

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

# CONNECTION

## Creative Collaboration

Prairie Renaissance  
Cultural Alliance

HOMESCHOOL  
CO-OPS

HERITAGE  
AGRICULTURE



# NTCA THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

## RURAL CONNECTIONS

By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

### Ensuring Access for All

Supreme Court upholds  
Universal Service Fund

**M**oney raised by a small fee on your communications bill makes a critical difference throughout rural America. Earlier this year, a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the Universal Service Fund, or USF, to continue.


I can't emphasize enough how critical this ruling is in a journey that began in 1934, when the Communications Act decreed all Americans should have access to rapid, efficient and nationwide communication services at reasonable prices.

Then, the 1996 Telecommunications Act created the USF to better connect rural areas and make voice and broadband services more affordable for rural and low-income consumers, schools, libraries and rural health care facilities.

By affirming that the Federal Communications Commission has discretion to collect the fees, the court kept this foundational tool in place. A March survey of nearly 270 NTCA members indicated that the USF programs help keep rural broadband rates more affordable. Without this funding, rural consumer rates could be more than double those in urban areas.

Policymakers in Washington, D.C., are debating how to reform universal service programs going forward, so that they can continue to serve the needs of millions of Americans.

It is essential that our elected officials understand the positive impacts the critical USF programs have had—and continue to have—on the availability, affordability and sustainability of voice and broadband services for millions of consumers, businesses and anchor institutions in rural America.

Visit [ntca.org/universalservice](http://ntca.org/universalservice). 



# Secure Your Digital World

## Keys for success


**W**hile October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, protecting yourself requires year-long vigilance. And everyone's needs vary based on the online tools and resources you use.

Remember, bad actors are increasingly sophisticated—they want access to your information. The FBI offers a few tips for some of the key points of emphasis, and they provide a good starting point for planning your personalized security strategy.

**Create a sturdy defense.** Update systems and software. Also, install a strong, reputable antivirus program.

**Connect carefully.** Be cautious when connecting to a public Wi-Fi network. Avoid sensitive transactions, including purchases. Create a strong and unique passphrase for each online account.

**Lock down all accounts.** Establish multifactor authentication. Examine the email address in all correspondence and scrutinize website URLs before responding to a message or visiting a site. Don't click on anything in unsolicited emails or text messages.

**Guard your information.** Be cautious about your information in online profiles and social media accounts. Sharing the names of pets, schools and family members gives scammers hints they need to guess your passwords or the answers to your account security questions. Never send payments to unknown people or organizations, particularly those urging immediate action. 

# RAISING HISTORY

## Heritage breed farmers preserve the past while protecting the future

Story by LES O'DELL

Farmers, ranchers, shepherds and homesteaders work to raise crops and livestock as efficiently as possible. Like any business, the goal is to maximize income and profitability.

Yet many agriculturalists also see themselves as conservationists, working to preserve the past while ensuring the future by using Earth-friendly farming methods and raising animals facing extinction.

In Pikeville, Tennessee, Amy Balog and her family raise endangered agricultural animals, also called heritage livestock breeds. “There are so many reasons why,” she says. “It’s not only keeping the genetics going. It’s the history and provenance of the breeds.”

Her Faverolles chickens, Sebastopol geese and Saxony ducks are among 180 breeds listed on the Conservation Priority List, an annual ranking of farm animals on the brink of disappearing. The list includes varieties of 11 different animals, from rabbits to cattle, horses and hogs. Many breeds fall out of favor in commercial agricultural settings. Perhaps they don’t put on weight as quickly as other breeds, for example. But they still have value.

### SUSTAINABILITY

Protecting biodiversity and genetic resources is an important reason for protecting heritage breeds, says Allison Kincaid, executive director of The Livestock Conservancy. But many producers choose heritage animals because they want to make a difference.

“None of us can predict what the future of agriculture will look like. This is about keeping these breeds around as a genetic

reservoir,” she says, adding these animals are key to food security. “If we didn’t have this diversity, eventually we would narrow our food system down to where it wasn’t sustainable. There would be no backup.”

