

MARCH/APRIL 2025

CONNECTION



GAME ON!

The team approach to esports

VIRTUAL
GOLF

COASTER
CRAZE



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Broadband Built to Last


How the Universal Service Fund Helps Keep Americans Connected

When we're connected, America thrives, and for rural communities, the federal Universal Service Fund (USF) helps community-based providers deliver broadband built to last for generations. This fund is critical for ensuring high-quality, affordable broadband services are available for families, schools, libraries, health care facilities and so much more.

The idea behind the USF is that all Americans should have reliable access to communications services at a reasonable cost—it's been a national objective for over a century and was codified into law in the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Today, the USF enables providers to make a business case to invest in many rural areas, sustain networks once they are built and keep service rates affordable.

Unfortunately, the USF is at risk of disruption. Last summer, a federal circuit court declared that the way the USF is funded is unconstitutional, and the case is now before the Supreme Court for review.

According to an August 2024 survey of more than 200 NTCA members across 35 states, the loss of USF support could be catastrophic for rural consumers. Respondents reported that rural consumers could see their monthly bills increase by \$72. And 68% of respondents said they may need to cancel over \$1 billion in deployment projects.

These survey results highlight the importance of the USF in both getting and keeping rural consumers connected to high-quality, affordable services. You can learn more at ntca.org/universalservice. 



Adobe Stock Illustration by Julien Eichinger

The Buzz

An internet roadmap

The online world moves fast, and it's a rich, helpful place. In fact, there are so many opportunities and so many resources that keeping up with the latest can prove daunting. Here are a few hot topics:

VIDEO SHORTS

These bite-sized videos usually last a few seconds. They're often lighter in tone. Many are great for showing fun or helpful ideas quickly, such as cooking tips, telling a joke or sharing engaging facts. Others are simply silly fun. Most social media services offer some version of these videos.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OR AI

AI is appearing in more and more places. It may help complete a text message, edit and sort photos on a smartphone or even create an image from scratch. And that's only the beginning. Think of AI as a smart, learning system capable of processing tremendous amounts of information—and it's changing and growing daily.

CRYPTOCURRENCY

This digital currency is stored and managed on secure systems. Bitcoin is a famous example, but there are many others. Some people use cryptocurrency to buy goods or services, and others consider it an investment. It's another growing, diversifying part of the digital world.

VIRTUAL REALITY OR VR

With the right hardware, such as VR goggles, virtual reality can be like stepping into a video game or movie. It's also a rapidly growing technology, expected to become more affordable and accessible over time.

Wading Into the Stream

Catch the current to entertainment

The arrival of streaming entertainment services brought the promise of simple, affordable access to deep, rich libraries of content.

So, how are these increasingly popular

services, ranging from Netflix to YouTube TV, doing? Seemingly endless content? Check. Simple and affordable? Well, that gets a little complicated.

With care, though, you can find the

services that not only meet your needs but also your budget. Live sports, ad-free options, high-definition streams and so much more are a few clicks away. 📺

DEFINE YOUR PRIORITIES

With so many possibilities, first consider what you generally want to watch. Do you love original dramas? Perhaps classic sitcoms and movies are your favorites? Are live sports or kids' programming your go-to shows? Or maybe it's a mix of all of the above. Here are a few options:

For exclusive originals: Netflix, Hulu and Max—formerly HBO Max—are standouts. They mix fresh shows and movies with a wealth of older favorites. And Hulu gives access to TV episodes the day after they air on traditional TV.

For family and classics:

Disney+ shines. And Peacock and Paramount+ serve up plenty of long-time favorites, as well as new shows.

AD TIERS

When it comes to pricing, streaming services increasingly offer a range of options—along with some tradeoffs.

Many services have lower-cost plans, but they come with ads. If you don't want interruptions, be prepared to pay extra. Similarly, Netflix offers a more expensive choice for high-definition content. Meanwhile Disney+ emphasizes the ability to bundle added services like Hulu.

Netflix: A lower-priced ad tier was introduced in 2023 to go along with the more expensive ad-free option.

Disney+ and Hulu: The price difference between ad-supported and ad-free versions is significant, so be aware when considering such services.

