WK&T Sports showcases local athletes

SERVICE AND SOLACE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020

CONNECTION
Published for the members of West Kentucky & Tennessee Telecommunications Cooperative

DEER, OH DEER
Blood River Outfitters offers hunting experience

SPREADING THE WORD
Churches use technology to reach more people

SERVICE AND SOLACE
Broadband powers community outreach
INDUSTRY NEWS

Connecting rural communities to reliable broadband networks represents a vital challenge for not only individual states but also the nation as a whole. Jobs, education, health care and more increasingly rely on fast internet access.

As state and national policymakers consider strategies to expand broadband networks, weighing the benefits of an often misunderstood technology might prove beneficial.

Hot spots are described by NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association as wireless on-ramps to the internet that cover a small area. Many consumers and policymakers associate hot spot technology with cellular phones, because many phones have the capability of becoming hot spots to serve as gateways to the internet for other devices.

NTCA, however, notes that these mobile connections represent only one form of hot spot. A fixed hot spot is created by use of a Wi-Fi router connected to a physical internet source such as a fiber optic network. These hot spots are common in homes, coffee shops, offices and more. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many rural telcos used this technology to provide free Wi-Fi connections at schools, churches and public spaces.

The important point to remember is that wireless connections do ultimately need wires. Fast broadband networks make these Wi-Fi-based hot spots possible, because those wired links provide the final connections to the internet.

NTCA emphasizes it’s important for policymakers to remember that the term “hot spot” is associated with far more than mobile phones. Robust rural broadband networks make Wi-Fi-based hot spots possible, bringing their power and convenience to your homes, businesses and more.
The CrazyCap

The CrazyCap uses ultraviolet light to kill germs inside your water bottle. This means you never have to worry about a smelly bottle again, even if you leave it overnight in your gym bag. It self-cleans every four hours. And forget about running low on water during a hike. The manufacturer claims you can safely disinfect any debris-free water, so you can refill your bottle from rivers, lakes or streams. The rechargeable cap can also disinfect surfaces or objects, such as your smartphone or keys. CrazyCap can be purchased with its bottle or separately, and it fits most cola-style bottles. The company donates 5% of every sale to water.org, a group that helps people around the world have access to clean water.

The CrazyCap with 17-ounce bottle: $69.99.

Senstroke

Giving that budding Buddy Rich in your household a full-size drum kit is the fastest way to put yourself on the outs with your neighbors and less-than-appreciative family members. So, the Senstroke is a great gift for everyone. The Bluetooth sensors attach to drumsticks, as well as to your feet, allowing you to mimic a bass drum and hi-hat. Connect to a free app to play and practice drums on most surfaces. The app includes a learning mode for beginners and can also record, playback and export your performance in MIDI format. Complete kit: $280. Essential kit: $200.

Gadget Discovery Club

For year-round giving to that tech junkie in your family, you may consider getting him or her a subscription to the Gadget Discovery Club. Every month, the service mails a new mystery gadget for you to discover upon opening the box. The promise from the company is that you will receive a high-quality item at a cheaper price than retail, with a one-year guarantee and a 30-day return period. Don’t expect to get an iPhone, but past deliveries have included gadgets such as fitness trackers, Bluetooth speakers and wireless earphones. Subscriptions range from $96 for three months to $276 for 12 months.

The Child Animatronic Edition

The creators of the hit Disney+ show “The Mandalorian” want you to call him The Child, while the internet knows him as Baby Yoda. Whatever his name is, he is undeniably adorable and ready to come home for the holidays. The Child Animatronic Edition giggles, babbles and makes Force effect sounds. It also features motorized movements, including eyes that open and close and ears that move back and forth. The Child even lifts his arm as he prepares to use the Force, after which he may need a “Force nap.” Demand will be high, so you may need an intergalactic bounty hunter to snatch one up or be quick on the draw at your favorite online retailer. $59.99 MSRP.
A spirit of giving and support

Neighbors helping neighbors is something we see daily. Never is this spirit more evident than during tough times. At WK&T, working together as a community is also part of our heritage as a cooperative. For nearly 70 years, we’ve focused on making our area stronger, healthier and richer.