Likewise, farmer Grant Breitreutz of Redwood Falls, Minnesota, takes a conservation approach to crop production. “We’ve been no-till for 12 years for all of our crops,” he says. Grant leaves farm implements that expose the soil, such as plows and discs, in the machine shed. Instead, he plants cover crops, grasses and other plants he sows without exposing the soil in order to replenish organic nutrients and to minimize erosion.

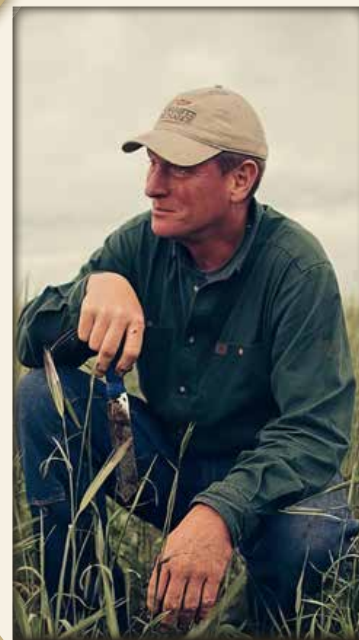
Grant pivoted to conservation farming practices to ensure his soil is healthy and hearty enough to produce bumper crops for generations to come. “If we’ve done this for 130 years of farming, how much time do we have left? So, that’s why we focus so hard on building our soils back,” he says. “It has made a world of difference, and the crops are much more drought resistant and are yielding more bushels per acre. Plus, our pastures have tripled in production over the years by taking care of the soil first.”

The Breitreutz family won the inaugural Minnesota Leopold Conservation Award, presented in 2024 by the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition. Grant says honors are not important, but preserving things for future generations is. Amy agrees.

“It’s more about quality over quantity and quality is what keeps these lines going. If we don’t do it, I’m afraid they’ll all get lost,” she says.



Amy and Daniel Balog, who live outside Pikeville, Tennessee, raise heritage animals like the Sebastopol goose she’s holding.



Grant Breitreutz uses no-till techniques that protect soil quality on his Minnesota farm.

For more about agronomic conservation, visit [sandcountymn.org](https://sandcountymn.org) and to learn about livestock conservation efforts, visit [livestockconservancy.org](https://livestockconservancy.org).

Photo courtesy of Amy and Daniel Balog

Photo courtesy of Grant Breitreutz

# National Co-op Month

## Preserving what matters



**KEVIN BEYER**  
Chief Executive Officer

Every October, we celebrate National Cooperative Month. Why? Because it's a time to reflect on what makes co-ops special. This year, we're adding a little extra flavor with our slogan, letting you know as a cooperative, members are our jam.

It might sound like a silly slogan we're using to spread the fun, but it's the truth. Cooperatives put people before profits, serve the community and give you and your neighbors the power to make local decisions. And to me, that's as sweet as it gets.

Just like your favorite jam, Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone are made of real ingredients. Real people. Real care. Real principles. Seven principles, to be exact, that guide everything we do and remind us why the cooperative model is worth preserving.

Our recipe for success, the Seven Cooperative Principles:

### 1. OPEN AND VOLUNTARY MEMBERSHIP

Everyone is welcome. It doesn't matter your race, religion or gender. If you need our services and accept the responsibilities of membership, you're a member.

### 2. DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL

You're not a customer, you're a member. That means you help guide the direction of your cooperative by electing fellow members to serve on our board of directors and make decisions on your behalf.

### 3. MEMBERS' ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

When you invest in us, we invest in you. At Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, we spread your dollars across the community, improving your service, strengthening local nonprofits and, when possible, returning any leftover money to you.

### 4. AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE

We're local through and through, which means we answer to you, not faraway investors. It also means we won't enter into any agreements or partnerships that put local control of the co-op at risk.

### 5. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Knowledge is power. We prioritize education, training and sharing information about the issues that affect our co-op.

### 6. COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES

Have you tried a mixed-berry jam? The flavors support each other just like co-ops support each other. Together we're stronger. We work with other cooperatives at the local, state and national levels to share knowledge, improve services and strengthen the communities we serve.

### 7. CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

This is our home, too, and Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone succeed when our communities do. That's why we care deeply about supporting you, through college scholarships, community sponsorships and charitable donations.