Amazon: Members of Amazon Prime must now pay an extra fee to remove ads from streaming content.

So, the price considerations of comparing streaming services to traditional cable television is more complex. But the system offers consumers greater choice—after all, many people don't mind ads. Pricing and offers can change quickly, so check each service for the current rates and offers.

LIVE SPORTS

Traditional TV networks are still the biggest player in the live sports world, but services like YouTube TV and Sling allow you to tap into many of those channels. However, the streamers are catching up.

Services like ESPN+, Peacock and Paramount+ have exclusive sports content. Amazon Prime hosts NFL games on Thursday nights. Even Netflix recently showcased a live night of boxing.

Then, there are also the direct-to-consumer options, like the NFL's Sunday Ticket or MLS Season Pass on Apple TV. Fans can binge-watch their favorite leagues.

Be a DIY VIP

Online resources and communities can help conquer many projects

Even though it doesn't always feel like it, spring is replacing winter, and I can't wait. It's time to get outside for fun and maybe a little bit of work, too. This is the time of year when many of us plan to spruce up the yard, plant a garden or tackle overdue home chores.



KEVIN BEYERS
Chief Executive Officer

Whatever task you need to get done or hobby you enjoy, there are likely internet-based resources that can help. At Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, we see firsthand examples of how access to high-speed broadband empowers you to learn, plan and confidently execute projects.

Consider gardeners, for example. It doesn't matter if someone is a beginner or a seasoned green thumb, they can use the internet to research plant varieties suited to their climate, find layout ideas for vegetable gardens and even order seeds and supplies online. YouTube tutorials provide step-by-step guides for building trellises, creating compost bins and improving soil quality. Websites like the Farmers' Almanac and our fantastic

state extension offices are also great resources that can provide planting calendars and pest management tips.

Even better, online communities let gardeners share advice and troubleshoot problems in real time. From identifying mysterious weeds to diagnosing yellowing leaves, having access to expert advice—or a crowd of helpful fellow gardeners—can make all the difference.

Or perhaps you struggle with keeping a lush, green lawn. Those never happen by accident. Fortunately, you don't need to be a landscaping expert to achieve one. Go online to find lawn care schedules tailored to your region and learn about the right fertilizers, grass seed mixes and weed treatments. Online video tutorials show how to aerate your soil, reseed patchy areas and properly mow for healthy growth.

Tech-savvy homeowners can even use smart irrigation systems connected to Wi-Fi to control watering systems from a smartphone. These tools improve water usage and keep your lawn looking great, even during hot, dry spells.

There are plenty of other ways modern digital tools can make life a little easier. From fixing leaky faucets to repairing drywall, the internet has become a go-to resource for home repair solutions. With access to instructional videos, product reviews and downloadable manuals, you can tackle many common repairs.

While the internet can help you dream big about your spring projects, it's important to make safety a priority—especially if your plans involve digging. Before you break ground for a new garden bed, fence or deck, call 811 to have underground utilities marked. It's free. It's easy. And it could save you from costly repairs—or worse, a dangerous accident.

Broadband internet has made it easier than ever to plan and execute DIY projects, but some tasks still require a little extra preparation. As you gear up for a productive spring, let the web be your guide—but don't forget to make that crucial call before you dig.

Here at Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, we're proud to keep our community connected and equipped for success, whether you're planting tomatoes or building a new patio. Happy spring—and safe digging! 📧