In 2020, though, it seemed every day brought news about a fresh challenge facing our world. But with each hardship came an opportunity to demonstrate the cooperative spirit that is a part of our nation. When wildfires ravaged Oregon and California, thousands of firefighters did their part. As devastating hurricanes slammed into the coasts, emergency personnel and aid organizations rushed to assist. Doctors, nurses and scientists worked to study COVID-19, limit its spread and find a vaccine. Educators essentially reinvented school, finding ways to safely teach our children.

All of that effort can boil down to one idea: neighbors help neighbors. I would humbly suggest that in our own way, WK&T joined other community-based internet providers around the country to help. Without fast, reliable broadband internet service, our businesses, work-from-home employees, students and more would lack the critical tools needed to weather such a challenging year.

As always, WK&T remains dedicated to providing our customers and communities with the essential services they need to stay connected, engaged and on track, both at work and at home. We are proud to be entrusted with the responsibility of providing these invaluable connections.

Earlier this year, WK&T Telecommunications Cooperative received state Emergency Broadband Fund grants totaling more than $3.2 million to ensure residents in parts of Henry and Weakley counties have the internet service they need for online learning, working from home, and access to telehealth services.

The grants Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee awarded are part of the state’s portion of the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund. The goal is to enhance broadband infrastructure and access to the internet for individuals and families. Thanks to the grant, WK&T will bring at least education-speed internet — downloads of 25 Mbps and uploads of 3 Mbps — to underserved areas. In Henry County, that means at least 350 households will now have the service they need. Similarly, in Weakley County, WK&T will bring service to more than 1,100 households.

Over the years, such large-scale efforts have allowed WK&T to bring quality services to rural homes and businesses in areas that larger, for-profit companies did not see value in serving. Our mission, though, does not always rely on complex infrastructure projects. In fact, we can respond nimbly when there is a need.

During the pandemic, more people needed access to the internet than ever before. To make lives easier, we added free Wi-Fi access at 10 elementary and high schools in Graves County and at six churches in Calloway County. Users could use the service from the parking lots of the buildings, meaning students and others could access the internet for online learning or similar needs safely and without entering the schools or churches.

As you read this issue, you will find highlights of how others used broadband to assist their neighbors. Dozens of organizations in our region alone use broadband to do great work in serving their communities, whether through fundraising, recruiting volunteers, connecting with similar organizations or raising awareness of their causes.

As we move into what may be a very different kind of holiday season, may we all pause to give thanks for our neighbors.
Statement on Non Discrimination

WK&T is the recipient of federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call toll free 866-632-9992 (voice) or 800-877-8339 (TDD) or 866-377-8642 (relay voice users).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. The person responsible for coordinating this organization's nondiscrimination compliance efforts is Trevor Bonnstetter, CEO.

Emergency broadband grants

WK&T Telecommunications received Emergency Broadband Fund grants totaling just more than $2.6 million to ensure residents in Henry and Weakley counties have the internet service they need for online learning.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee awarded the grants as part of the state’s portion of the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund. The goal is to enhance broadband infrastructure and access to the internet for individuals and families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The grant will allow WK&T to provide broadband access to underserved areas in Henry County, including 350 households. In Weakley County, WK&T will provide service to more than 1,100 households. The grant requires WK&T to provide a minimum of “education level” speeds, which are downloads of 25 Mbps and uploads of 3 Mbps.

The grant will allow three months of free service to eligible residents. Afterward, those who wish to keep the service must subscribe and pay the monthly fee.

Feature presentation

Do you know a business or individual with a story that should be featured in the WK&T Connection? If so, please send an email to nmorgan@mywkt.coop or call the WK&T office at 877-954-8748.

WK&T News

Holiday closings

A reminder that the WK&T offices will be closed for the following holidays.

Thanksgiving: Thursday, Nov. 26
Christmas: Friday, Dec. 25
New Year’s Day: Friday, Jan. 1

A salute to veterans!

WK&T would like to thank the brave men and women who have served our country. We thank you for your service. Take a moment to thank a soldier in your life on Veterans Day, which is Wednesday, Nov. 11.
It's the time for Christmas lights, and cities around the South tend to take the holidays to a whole ‘nother level, brightening the season and lighting up the town.

It’s time for brightly lit trees, warm cider simmering on the stove and scented the house, and steam rising from mugs of hot chocolate. And it’s time to revel in the joy of the Christmas season with family, friends and lots of colorful displays of light.