These aren't just words on paper, they're the ingredients that make Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone sweet additions to our community. Members are our jam not only in October but all year long.

Thanks for being part of something meaningful. 📞

## CONNECTION

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On the Cover:



Diane Trew is the gallery director for the Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance, a nonprofit dedicated to connecting the community through art. See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of Brooke Kern



# Making Connections

In June, Colton Gillespie represented Federated Telephone on the annual Foundation for Rural Service Youth Tour of Washington, D.C.

Since 1995, FRS has hosted the Youth Tour for thousands of high school students from across rural America. The tour is a chance for students to visit the nation's capital and learn about rural broadband legislation and share their community's story with key legislative, regulatory and government figures. It is also a forum for participants to meet and interact with their peers from other rural communities.

"I enjoyed touring the United States Capitol, where I had the opportunity to meet with Rep. Michelle Fishbach," Colton says. "We also had the chance to tour and view the monuments, visit the Smithsonian museums, Arlington Cemetery and Mount Vernon." The students also experienced a riverboat cruise along the Potomac River.

Colton enjoyed visiting the Federal Communications Commission. "I hadn't realized the vital role it plays in our daily lives," he says. "Rural broadband is essential to our daily lives in West Central Minnesota! While touring and visiting the FCC, I learned about Amber Alerts, internet censorship and spam calls."

Colton, a student at Chokio-Alberta School, joined 114 other students on the trip. "I met new people from all over the country, and we had a great time together," he says. "It was a fantastic experience! I would encourage any high school student to consider applying for this incredible opportunity in the future."



Photo courtesy of Colton Gillespie

## Happy Labor Day

Put yourself first this Labor Day. We hope you enjoy a relaxing long weekend. In observance of the holiday, our offices will be closed on Monday, Sept. 1.



## Statement of Nondiscrimination

Farmers Mutual Telephone and Federated Telephone are the recipient of federal financial assistance from the Rural Utilities Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and is subject to the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. In accordance with Federal law and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's policy, this institution is prohibited

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## Mapping out your perfect road trip

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

**F**all is the perfect time for travel and new experiences with family and friends. And while flying can have its conveniences, most travelers prefer to hit the road when mapping out their next adventure. According to AAA's domestic travel forecast for a recent holiday weekend, 87% of travelers planned to make trips by car.

### PREPARE FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

"I usually tend to drive, and most people choose to drive. And the reason for that is, for most families and groups of people, it's the most affordable way to travel," says AAA Texas Communications Manager Doug Shupe. "It's also the most convenient. You can leave when you want to leave and return when you want to. But there definitely needs to be some preparation before taking a long road trip."

Before everyone piles into the car, make sure you're ready for the journey. That includes giving your vehicle a quick inspection, planning a route and having the supplies—and the tunes—to keep everyone happy until you reach your destination.

### SAFETY CHECK

Before any lengthy road trip, Doug recommends taking your vehicle for a tuneup at a trusted repair facility. But if you can't find time for that, it's still a good idea to do a few quick checks on your own.







Check your tires to make sure they're properly inflated and in good condition.

That includes the tread. If you can put an upside-down quarter in the grooves of your tires and see the top of George Washington's head, it's probably a good idea to replace them before taking a long trip.

If your vehicle's battery is more than 3 years old, consider having it tested before getting on the road. Vibration can also cause a battery to fail sooner, so check that the terminals are secure and free of corrosion.

Examine your radiator and cooling system to make sure they're in good condition. Check belts and hoses for cracks or fraying that could lead to problems after extended use.

Ensure your wiper blades are in good shape in case you pass through a rainy patch, and have someone help you check that your headlights, taillights and turn signals are all working properly.

## PLANNING YOUR ROUTE

One of the best parts of any road trip is mapping out a path, as long as there's a little room for improvisation. Plan ahead and make the most of these tools



that can help you find the right stops along the way.

**Know what's coming**—Apps like Roadtrippers and GasBuddy can help you pick the best place to make a pit stop. Get suggestions for must-visit restaurants and scenic drives or just scope out the most affordable gas prices so you can make the most of your detours.

**Go analog**—GPS is an invaluable resource on the road, but it's still smart to have a physical map to orient yourself just in case you lose signal or your battery dies. Maps can even be a fun distraction for kids and give them a hands-on way to follow along with where you are.