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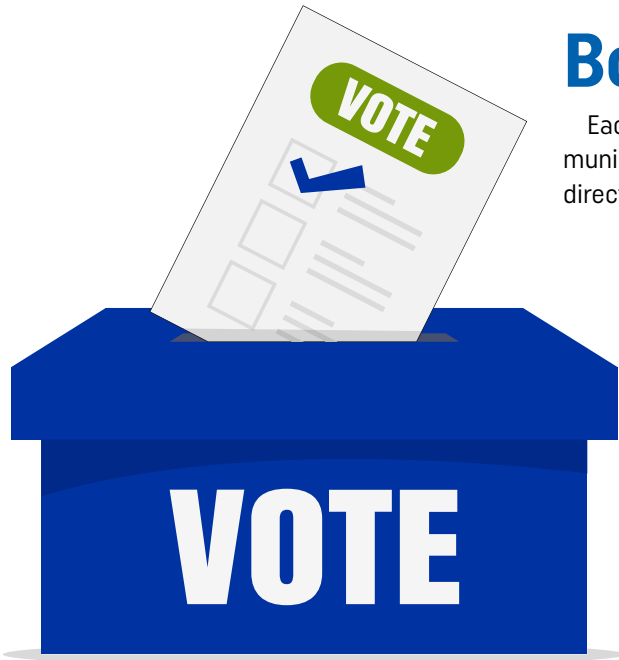
On the Cover:



Photo courtesy of Brooke Kern Photography

Under the direction of coach Barb Schwarz, players on the Benson High School esports team compete in tournaments in many games, including Valorant.

See story on Page 8.



Board of Directors Elections

Each year board of directors elections choose the people who guide the communications companies serving you, allowing our community to play a vital role in directing these essential services. Your involvement is essential—please vote.

Farmers Mutual Telephone Company

Tuesday, June 10, at Dawson Boyd School at 6:30 p.m.

Director positions on the ballot are:

District I
District III

Federated Telephone Cooperative

Thursday, June 12, at Morris Area Elementary School at 6:30 p.m.

Director positions on the ballot are:

District 2
District 3
District 6

If you are interested in being a board member, please see your cooperative bylaws for information about the qualification process.

Know What's Below

The arrival of spring brings longer days and outdoor chores. Some of those backyard tasks require a shovel and a visit to gopherstateonecall.org.

State laws require homeowners and contractors to call 811 before digging. Starting a digging project without first knowing where underground utility lines are buried can result in damage to expensive infrastructure and put lives at risk. Gopher State One Call notifies all utilities based on the caller's address, allowing those stakeholders to safeguard their facilities.

Here are the steps to dig safely:

- Call 811 for your lines to be marked.
- Wait the required amount of time—three full business days for normal requests, not counting the day of the call.
- Call 811 or 800-252-1166 to confirm all lines have been marked.
- Dig carefully around the painted lines and flags.
- Respect the marks and call for a re-marking if needed.

Homeowners and contractors can start a ticket to locate utilities at gopherstateonecall.org.



Tired of Robocalls?

Here are a few tips for dealing with dreaded robocalls:

- Add your number to the National Do Not Call Registry. Visit donotcall.gov.
- Let calls from unknown numbers go to voicemail.
- If you accidentally answer a robocall, just hang up. Pushing other numbers or answering yes can cause an unauthorized charge.
- If the caller asks for anything involving a gift card, it's very likely a scam.
- Report any scam calls to the FCC Consumer Complaint Center.



Lifeline

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

To find out whether your household qualifies for Lifeline assistance, please visit lifelinesupport.org or call our office.

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

Roller coasters take thrill-seekers to the limit

Story by KATHY DENES

It's a rite of passage—a child in the roller coaster line steps up to the mark, stands up straight and finally hits that magical measurement, tall enough to be welcomed aboard for a lifetime of adventure.

The thrill of roller coasters never grows old, whether they're modern rockets of cold, sleek steel or creaky, wooden rides that are a nostalgic nod to yesteryear. Around 1,000 coasters in the United States and thousands worldwide offer limitless options for destination vacations.

"At this point, I've been on just under 1,200 unique coasters at over 300 different amusement parks," says James Nocito, a CoasterNerds contributing writer whose hobby of "chasing down rides" has taken him to 38 countries on four continents.

"Sometimes, I do actually think the hobby is ridiculous, but it's also given me a chance to visit all sorts of places I probably wouldn't have otherwise, like all 50 U.S. states. I guess I've always compared it to people who try to see a baseball game at every Major League Baseball stadium or such."

Roller coaster fans seeking out the fastest ride, wildest twists and turns or just a new experience have created a community. Numerous websites, like coaster101.com, and social media pages, like Facebook's CoasterNerds, are dedicated to informing and connecting enthusiasts.