Rock City’s Enchanted Garden of Lights, now in its 26th year and named a Top 20 Event for 2019 by the Southeast Tourism Society, is just that — enchanting. There are more than 30 holiday scenes and a million-plus LED lights — more than ever before. As the lights brighten the night, Rock City Gardens’ daytime splendor is transformed into a fantasyland of brilliant wonder.

For many, a trip to Rock City atop Lookout Mountain is a holiday tradition. For others, it will be a new experience. For all, it offers popular attractions preserved from years past, along with new adventures through the lights.

There are four areas that light up each Christmas season: Yule Town; Magic Forest; North Pole Village, where Santa and Mrs. Claus live and work with their magical elves; and the popular Arctic Kingdom, which has a brand-new look this year, offering one of the world’s first of its kind — walk-through Christmas trees.
Also new this year are the fashions on Inara the Ice Queen and Jack Frost. They will be decked out in colorful, new garments to prepare them for a journey through a stunning display of ice crystals in the Arctic Kingdom with a design reminiscent of the aurora borealis lights. Within this area of the Enchanted Garden of Lights is the Glacier Grotto, which offers a firepit to warm visitors passing through. Treats to warm the body and soul are also found at the North Pole Lodge, where kids of all ages can enjoy gingerbread cookie decorating and sipping hot cocoa while enjoying live music.

But that’s not all. Other presents Rock City offers for the season include the chance to enjoy dinner with Santa, storytimes with Mrs. Claus, pictures with Santa and greetings from Jack Frost, Inara the Ice Queen and other characters roaming through the Enchanted Garden of Lights.

Rock City Enchanted Garden of Lights
Nov. 20-Jan. 2, 4-9 p.m. (closed Christmas Eve)
Rock City Gardens, 1400 Patten Road, Lookout Mountain, Georgia
For information on special events and deals on weekday pricing during the holiday season, visit www.seerockcity.com/lights.

Lights around the South
Holiday lights shine all around the South this season. Here’s a look at some in your area.

- **Magic Christmas in Lights**
  Bellingrath Gardens, Theodore, Alabama
  Take a tour through the gardens and become illuminated with the more than 3 million lights sparkling throughout the gardens every Christmas. It’s a holiday event that has become a tradition along the Gulf Coast. www.bellingrath.org

- **Natchitoches Festival of Lights**
  Natchitoches, Louisiana
  The city’s historic district lights up with holiday spirit as hundreds of thousands visit annually for fireworks, parades, plays, historic tours and the charm of the oldest community in Louisiana. More than 300,000 lights drape the cobblestone streets decorated with garlands of greens. www.natchitocheschristmas.com

- **Southern Lights Holiday Festival**
  Kentucky Horse Park, Lexington, Kentucky
  Santa on horseback outlined with lights and other scenes are part of the 3-mile driving tour of the Kentucky Horse Park that attracts more than 120,000 visitors each year. www.kyhorsepark.com

- **Anderson Christmas Lights**
  Anderson, South Carolina
  Old Man Winter, Santa Claus, the Anderson Express and a salute to the military are among the 160 displays and 3.5 million lights that brighten the night at Anderson Christmas Lights. Warm up by the fire, roast some marshmallows, sing some Christmas songs and get into the holiday spirit. andersonchristmaslights.org

- **Dollywood’s Smoky Mountain Christmas**
  Pigeon Forge, Tennessee
  The mountains come alive with color and cheer as Dolly’s crew turns on the lights — 4 million of them — throughout the park. They are a backdrop for the amazing Parade of Many Colors and other events, including live shows with a holiday theme, such as the popular “Christmas in the Smokies.” www.dollywood.com

- **Galaxy of Lights**
  Huntsville, Alabama
  The Huntsville Botanical Garden is all decked out in holiday finery as the annual Galaxy of Lights turns the gardens into a fantasyland of lights and color. It’s a driving tour that takes you past nearly 200 animated displays, from those with holiday themes to dinosaurs and nursery rhyme characters for the kids. Special Galaxy of Lights Walking Nights are also available. Walk through snow falling inside a twinkling icicle forest, visit with Santa and enjoy hot chocolate along the way. www.hsvbg.org
Even before the pandemic struck hard this past spring, churches across the country were attempting to find their way in the 21st-century world.