**Track your itinerary**—If you've already set up all your reservations for hotels, restaurants and attractions, TripIt can keep track of it all in one place. The app syncs with your inbox to compile an itinerary, so you don't have to search for each confirmation email, and sends you reminders so you can focus on having fun.

**Don't be afraid to rest**—If you're driving for multiple days, be realistic about how far you can go before resting for the night. It's better to lean toward too many stops than too few. You can even pull over for a quick 30-minute nap if you're feeling drowsy.

## FUN AND GAMES

Hitting the open road also means getting to spend plenty of time with your favorite people. So don't forget



to prepare the food, games and music that will help you make the most of it.

**State of play**—Road trip games are classic, from the Alphabet Game and I Spy to Two Truths and a Lie and 20 Questions. Make your own fun by taking turns thinking of a movie and describing it in the worst way possible to see who can guess it. Or, learn more about each other by picking a category like songs, books or foods and building your own top-five lists.

**Fight the munchies**—Stops at hole-in-the-wall restaurants are a must for



any road trip. But someone is bound to get hangry in between meals. Everyone's favorite snacks will vary, but it's hard to go wrong with some trail mix or jerky. You can even pack fruit and rice cakes for healthy options.

**The perfect mix**—Planning out a playlist that will make everyone happy is a tall task. You want music that will fit the mood and maybe even complement the terrain you're driving through. Fortunately, you don't have to do it alone these days. If everyone shares the same music service, you can make a shared playlist that everyone can contribute to. You can even make a game out of it, guessing who's the secret Swiftie or where all those oldies came from. 📻



# A Creative Home

## A local arts hub inspires

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

Artist Sandy Fabian wants more people to appreciate the arts, which may be as simple as recognizing a lamppost. “Sometimes we don’t realize how we are influenced by our world around us. The texture in our community, in our art forms, in our lampposts and all kinds of stuff that you take for granted,” she says.

Sandy, of Sartell, is a potter who makes functional pieces ranging from dinnerware to egg bakers, and she loves designing porcelain jewelry. She also dedicates time to photography and writing.

She displays her work in Morris through the Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance, known as the PRCA. She is also a board member of the nonprofit dedicated to connecting the community through art.

### ADVOCATING FOR THE ARTS

Fiber artist Diane Trew is the PRCA gallery coordinator. In addition to its gallery, Prairie Art & Gifts, the PRCA regularly hosts exhibitions, community events and classes.

The PRCA started in 1998, when a group of local artists and community

Sandy Fabian creates many ceramic designs, from coffee mugs to bottles for olive oil.





members decided to bring a greater emphasis on art to the community. They met to talk about the idea for a few years, and then opened the PRCA in 2002. “Their mission was to advocate, promote and coordinate arts heritage and cultural activities in Stevens County and the surrounding area,” Diane says.

They wanted a physical space to serve as an information center for cultural events—they also issue a quarterly newsletter. The gallery provides a place for artists to display their work and hold on-site classes and workshops.


Diane became acquainted with the PRCA in 2007, when she opened a weaving studio

in Benson and started connecting with other artists. She says the PRCA today stays true to its roots. The nonprofit is largely volunteer based, with a dedicated board of directors and a group of volunteers who help run the gallery and form various committees.

### ‘ART BAR’ ON TAP

When it comes to filling the PRCA’s gallery space, the alliance seeks both local artists and those from the surrounding community. The group also looks for up-and-coming artists, including local high school students, who offer fresh perspectives. “That’s an ongoing thing for us, and we’re still growing that,” Diane says.

In addition to classes and workshops, the PRCA offers a bimonthly art bar. Four artists present four projects and encourage participation by those who pay a small fee. Recent projects include watercolor painting, collage and fabric printing with leaves. “We have, really, a lot of talented people who will come and share a different project,” she says.

Diane encourages residents to become members. “We really survive on our membership, and we encourage people to become a member of the gallery and support the arts in their community,” she says. “It’s a really easy way to do that.” 