"There's this whole community within the parks and coasters fandom, and some of the best people I met from internet chatrooms or online message boards when I was a teenager are people I know 20-plus years later, now hanging out in person," James says.

He hesitates to cite one roller coaster as his favorite, "but if I were going to suggest to someone some of the biggest, baddest or craziest rides in the U.S., I'd probably start with Fury 325." That ride at Carowinds in Charlotte, North Carolina, is North America's tallest, fastest and longest giga coaster—one with a height or drop of at least 300 feet. 📺

IF YOU'RE GOING

- For a selection of the country's top 100 coasters, consult coasterbuzz.com/rollercoasters/top100.
- If taking younger travelers along, be sure to check height requirements for the coasters you hope to experience.
- To check real-time waits before you go, visit queue-times.com.
- Concerned about motion sickness? Snack on something fairly bland 30 minutes to an hour before jumping in line.





PLANNING A COASTER VACATION?

Consider visiting these thrill rides:

The Beast broke all records when it opened at Kings Island in Mason, Ohio, in 1979, and it still reigns as Guinness World Records' longest wooden roller coaster.

The Voyage at Holiday World in Santa Claus, Indiana, is the world's second-longest wooden coaster, running for 1.2 miles and featuring a world-record five underground tunnels.

It's always coaster weather at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, where the 7-acre center court offers five unique options.

Two record-breaking coasters—the nation's first tilt coaster, the Circuit Breaker, and Palindrome, a one-of-a-kind infinity coaster—are set to open in Texas this year at Austin's COTALand.

Also opening this year at Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, is the Siren's Curse, expected to break records for height, speed and longest tilt.



Photo courtesy of Lake Winnepesaukah



Adobe Stock photo by Panosk18

TOP: The Cannon Ball at Lake Winnepesaukah is the oldest wooden roller coaster in Georgia.

ABOVE: The Six Flags family of parks is known for exciting roller coasters, like the Joker at Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson Township, N.J.

LEFT: Southern California's mild weather means rides like the roller coaster and Ferris wheel at Pacific Amusement Park on the Santa Monica Pier can be enjoyed throughout the year.

FIND YOUR THRILL

Look for CoasterNerds on Facebook and visit these websites for more information: coasterforce.com, aceonline.org, coaster101.com and coasterbuzz.com.



Adobe Stock illustration by Wasum

MORE THAN

Esports showcase life lessons, opportunities

Story by PATRICK SMITH

To many sports fans, a high school esports contest may look a little different. There's no physical court, field or track. There isn't a physical ball, racket or stick. But that doesn't mean there's a lack of enthusiasm.

More than 8,600 high schools adopted an esports program between 2018 and 2021, according to the National Education Association. Benson High School got in on the growing trend in 2022 and fields 18 players, with more joining every day.

"We're building friendships," esports coach Barb Schwarz says. "For some of the students, they didn't know each other, but through esports they're learning and growing as a team."

GETTING STARTED

After more than 30 years coaching volleyball, basketball, softball, baseball and hockey, Barb was ready for a change. At the same time, Ethan Mulder, now a senior, took the initiative to petition the Benson athletic director and school board to start an esports team.

Once the team was approved, Ethan asked Barb to step in and help, even if she was a somewhat unlikely choice. A veteran social studies teacher with more than 35 years of experience, she acknowledges she isn't a video game prodigy.

"I don't know much about gaming," she says with a chuckle. "But coaching is coaching no matter how you look at it. You're helping kids to be positive, teaching them to control their emotions, communicate as a team, and you're encouraging them to enjoy their activity."

The Benson esports team is equipped with special access-controlled computers, gaming consoles, headsets, controllers

and screens for students to compete in games against players from high schools across Minnesota. Favorite titles include Super Mario Kart, Super Smash Bros., Minecraft, League of Legends, Fortnite, Valorant, Chess and Rocket League. New games are always being reviewed and introduced.

"Each time the kids go on the website for the Minnesota Varsity League and connect with their opponents in another high school," Barb says, "they can talk to each other, chat and set up their games with other students throughout the state."