Denominations sought to maintain tradition while using technology to open the doors to broader audiences and sometimes to welcome back old friends.

Churches like the Lebanon Church of Christ in Sedalia, St. Charles Catholic Church in Bardwell and Puryear Baptist in Puryear were making those changes incrementally before COVID-19 struck. The pandemic forced distance among those accustomed to gathering for worship, and churches had to adapt and use technology to reach their congregations. “We really don’t change what we’re doing,” says Chris King, minister of the Lebanon Church of Christ. “We’ve just kind of changed how we’re doing it.”

Livestreamed sermons and video productions have become the norm for churches entering 2021, even if they resisted using social media sites like YouTube, Instagram and Facebook prior to the pandemic. For King, it has become a mix of new technology and old-school service that has kept his congregation members in touch with one another, physically and spiritually.
“People have spiritual needs, and that’s the most important thing we want to provide for, but there are physical needs, as well, so we’ve gone out and picked things up for people and made deliveries — grocery shopping and other things we don’t normally do. We’re trying to minister to people and all their needs, whether it’s physically, emotionally or mentally.”

Sometimes it has been something as simple as a phone call or a handwritten note. Regularly, it is the use of broadband internet service to livestream church services or take video recordings straight into the homes or hands of church members. “If I’m guessing, I’d say 90-95% of our congregation has internet access,” King says. “But there are those who don’t, so we’ve made DVDs of our services, and we get those to people who can’t watch over the internet.”

**CHALLENGES**

King’s church was already at least streaming services on social media prior to the pandemic. Puryear Baptist was recording services for YouTube but needed to upgrade its internet service to be able to livestream when congregation members were unable to attend traditional services.

Bible studies at the Church of Christ have taken place via Zoom, a video communications platform, during the pandemic. At Puryear Baptist, the online services had more attendees than traditional services with “more views than people in the pews,” says Brother Donald Chadwick. So, the staff expects virtual services to continue even after the pandemic.

The Catholic Church is more steeped in ritual than most Protestant churches, which provides a unique challenge for St. Charles and Father Chrispin Oneko.

Though services from St. Charles were available through livestreaming, and the local diocese provided readings through its website, members were unable to participate in sacraments like confession, which are integral parts of Catholic worship.

“Catholics have the sacraments and Holy Communion, and they are missing it, so the physical presence of the person is important,” Oneko says. “They are able to see everything online but are missing that part.”

Even so, Oneko says the addition of streaming Sunday services is probably the way forward for the Catholic Church and others, even when there is a post-pandemic normal. “The pandemic has brought a lot of people together although apart,” he says. “Using media will help with communication to connect with everyone.”

**GOING FORWARD**

Like Puryear Baptist and St. Charles Parish, Lebanon Church of Christ has discovered its reach has been expanded exponentially with its social media presence in particular.

Now, it is more than an option for the church — it is a near-necessary tool, just like the texts, phone calls and handwritten cards to members of the congregation. But King is confident that the members of the Lebanon Church of Christ will be able to come together again for traditional services. “We need to fellowship with one another — the Bible talks about fellowship. That part has been difficult, so we’ve really looked around and found things we can do to distance but still fellowship and encourage one another.”

The church has also found a new path for traditional worship that goes well beyond the church building. “We have talked about how we progress forward,” King says. “We’ve been able to reach out to some people that maybe we never would have had the chance to before.

“I got a message from a man in Ghana, and he said he watched our services,” King says. “I never would have been able to go to Ghana on my own and find this guy to preach to, but he came across our stream. So it’s a tool that we will want to continue to use in the future to reach out to someone who may never come in our doors.”
In March 2020, Chowgirls Killer Catering in Minneapolis was busy preparing for its Sweet 16 party, complete with signature food and a swing band. Like many events in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, the celebration was ultimately called off. The next day, while watching Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz recommend against large gatherings across the state, it occurred to co-owner and CEO Heidi Andermack that one canceled party was the least of her problems.

“We had a big leadership meeting about what to do, because all our events were canceling,” she says. “Our chef, who had been working with Second Harvest Heartland, thought of calling them to see what they were going to do. We would have a big empty kitchen, so maybe we could work with them.”

As service organizations, charities and churches throughout the nation learned, creating connections to serve their communities meant relying more on online tools, broadband access and digital communication. They learned to talk, collaborate and succeed with the help of technology.