Photos courtesy of Brooke Kern

**ABOVE:** Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance showcases the work of regional and local artists.

**FAR RIGHT:** A rotating display of art in the storefront windows invites locals to explore.

**RIGHT:** A guest explores the creativity on display at the PRCA.





# HOW THE WEST WAS HEARD

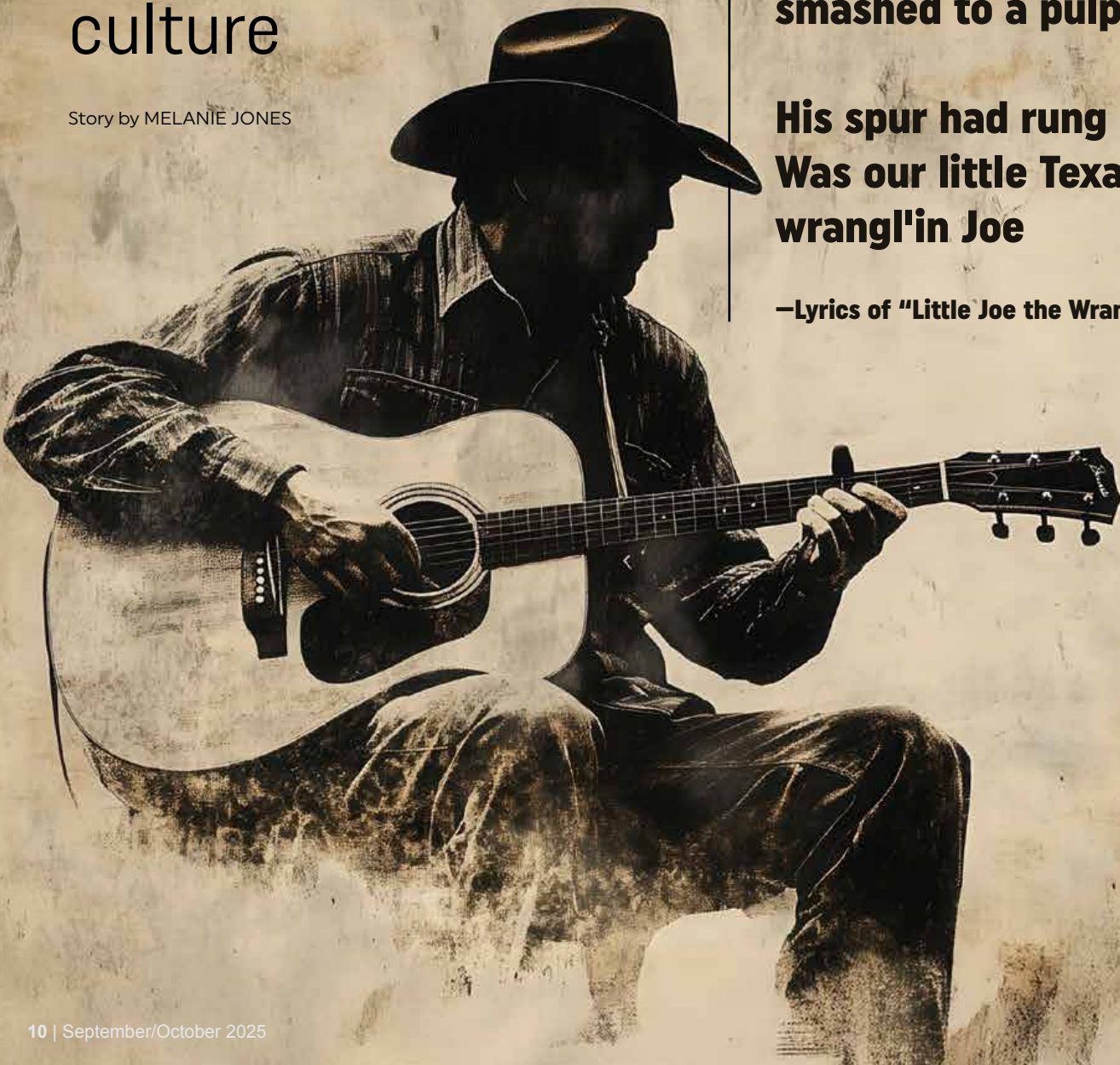
Poet and musician captures cowboy culture

Story by MELANIE JONES

**Next morn'in just  
at daybreak  
And beneath his horse,  
smashed to a pulp**

**His spur had rung his knell  
Was our little Texas Faithful,  
wrangl'in Joe**

—Lyrics of “Little Joe the Wrangler”







Andy Hedges plays several instruments favored by cowboys, including the banjo.