Barb is grateful broadband ensures there are no delays while gaming. "High-speed internet is extremely important," she says. "It takes a lot of frustration out of gaming when we play."



Izzy Martinez is a Nintendo Switch Mario Kart team member for Benson esports.

Photos courtesy of Brooke Kern Photography

N A GAME

LEARNING THROUGH TEAMWORK

As the esports team continues to grow, Barb says it attracts more than gaming fanatics. It also gives an opportunity to students who can't play traditional sports. "Sometimes because of the cards they've been dealt, students can't join in physical sports activities," Barb says. "Video games are often something they really enjoy, and it helps them bond with other kids."

While Barb is happy to coach the team, she says there was some early skepticism about the validity of competitively playing video games. "I know that it takes a minute for some people to wrap their heads around it, but video games are such a big part of the culture for young kids," she says. "I always encourage folks to consider whether they'd

rather have their son or daughter in the basement yelling at the TV or playing on an esports team. Kids are going to play video games no matter what, so why not do it in a constructive and positive environment?"

The constructive and positive environment not only builds friendships, it also helps develop elite gamers. Last year, Barb went with 10 players to a tournament at the University of North Dakota.

"It was very, very fun," Ethan says. "There were games and consoles everywhere. I loved playing the games and meeting people with interests like mine. It was awesome."

GAMING FOR THE FUTURE

Their time at the University of North Dakota revealed another possibility for the team—playing esports in college. Both Ethan

and teammate Isnalby Ramirez say their college decisions depend on an esports option.

"As a junior looking at colleges, I always check whether a school has an esports team," Isnalby says. "If colleges don't have a team, I'm not really interested. I really enjoy playing esports, and I want to go somewhere I can continue to play competitively."

She's not the only one taking notice of esports' growth. In its Global Entertainment and Media Outlook, multinational consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers projected the global gaming industry could be worth as much as \$321 billion by 2026. With ZipRecruiter's average salary estimate of \$149,000 for a video game designer, it's easy to see that the growth of video games and esports won't slow down anytime soon.

"Esports are incredibly powerful," Barb says. "They've shown students new possibilities for their future." 🗨️

Michael Lanning, seated center, competes in a Valorant practice round while his Benson esports teammates cheer him on.



Empowerment Through Sports

Adaptive competitions and

Story by DREW WOOLLEY and JEN CALHOUN



ADAPTIVE CLIMBERS FESTIVAL

After Shane Farver’s lower-level spinal cord injury, the rock-climbing enthusiast realized he needed to learn new ways of moving through the world, whether scrambling up rocks or making his way through shopping malls and office buildings.

“Early on in my recovery, a friend of mine said, ‘A cool thing about climbing is the problem-solving aspect of it. You have to figure out how to get from this hold to that hold as efficiently as possible using your body as it is and kind of figuring those things out,’” Shane says.

It’s the same for people with disabilities, he says. “We have to be problem-solvers, because—very often—the world is not made for us.”

Today, Shane is communications director and a member of the organizing committee for the Adaptive Climbers Festival. The three-day event offers people with disabilities a chance to learn rock climbing and other outdoor skills while camping and communing in Eastern Kentucky’s Red River Gorge.

“We really emphasize the notion that we do not take people with disabilities rock climbing,” Shane says. “We teach people with disabilities how to rock climb. The nuance there is we’re not here to take you on a ride. We’re here to empower you and help you see what’s possible in rock climbing and hopefully provide some confidence elsewhere in your life.”

SWEET SETUP

The idea for the Adaptive Climbers Festival came about during a hot tub hang with a few adaptive climbers and their allies. “They were talking about the fact that outside of the competitive environment, there aren’t a lot of opportunities for people with disabilities to rock climb,” Shane says.

The first Adaptive Climbers Festival was in 2018 at a climbing area in northwest Alabama, but by 2022 the event found its home at Lago Linda Hideaway, a 410-acre wonderland that offers cabins, RV sites and campgrounds surrounding a 5-acre lake.

“We have our run of the place,” Shane says. “Once we figured out that setup, we didn’t want to hold it anywhere else. We also have other partners who help us out, including the local search and rescue folks. It’s a huge coordinated effort.”