Chowgirls had first partnered with Second Harvest Heartland, a member of the Feeding America network of food banks, on a food rescue program around the 2018 Super Bowl. The two groups met once again and created the Minnesota Central Kitchen to feed families in need.

Chowgirls is now one of eight kitchens cooking for Minnesota Central Kitchen, preparing 30,000 meals weekly for hungry populations in the Twin Cities area. Large-scale donors such as restaurants, grocery stores and food distributors contribute ingredients, which are managed using Feeding America’s MealConnect app.

“It’s a lot of meals to keep track of, so our high-speed internet has been pretty key to keeping it all coordinated,” Andermack says. “We also organize all of our meals and what is available using Google Spreadsheets. We’re not just tracking our kitchen but tying together a whole network of kitchens.”
WORSHIP ON DEMAND

While the importance of online tools is nothing new to service organizations across the country, they have become all but essential over the last year. Rev. Chad Ramsey at Smithville First Baptist Church in Smithville, Tennessee, has relied on the ability to stream services online to reach parishioners who might find themselves homebound.

“Streaming is huge everywhere,” he says. “We see that in the media world with Netflix, Disney+ and all the streaming services. But the same is true for the church.”

Smithville FBC not only streams live services for parishioners who can’t make it to the church but also has its own studio for recording and uploading training videos for everyone from new members to those preparing for mission trips. With so many demands on the church’s internet service, Ramsey isn’t sure what they would do without a fiber connection.

“We saw where things were going in this world and knew that having that ability to connect with each other would be important, whether it’s sharing files, videos, streaming or uploading to social media,” he says. “People are so much more connected than they have been, and if you don’t have that consistent and quality connection, you’re going to be left behind.”

That approach has helped Smithville FBC build a church that appeals across generations, attracting millennials and seniors alike. And while their preferences for how they worship may not break down as neatly as expected, the fiber connection provides the flexibility to meet everyone’s needs.

“You might see someone really young who wants things to be done the way they were decades ago, and then there are other people who are much older who want to know why we aren’t making the changes we need to to be around for another 100 years,” says Ramsey. “That’s the challenge: Getting the focus not on style but the purpose. We’re here to serve God, not ourselves. That’s what makes us tick.”

DIGITAL LITERACY

At Families & Literacy in Kerrville, Texas, it’s opening doors to people’s futures that makes them tick. The organization serves adult learners throughout the community and inmates of the Kerr County Jail, helping them to earn their citizenship or GED or learn English as a second language.

While most of the classes Families & Literacy organizes take place in local churches or other off-campus locations, the in-office broadband connection has been particularly helpful in getting prospective students on the path to learning as quickly as possible. Not every student has access to a reliable internet connection at home, so the organization provides Chromebooks on-site so they can take placement tests and register for the appropriate classes.

Families & Literacy even offers an ESL class that incorporates computer skills, helping prepare students to be ready to communicate in the workplace and to better understand the tools they will be using day to day.

“Computer technology is prevalent in pretty much every job you go to now,” says Families & Literacy Executive Director Misty Kothe. “It’s important that not only can our students speak the language and do the work but they can also efficiently use that technology. It just makes them more employable in the future.”

Moving forward, broadband connections offer new opportunities for all three organizations. Families & Literacy aims to offer limited-size classes on location, outdoors if necessary, while Smithville FBC is eager to explore the possibilities of Bible study streaming services. Meanwhile, the Minnesota Central Kitchen project has proven so successful that Andermack now plans to incorporate its mission into Chowgirls’ regular operations even when the pandemic has passed.

“We have always had a mission of reducing food waste, but now we’re looking at it as hunger relief,” she says. “It’s become essential to our business, helping us give jobs to chefs who would otherwise be unemployed and keep the lights on at our facility. Sometimes you just need to support each other, and it comes back in ways you don’t expect.”

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Families & Literacy in Kerrville, Texas, combines GED and ESL classes with computer literacy.
Scott Taylor grew up hunting and fishing along Blood River, bagging his first deer at the age of 10. “I was out either hunting or fishing every day growing up,” Taylor says of his childhood in the Murray countryside.

Now, he is sharing his passion for hunting in the area as the owner and operator of Blood River Outfitters. The operation began in 2018, and Taylor serves as a guide on whitetail deer and turkey hunts that ramble over thousands of acres he owns and leases in the area. “I just like to take people to my spots and let them do the hunting themselves,” Taylor says. “I enjoy watching other people do what I like to do myself and helping them get that experience.”