Andy Hedges, a cowboy poet, musician and podcaster, collects oral histories of the Old West the way rodeo champs collect belt buckles. He's a champion of cowboy culture, and he has the hat to prove it.

"I think there's something about that image that just resonates with people," he says. "They know cowboys represent some of the best of American values—independence, honesty, hard work. And when they hear it, they're hearing real, authentic stories from cowboy culture. They learn the real truth behind the cowboy image."

Cowboy poetry also extends to music, with songs like "Rounded Up in Glory" and "Little Joe the Wrangler." Roy Rogers and Gene Autry brought that style of music to the silver screen, although the Hollywood version is not at the heart of the genre.

Authenticity inspires events across the country, from the Cowpoke Fall Gathering in Loomis, California, to Old West Days in Valentine, Nebraska. Minnesota annually declares a Cowboy Poetry Week, and Andy is returning to Jonesborough, Tennessee, where he performed several times. Cowboy music has even made it to the world-famous Carnegie Hall.

## DISCOVERY

Andy, who lives in Lubbock, Texas, is part of a movement that began in 1985, when a group of cowboys met in Elko, Nevada, for the inaugural National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. It's where cowboys swap tales, sing songs of the range and recite poetry that fills lonely days and nights.

What makes a poet a cowboy poet? Andy says his friend Vess Quinlan explains it this way: "He told me there's two ways you can make a deposit in the cowboy poetry bank. One is by being a working cowboy who writes poetry. The other one is to be a non-cowboy who writes poetry that is so good, it becomes accepted by working cowboys. And, of course, it has to be authentic. It has to ring true to those people."

"A lot of people write or recite cowboy poetry or sing the old cowboy songs or write new songs," Andy says. "The truth is a lot

of us, including myself, have never made a living as a cowboy."

Andy has spent years immersing himself in cowboy culture's history, poetry and music. "I try really hard to represent the culture in an authentic way," he says.

He grew up hearing stories of his dad, who worked the rodeo circuit before becoming a Primitive Baptist preacher. He watched old Hollywood Westerns and listened to Western music. "All I really thought I wanted to do was be a cowboy," he says.

But his true obsession with cowboy culture began when he saw an episode of "Austin City Limits" featuring Michael Martin Murphy and friends. Those friends included cowboy poet Waddie Mitchell, cowboy singer Don Edwards and the groups Sons of the San Joaquin and Riders in the Sky. "It just opened that world up to me," Andy says. "I didn't realize there were people who still sang the old songs. I'd never heard cowboy poetry before I heard Waddie on that show."

A self-taught guitarist, young Andy learned some of the old songs. "It was really the beginning of a lifelong obsession with cowboy poetry and cowboy songs," he says.

By the time he could drive, the homeschooled teen was traveling to cowboy gatherings. By 20, he made it to Elko, where he's appeared 17 times. Since recording his album of duets, "Ride On, Cowboy," he and some of the album's guests have appeared on the Grand Ole Opry and practiced, practiced, practiced their way to Carnegie Hall, where they performed for an appreciative audience in March 2024.

The music has an international audience. While travelers come to the United States for gatherings, some performers also toured overseas. Andy even traveled to Turkmenistan as part of a cultural exchange. "The cowboy has always been the folk hero of America," he says. "People identify with that image. You know, when I traveled to Turkmenistan, or just travel overseas not performing, when I wear a cowboy hat, people love that and immediately associate that image with the United States." 📺

## SWAPPING STORIES

Cowboy poet and musician Andy Hedges will be the teller-in-residence at the National Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee, Sept. 2-6. Andy has participated in the National Storytelling Festival before.

"It's a really fantastic gathering of all kinds of storytellers from different traditions," he says of the festival. "I was honored to be there representing the cowboy tradition and sharing cowboy poetry with them." As teller-in-residence, he'll perform a concert every day, make media appearances and take part in other community events. For more information on the event, go to [storytellingcenter.net](http://storytellingcenter.net).