MOVING MOUNTAINS

The event offers about 30 clinics, including courses on rappelling and anchor-building, which shows attendees how to set up their ropes for climbing. Most of the courses are led by people with disabilities.

“That’s kind of our ethos—the idea that we’re here to empower people and to give people opportunities to grow and lead,” Shane says.

The Adaptive Climbers Festival has grown from about 30 participants to about 150 in 2024, including attendees from across the country, as well as some from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Spain. 📍

events shatter barriers



Photos courtesy of Beth King



ABOVE: Training to succeed in new sports, like javelin, cycling, powerlifting and rowing, gives Beth King the confidence to overcome life's other challenges.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Participants in the Adaptive Climbers Festival come from all over the world to enjoy a weekend of rock climbing, fellowship and fun in Eastern Kentucky's Red River Gorge area.

RESTORING FREEDOM

The first time Beth King saw a recumbent tricycle, she thought it was a joke. She rarely left the house for anything other than doctors' appointments after retiring from the military in 2014 due to injuries she sustained three years earlier when a rocket-propelled grenade brought down her Chinook helicopter in Afghanistan.

Then, after battling a traumatic brain injury, rehabbing for permanent damage to her spine and back and undergoing a bilateral joint replacement for severe pain in her jaw, Beth's occupational therapist wanted her to hop on what to her looked like a child's toy.

"When she showed me a picture, it looked like a Big Wheel from when I was a kid," says Beth, who was not happy about the idea. "But halfway through my first ride, I realized I'm out here by myself, no one's running after me to catch me. And I really found that

liberating. I felt a sense of independence I hadn't felt in years."


She then took part in the Wounded Warrior Project's Soldier Ride, introducing her to the world of adaptive sports. Now based in Missouri, Beth has trained in javelin, rowing, discus and powerlifting, even competing at the 2022 Invictus Games in the Netherlands. She hopes to qualify for the Paralympics in 2028.

"It's what saved me. I was really struggling with depression, suicidal thoughts and isolation. I just couldn't deal with anything. And it gave me something to train for, to get out of bed for," Beth says. "Sports made me realize that I could still do all the things that I thought I lost."

FINDING INSPIRATION

Realizing she was losing almost all function in her feet, in 2023 Beth decided to have her right foot amputated, allowing her to begin learning to walk with an artificial one. Last year, she completed her first year of welding school, a goal she set after retiring from the military.

"I think sports really gave me the confidence to advocate for myself. To believe that I didn't really lose as much as I thought I had," she says. "If you had asked me a year ago if I'd be welding right now, I would have said, 'No way.' I couldn't see a life bigger than the box I had put myself in with my injuries."

Once she finishes school, Beth hopes to be able to make adaptive equipment for more people. "I don't think people always understand that it's not just sports equipment. It's freedom," she says. "It's a regular life and feeling like you're a part of things. To have a place where people can go and just have fun and play a sport, even if it might look different. I think people are starting to realize that it really does matter." 

'TRAIN LIKE THE PROS'

Anytime Sim Sports gives golfers winter go-to

Story by PATRICK SMITH

During the coldest winter months, with an average temperature of 22 degrees, you're likely to find only the most dedicated of golfers swinging clubs in Morris.

At least that was the case until Anytime Sim Sports opened in 2022. Each winter, owner Chase Engebretson and his friends were disappointed to miss time on the links. Now, golfers can play nearly 100 courses indoors in the comfort of 72 degrees.

"We're a little bored in the wintertime," Chase says. "One of the best parts of using the simulator is keeping your swing current and not using the first two months of the summer trying to learn how to hit the golf ball again. The system gives you a shot-by-shot breakdown with your club angle, ball speed and other technical information. You can train like the pros."

PAR FOR ANYTIME

For many locals, the convenience of Anytime Sim Sports is an opportunity to stay in touch with friends at times that meet their schedule.

"Our online booking to reserve a tee time is very popular," Chase says. "Whether it's right away in the morning or late-night bookings, a lot of people come in regularly for the camaraderie. It gives people a chance to see friends and golf year-round."

Ryan Loge smacks a long drive at Anytime Sim Sports in Morris.

