.

Looking to the future, Kris hopes Madison Mercantile can serve as a model for more rural communities. “Once we get all our lessons learned, I’d love to be able to help another town do the same thing,” she says. ☎

THE DETAILS

Visit madisonmercantile.com to learn more about Madison Mercantile and current projects, as well as new organizations and programming. You can also follow the shop on Facebook and Instagram.



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A tasty tradition

Celebrate the season with sweet holiday treats

Baking is a time-honored tradition in so many households this time of year. Kids love sprinkles, and holiday hosts appreciate having sweets on hand for unexpected guests and tasty gifts for neighbors and friends.

There are a few important tips that can make your holiday baking a stress-free experience and perhaps a little more rewarding for those who will be enjoying the results of your efforts. Many of us have had baking disasters that weren't funny at the time but made for entertaining stories later. That doesn't need to be the case, though, if you:

► **Organize** — Make lists of all the things

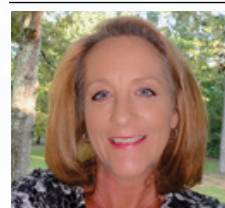
you want to bake and the ingredients you'll need. Do this a couple of days ahead of time so you can decide what will need to be frozen and used in coming weeks, such as cookie dough.

► **Check your pantry for the essentials** — Make sure you have plenty of sugar, flour, butter, eggs and the all-important extracts of the holiday season: vanilla, almond and, oh, yes, peppermint. There's nothing more aggravating than getting halfway through a recipe only to open the sugar bag and discover it's nearly empty. Don't forget cooking spray and parchment paper, too. You'll be needing them.

► **Make sure you have plenty of room in your refrigerator** — Some baked goods need to be chilled. This is a good time to throw out what's been in the fridge a little too long or to use up any leftovers.

► **Ponder presentation** — Check your closets and cabinets for decorative cookie tins. You'll need them for more than just cookies, they're also great for caramel corn, fudge, brownies and bars. A colorful holiday tin is so much more festive than a zip-top bag with a stick-on bow.

Now, get baking. It's almost Christmas!



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HOLIDAY CARAMEL CORN

One word of caution: be sure to weed out all of the unpopped kernels so there are no unexpectedly hard bites in this delicious, sweet-salty snack.

- 3 quarts popped popcorn (about 2 bags microwave popcorn, popped)
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter (no substitute)
- 1 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1/4 cup dark corn syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups mixed nuts

Heat oven to 250 F.

Place popped popcorn into a large, 4-inch-deep buttered baking pan, and place it in the oven to keep warm. In a large saucepan, melt the butter over

low heat. Stir in brown sugar, corn syrup and salt. Bring to a soft boil, stirring constantly. Boil without stirring for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and quickly stir in the baking soda and vanilla.

Remove popcorn from the oven. Slowly pour syrup mixture over popcorn, and add nuts, mixing well. This may prove a bit difficult at first, as the caramel mixture hardens quickly once removed from the heat. But as you stir it while it's baking in the oven, it will soften and get much easier to stir.

Butter a large cookie sheet, and turn the popcorn mixture into the pan. Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. You don't want the popcorn to get overly browned. Remove from the oven and cool completely. Break apart. Store in tightly covered tins.



CRANBERRY ORANGE HOLIDAY NUT BREAD

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 cup butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel
- 3/4 cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- 6 ounces chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease the bottom of a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan and set aside.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Stir in the butter until the mixture is crumbly. Stir

in the orange peel, orange juice, vanilla and eggs, just until the batter comes together. Be careful not to overmix. Fold in the fresh cranberries and nuts.

Transfer the batter to the prepared baking pan. Bake until a wooden toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean: about 50 minutes to 1 hour. Cool in the pan for 5 minutes before loosening the sides of the loaf from the pan. Transfer the loaf to a rack to cool completely before slicing. Let cool completely and wrap with plastic wrap.



PEANUT BUTTER STARS

A classic holiday cookie. These freeze well, so make plenty to enjoy throughout the season.

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup peanut butter
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar

- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- Chocolate kisses or stars

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

In a large mixing bowl, beat shortening and peanut butter with an electric mixer on medium-high speed for 30 seconds. Add 1/2 cup of the granulated sugar, along with the brown sugar, baking powder and baking soda. Beat until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in egg, milk and vanilla until combined. Beat in as much of the flour as you can with the mixer. Stir in any remaining flour.

Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll balls in 1/4 cup granulated sugar. Place 2 inches apart on an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake for 10-12 minutes or until edges are firm and bottoms are lightly browned.

Immediately press a chocolate star or kiss into the center of each cookie. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool. Store in airtight containers. Makes 54 cookies. 📺

**Everyone at Farmers Mutual & Federated
Telephone are grateful for our members and
the communities we call home.**



WISHING YOU AND
YOURS A WONDERFUL
HOLIDAY!



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