To learn more about cowboy culture, check out Andy's podcast, "Cowboy Crossroads." You can download episodes at [andyhedges.com/cowboy-crossroads](http://andyhedges.com/cowboy-crossroads).

# Homeschooling as a Community

Morris programs offer structure and socialization

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

With ease, Michelle Nelson sings the historical events in order: “Early Native Americans, Israel divides into two kingdoms, Homer and Hesiod, Rome founded by Romulus and Remus, Israel falls to Assyria, Assyria falls to Babylon, Lao-Tzu, Confucius, Buddha.”

Michelle is homeschooling with the help of Classical Conversations Morris, a community-minded program that offers families support as they educate their children. It’s one of several homeschool programs in Morris that support at-home learning supplemented by in-person education that regularly brings students and their parents together.

Children as young as preschool begin memorizing different songs, like the historical timeline. Each week, they build upon what they’ve already learned, in addition to reviewing what they already know. A lot of the work is set to a tune to make it more memorable.

The history timeline song touches on 161 historical events and takes about 15 minutes to sing, says Kaitlin Westerman, the director of the Foundations and Essentials programs at Classical Conversations Morris.

“When they’re 5, do they really know what every single one of those events means or is about? No, they don’t at all,” says



Students work together on a tempera painting in the style of Giotto at Classical Conversations.



Photo courtesy of Classical Conversations



BELOW: Student Peter Jay dissects an owl pellet at Classical Conversations.



ABOVE: Briella Koehntop reads a story to Brendon Woodke.

RIGHT: Tutor Cassie Blair instructs students in a lesson on the atmosphere with a mnemonic device, "Try Stromboli Mom Told Everyone," helps them recall the troposphere, stratosphere, mesosphere, thermosphere and exosphere in order.



Kaitlin, a mother of four. "But when they're 10, and they're reading about the French Revolution, they're like, 'Huh. Because the French Revolution on the timeline comes right after the American Revolution, I wonder if they have anything to do with each other?'"

The Classical Conversations, or CC, program encourages get-togethers every Thursday. The group meets at the Morris North Apostolic Christian Church. Leigh Bortins founded the Christian program in North Carolina in the late 1990s. Today, there are programs in more than 50 countries offering curriculums for children of all ages.

The group in Morris started with the 2023-24 school year. Kaitlin first joined the CC group in Alexandria with her children and agreed to direct the Morris program.

This past year, seven families and 20 children, including Kaitlin's own, were involved. "CC is more of a resource, but the parent is still the main teacher," Kaitlin says. "CC is really big on parents retaining authority over their own children."

## PARENTS COLLABORATING

Lighthouse Learning is a similar homeschool program. About five

years ago, Mandi Koehntop started homeschooling her four children. When approached by a mutual friend and elementary school teacher, they decided to form a co-op—Lighthouse Learning. In an education co-op parents share the costs and the resources needed to teach their children.

In-person meetings with students and tutors Monday through Thursday are key to Lighthouse Learning. "It's not your traditional homeschool co-op," says Mandi, a co-leader of Lighthouse Learning. "We decided to offer it to families in our community that wanted to homeschool their kids, but to use this more as an educational service for them to collaboratively meet for the week."

Every family looks different, Mandi says. For instance, some parents work full time. Others have just one or all of their children participating.

Lighthouse Learning meets four days a week at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Morris, with three full-time tutors and a part-time high school math tutor.

"It follows the homeschool model of offering flexibility in what is being taught, how and where the learning takes place and is also tailored to individual learner's needs with a high importance on life skills and family values," Mandi says.

The Christian-based curriculum is nondenominational and tailored to each student. "Everyone has various needs and various skills and strengths and weaknesses," Mandi says. "We do our best to accommodate and individualize based on their needs."

Currently, Lighthouse Learning has 19 students. It can accommodate kindergarteners through 12th graders. All children involved also benefit from multiage learning. They're able to interact, share ideas and collaborate in ways they wouldn't be able to in other school settings, Mandi says. "They're learning off each other in positive ways that they will carry with them into their adult lives," she says.