Photo by Brooke Kern Photography

Chase is also dependent on the online booking system to support his packed schedule. While he has the help of his mother, Stacy Engebretson, he balances his simulator business with work at his family's landfill and septic tank-cleaning businesses. He also coaches the Morris-Benson Area Storm Hockey team.

While there's plenty to keep him busy, if there's an issue Stacy can't solve, Chase can take advantage of their broadband internet service to check in with customers remotely and get them back on the green.

"A high-speed connection is crucial to keep the software updated and run the entire simulator," Chase says. "Without Wi-Fi the whole business doesn't work."

With a state-of-the-art TruGolf setup, patrons can cruise through 18 holes in

about an hour. If your game isn't golf, the TruGolf Multisport Arcade system offers something for everyone—from zombie dodgeball to baseball, soccer, disc golf, hockey and more.

"The main attraction is definitely golf, but we host quite a few birthday parties and events," Chase says. "It's great to have a business that's also a resource for the community. It's fun to see the kids cheering with excitement and hear the happiness during a party." 🗨️

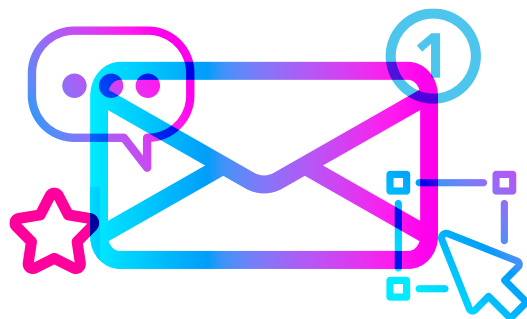
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EMAIL



Reliable and essential

In 1971, the first digital message—the earliest take on what we now call email—was sent at a government research facility at a time when wired phones were the main form of communication and the internet as we know it today was science fiction.

During the 1990s, email became part of our day-to-day lives. And it's never gone away. Essential for work and critical for individuals, email software has evolved. But don't take the basics for granted.

SECURITY

Regardless of the email platform, such as Gmail or Microsoft's Outlook, protecting your information should be the priority. **Always use a strong password**, and avoid including information like birthdays, pet names or common words in your password. Instead, use a long phrase that includes a mix of numbers, letters and special characters.

Always enable two-factor authentication. This is an added bit of security that requires you to use a second method to verify who you are as you log in to your

email. That second method could include a code sent by text message or even a specialized authentication app. Your email provider should be able to suggest options.

Dodge phishing scams. By sending what appear to be legitimate emails from a bank, a company you may do business with or even a friend, these scams strive to trick you into providing critical personal information. Always verify the sender's email address and avoid clicking on suspicious links or downloading attachments from unknown sources.

USABILITY

Check your email software for filters or rules. These tools improve organization, handling tasks such as automatically sorting emails about bills into one folder or those from a specific person into another. A little time setting up once can save many steps later. This can also reduce email clutter.

Lean on built-in search tools. Most email services provide folders or labels allowing you to organize your emails. This is a great strategy, but consider

placing emails into broad categories like personal, business or friends. Then, rely on the built-in search tools to find specific emails. Searching has become increasingly powerful and lessens the need for highly organized file systems.

Don't delete. Archive instead. This keeps your inbox clean while still allowing you to access past communications if needed.

Unsubscribe from unnecessary email newsletters. All digital newsletters or sales emails should display an "unsubscribe" button or link, so eliminate clutter by only keeping the emails you enjoy.

PRIVACY

Always avoid sending sensitive information, such as passwords or personal details, by email. It's easy to become comfortable with such a common system, but sending personal information by email can create a security risk.

When out and about, **be wary of accessing your email through public Wi-Fi**, which can be less secure than your home network. 📧



Pasta Supremo

Italian translates to a great meal

Italian cuisine, with its fresh ingredients and age-old techniques, has woven itself into the fabric of American culture.

Pizza, spaghetti and Alfredo are all favorites, but lasagna may top the list. It's simply hard to resist. Keep the Italian theme going with an Italian chopped salad and a cannoli poke cake. Loosen your belt and get ready to embark on your Italian culinary experience without leaving home.