When he opened Blood River Outfitters with his fiancee, Rachel Alexander, in 2018, they welcomed seven hunters for guided hunts after putting the finishing touches on Sugar Creek Lodge, which sits on Taylor’s property. Eight miles of hiking trails and an ample no-hunting zone for wildlife viewing surround the lodge.

They finished the lodge in October of 2018 as hunting season waned, but it was completed in time to welcome the new company’s first seven hunters. In 2019, 23 hunters from all around the country, along with two friends from Europe, visited for hunts.

“That’s about the number I was looking for last year,” Taylor says. “This year we’ve set a goal at around 30, and in late summer, we were sitting at about 25 that had made their deposits.”

As was the case with all things in 2020, COVID-19 has played a limiting role, at least with travel. While hunters can easily manage social distancing, travel to and from Kentucky was going to be challenging for some during a pandemic, so Taylor could only be so confident in his projections for the deer hunting season. “If we hit the 25 mark, I’ll be pretty happy this year,” Taylor says. “We’re relatively small, and we’re trying to grow as well as we see fit.”

**FINDING BLOOD RIVER**

Taylor says he has done no real advertising for Blood River Outfitters, but people have still found him.
Despite being a web design novice, Alexander built a website for the business, bloodriveroutfitters.com, and operates the company’s Facebook and Instagram accounts. “She’s done a great job with all that,” Taylor says. “I’m pretty much computer illiterate. I’ve resisted that as much as I could.”

Even so, Taylor says having a web presence and high-speed internet, which is available for clients as part of the package at Sugar Creek Lodge, has proven invaluable for the business. “A lot of our customers have definitely come off of just what they’ve seen on the website,” he says. “The two guys that came over from Wales, they did a search and found either the website or social media. That’s how most folks find us.”

Those same customers have also been able to leave reviews of their experiences with Blood River Outfitters on Facebook and on the company’s website. Taylor asks them for the feedback, which he says he works hard to keep positive.

“Wonderful experience! We saw tons of deer and several nice bucks. Scott and Rachel are great people and make you feel right at home. Excellent accommodations and hospitality. Highly recommend!” Alicia Downey Collier wrote on Facebook.

Justin Givens praised the wildlife management across the more than 2,000 acres Taylor leases for hunting each year, writing: “Phenomenal whitetail hunting experience. I was fortunate to be able to partner with Scott and Rachel for a youth muzzleloading hunt. I can’t say enough good things about the experience these folks are able to provide. Delicious down-home cooking, comfortable accommodations and personalized hospitality are what await you on their beautiful farm. The deer are plentiful and not pressured due to the protective management that is practiced. Scott knows the herd, their behavior and the land very well; therefore, he is able to give you your best chance at a monster! Outfitters like this are far and few between. Prepare to be spoiled!”

The goal for Blood River Outfitters is to offer the type of hunting experiences that will encourage each client to return again the following year, Taylor says. “The last two years, we’ve had a gentleman and his grandson, a youth hunter, from Mississippi come up to hunt together, and they’re planning to come back this year,” he says. “That’s what we want to see.”

Taylor can also see how word spreads online about his company after hunters return home and share a review, posts and photos of their hunting trips. “All of a sudden, you’ll notice after they go back to, say, South Florida, then we’ll get another 100 followers on Facebook out of the Miami area. So, it definitely helps when they get back and brag on their trips.”

THE NEXT SHOT

With a second full season done and positive feedback from practically all of its past clients, Blood River Outfitters is poised for growth. Taylor is still deciding what that might look like — perhaps using Sugar Creek Lodge as a bed and breakfast outside of hunting season or adding more guided hunts during the year.

“We’ve thought about expanding to other areas and services, whether it be fishing or rabbit or quail or something of the sort,” he says. “But right now, we’re really kind of concentrating on these other two big-game areas and trying to get that right. Then, maybe we’ll throw in some of that extra stuff.”