## A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS

Neither Kaitlin nor Michelle planned on homeschooling. They've found it to be the right choice. Both programs offer a valuable framework, while their children can still explore.

"Our children have time to develop their own passions and interests," Michelle says. "They aren't being influenced by other children in that way, but they still have the socialization concept by going to our Classical Conversations group on Thursdays." 📱



# Dinner on a Stick

Kabobs make for easy meals, quick cleanup

**D**o you ever crave an easy meal with meat and vegetables? Try putting kabobs on the menu. It's a tasty grill-friendly choice, and cleanup is easy.

Begin with a tender cut of meat like top sirloin, which is affordable. Filet also works well. If you'd like, substitute chicken or tofu. Just remember to cut your protein portions to about the same size so they cook evenly. You can add as many chopped veggies as you like.

Begin with a fresh marinade. Homemade chimichurri does double duty as a marinade and seasoning sauce—it works for any protein. Round out your meal with crunchy Asian coleslaw and a fresh apple cake for dessert.

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

## GRILLED CHIMICHURRI STEAK KABOBS

### CHIMICHURRI SAUCE

- 1/2 cup fresh cilantro, packed, leaves and tender stems
- 1/2 cup fresh parsley, packed
- 3 tablespoons fresh oregano or 3 teaspoons dried
- 1 lemon, zested and juiced
- 3-4 cloves of garlic
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Put all ingredients in a food processor

and pulse until blended. Taste and season with salt and pepper as desired.

### STEAK KABOBS

- 32 ounces top sirloin, or the protein of your choice, cut into 2-inch cubes
- 36-48 baby potatoes, golden or mini reds
- 2 medium bell peppers, any color, chopped into 2-inch pieces
- 2 small red onions, chopped into 2-inch pieces
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper





## CRUNCHY ASIAN COLESLAW

- 2 packages ramen noodles, any flavor
- 2 16-ounce packages shredded coleslaw mix
- 1 cup slivered almonds, toasted
- 5 green onions, chopped
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/3 cup rice vinegar

Reserve the flavor packets from the noodles for another use or toss. Crush the

noodles and set aside. Toss together the coleslaw mix, almonds and green onions in a large salad bowl.

Whisk together the sugar, oil and vinegar in a small bowl until mixed. Add the dressing to the coleslaw mixture and toss to coat. Mix in the chopped noodles. Serve immediately. Makes 12 servings.

Note: You may prepare the salad in advance, adding the noodles just before serving so they are crunchy.

## FRESH APPLE CAKE

- 1 cup oil
- 2 cups sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup pecans or walnuts, chopped
- 3 cups apples, peeled and chopped

### CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 16 ounces powdered sugar

- 8 tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons vanilla

Measure oil into a large bowl, then whisk in sugar and eggs.

Mix together the flour, salt, baking powder and cinnamon, then add to the creamed mixture, beating well. Add vanilla, then fold in nuts and apples.

Pour mixture into a greased 9-by-13-inch pan. Bake at 350 F for 50 minutes or until cake tests done. Cover with foil if it gets too dark around the edges.

To make frosting: Combine all frosting ingredients and spread over cooled cake.

After reserving some of the chimichurri to use during cooking and for dipping the cooked kabobs, combine the rest of the sauce and the cubed protein in a sealable bag. Set aside to marinate. Meanwhile, soak the skewers in water a minimum of 20 minutes so they don't burn on the grill.

Add potatoes to a large pot, cover with water and 2 teaspoons of salt. Boil for 5-7 minutes or until fork tender. Drain and rinse the potatoes. Let them sit in cold water to cool. Chop veggies and have them ready to slide onto your skewers.

Now it's time to assemble: Using a soaked skewer, put either a potato or piece

of meat on first, so the rest of the veggies don't slide off the end. Then alternate between meat, potatoes and veggies.

Prepare the grill to about 500 F. Once it's ready, place steak kabobs perpendicular to the grill grates. Grill 3 minutes on each side for medium doneness. If you use chicken, cook for 5-7 minutes. Tofu needs to cook about 10 minutes. While cooking, brush the reserved chimichurri on the kabobs.

Remove the kabobs from the grill and let rest for 3-5 minutes. Use the chimichurri as an extra dipping sauce, if desired. 🍴





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