**Food Editor
Anne P. Braly
is a native of
Chattanooga,
Tennessee.**

Photography by *Mark Gilliland*
Food Styling by *Rhonda Gilliland*

ITALIAN LASAGNA

- 1 pound sweet Italian sausage
- 3/4 pound lean ground beef
- 1/2 cup minced onion
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 2 (6.5-ounce) cans tomato sauce
- 2 (6-ounce) cans tomato paste
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried basil leaves
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 12 lasagna noodles
- 16 ounces ricotta cheese
- 1 egg
- 3/4 pound mozzarella cheese, sliced
- 3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Heat the oven to 375 F.
Cook sausage, ground beef, onion and garlic in a Dutch oven over medium heat until well browned.

Stir in crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, tomato paste and water. Season with sugar, 2 tablespoons parsley, basil,

1 teaspoon salt, Italian seasoning, fennel seeds and pepper. Simmer, covered, for about 1 1/2 hours, stirring occasionally.

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Cook lasagna noodles in boiling water for 8 to 10 minutes. Drain noodles, and rinse with cold water.

In a mixing bowl, combine ricotta cheese with egg, remaining 2 tablespoons parsley and 1/2 teaspoon salt.

To assemble, spread 1 1/2 cups of meat sauce in the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Arrange 3 to 4 noodles lengthwise over meat sauce to cover. Spread with 1/2 of the ricotta cheese mixture. Top with 1/3 of the mozzarella cheese slices. Spoon 1 1/2 cups meat sauce over mozzarella, and sprinkle with 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese.

Repeat layers, and top with remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheese. Cover with foil. To prevent sticking, either spray foil with cooking spray or make sure the foil does not touch the cheese. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 25 minutes. Remove lasagna from oven, and let it rest for 15 minutes before slicing and serving.



CANNOLI POKE CAKE

1 (15.25 ounce) yellow cake mix, plus ingredients on box to make the cake as directed

Topping:

- 1 1/2 cups ricotta cheese, well drained
- 2 cups mascarpone cheese
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1 (3.4-ounce box) instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon fresh orange zest
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 10 ounces mini chocolate chips

Make sure ricotta cheese is well drained—overnight is best, if possible, because it needs to be thick.

Prepare and bake cake according to directions on the package for a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Remove cake from oven

and poke holes all over it using the handle of a wooden spoon, large wood skewer or a straw. Set cake aside to cool.

In a large bowl, beat the ricotta and mascarpone cheese with an electric mixer on medium speed until well combined. Beat in the powdered sugar and dry pudding mix. Then beat in the vanilla, orange zest, cinnamon and salt. Once well combined, slowly beat in the milk a little at a time.

Spread about 1/3 of the topping over the cake, making sure it gets into holes. Then continue spreading the remaining topping, and sprinkle on the mini chocolate chips. Cover the cake and refrigerate for a few hours or overnight. Cut and serve well chilled.

Note: This cake is especially good with a little chocolate syrup drizzled over the top.

ITALIAN CHOPPED SALAD

Make the dressing in advance to allow flavors to marry.

Lemon Vinaigrette:

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 shallot, finely chopped

- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Salad:

- 1 head iceberg lettuce
- 1 head radicchio
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1 can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 4 ounces fresh pearl mozzarella, drained
- 4 ounces provolone cheese, diced
- 5 pepperoncini peppers, stemmed and sliced
- Kosher salt and pepper, as needed
- 1 teaspoon fresh oregano, for garnish

Make the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, vinegar, shallot, garlic, oregano, salt and pepper. Set aside.

Cut the iceberg lettuce in half, then cut out the core. Slice the lettuce lengthwise into 1/4-inch strips. Repeat with the radicchio.

In a large bowl, combine the lettuce, radicchio, onion, tomatoes, chickpeas, mozzarella, provolone and pepperoncini. Drizzle with the dressing and toss gently to coat. You may not need all of the dressing, so serve any leftover vinaigrette on the side. Season salad with salt and pepper and toss again. Garnish with oregano, if desired, and serve. 📖



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