**BLOOD RIVER OUTFITTERS**

» Personalized, all-inclusive, guided hunting packages
» Customized whitetail deer hunts using bow, muzzle-loader and crossbow
» Youth firearm deer hunts and doe-only hunts in late season
» Guided wild turkey hunts
» Comfortable, private accommodations that include Sugar Creek Lodge and The Drake Barn for overnight stays
» 3D targets, available for practice before hunts
» Food plots and advice on moon phases for the best hunts
» Custom-built elevated houses for families looking to hunt together
» A record of having all of the youth hunters here over the past two years harvest a buck or turkey
A tart treat

Cranberries are a longstanding staple at holiday time

They’re great with turkey and stuffing or baked in your morning muffin. Dried, they’re known as craisins and perfect sprinkled on a salad. A fixture on Thanksgiving tables or even wrapped around trees as a Christmas garland, the jolly red cranberry takes center stage at holiday time.

People have been eating cranberries for centuries. Native Americans first used them as food and medicine, well before Pilgrims set foot here. The absence of sugar in the colonies in the early 1600s meant cranberries, which benefit from sweetening, were probably not at the first Thanksgiving table. Nonetheless, it didn’t take long for them to become a part of that holiday’s menu, and today, consumers eat more than 80 million pounds of cranberries from Thanksgiving to Christmas.

Every year, holiday celebrators enjoy more than 5 million gallons of the canned sauce that jiggles like Santa’s belly, and cranberries are a simple way to add color to your table and a sweet, tart flavor to your turkey. But as Americans are latching on to the farm-to-table trend, fresh cranberries are outselling the canned variety.

Here are several tips from Vitamix for cooking with fresh cranberries:

- **Baking with cranberries** — Cut cranberries in half before adding them to baked goods to prevent them from swelling and popping.
- **Cooking cranberries on the stovetop** — Simmer whole berries gently in a small amount of water, uncovered, since too much steam might cause them to swell and explode.
- **Freezing cranberries** — To freeze and enjoy them throughout the year, spread the berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet and place it in the freezer. Once they are completely frozen, transfer the berries to freezer-safe bags or airtight containers. There’s no need to thaw your cranberries before cooking. Just give them a quick water bath before using.
CRANBERRY APPLE HOLIDAY BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

Make this casserole a day ahead.

Casserole:
- 2 tablespoons softened unsalted butter, divided
- 3 large, firm, sweet tart apples, diced
- 2/3 cup fresh cranberries
- 8 large eggs
- 1 cup vanilla Greek yogurt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/4 cup maple syrup, plus more for serving
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 6 cups stale bread cubes, crusts removed

Streusel topping:
- 1/3 cup flour
- 1/4 cup rolled oats
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Pinch kosher salt
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

Make the casserole: Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the apples and cook, stirring until they are starting to brown and become tender — 4 to 6 minutes. Remove from the heat. Stir in the cranberries.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch casserole dish with the remaining 1 tablespoon of butter. Whisk the eggs in a large bowl. Add the yogurt, milk, maple syrup and cinnamon, then whisk to combine. Add the bread cubes and the apple mixture, and stir until combined. Transfer to the prepared baking dish. Cover it with foil and refrigerate up to 24 hours.

Make the topping: Stir the flour, oats, sugar, cinnamon and salt in a medium bowl. Drizzle 3 tablespoons melted butter over the oat mixture, tossing with a fork until the crumbs are evenly moist. Add the nuts and stir to completely combine. Refrigerate.

Preheat oven to 375 F. Grease a 13-by-9-inch pan.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, 1 cup sugar, almonds, baking powder and salt. Cut in the butter, using a pastry blender or pulling 2 table knives through the ingredients in opposite directions, until the mixture looks like coarse crumbs. Stir in the egg. Press 2 1/2 cups of crumb mixture in the bottom of the pan. Stir cinnamon into the remaining crumb mixture. Set aside.

In a medium bowl, stir together the filling ingredients. Spoon the filling evenly over the crust. Spoon the reserved crumb mixture evenly over the filling.

Bake 45 to 55 minutes or until the top is light golden brown. Cool completely. Refrigerate until chilled. Cut into 6 rows by 4 rows. Store tightly covered in the refrigerator.

Remove the casserole from the oven, remove the foil cover, and sprinkle the top with the streusel topping. Continue baking until the topping is golden and the casserole is puffed, 25 to 30 minutes. Allow the casserole to cool 10 minutes before cutting it into squares to serve. Serve with additional warm maple syrup, if desired.
AND... DONE!

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