

WK&T

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

CONNECTION

hello!



trilight mobile



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Protecting the Vulnerable

The internet powers many indispensable resources, including educational opportunities, tele-health, deployment of smart ag tools and the ability to stay in touch with loved ones. However, it is also the most common place for the recruiting and selling of sex-trafficking victims.

More than 150,000 new escort ads are posted online in America daily. Seventy-five percent of underaged victims report being sold online, and human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal activities in our country.

January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month, and as we raise awareness to combat these crimes, NTCA members, and the association as a whole, are proud to collaborate with Guardian Group and Operation IFAST—ISPs Fight Against Sex Trafficking. It has been beyond gratifying to see the number of NTCA members step up to be the front line of defense with their “boots on the ground” staff.

Originating with CLtel in Clear Lake, Iowa, and in coordination with Guardian Group, a team of former intelligence professionals, Operation IFAST works to prevent and disrupt sex trafficking of women and children in the United States. Over 100 companies in 22 states and over 1,400 of their employees participate in the program, which helps educate and train their teams to report potential trafficking situations to local law enforcement or the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

NTCA members are committed to helping keep their communities safe and being part of the solution.

To learn more about Operation IFAST, visit guardiangroup.org/operation-ifast.



Adobe Stock image by stokete

Hard Reset

What to do with old, broken devices

Many people have outdated or unused electronic devices they aren't sure what to do with after the holidays. While recycling is good for the environment, many phones and tablets also contain rare materials that are much more useful in another device than sitting in a landfill.

Here's how to dispose of your old devices properly:

Phones: Most phone manufacturers will let you trade in your old phone when you buy a new one. But if you still have old devices, retailers like Best Buy, Staples and Home Depot offer in-store drop-off for unused devices. EcoATM also has more than 6,000 kiosks across the country where you get cash for your old phone.

Computers: If you can't upgrade your computer to extend its lifespan, many manufacturers have take-back programs. Barring that, Best Buy has a trade-in calculator for PCs, while Apple offers its own recycling program for Macs. You can also donate your computer to an organization like Computers with Causes that will find students, foster homes or shelters where your computer can make a difference.

TVs: Often, finding a new home for your TV is the best option if it still works. Consider Goodwill, schools and libraries. If it's completely dead, Best Buy has a haul-away service that can send your old TV to one of its recycling partners.

Looking for a recycling center near you? Visit earth911.com to find the closest e-waste center.

GAME ON



Adobe Stock image by Mijan Živković

Growing numbers of seniors are playing video games to stay sharp

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Today's gamers might not fit the picture many people have in their heads. As the generation that grew up with Sega and Nintendo has come of age, the Entertainment Software Association's 2025 annual study found that the average gamer is 36 years old. The same study found that 28% of gamers in the United States are over the age of 50.

"It's easier to play video games now than at any other time in history. You don't have to go to an arcade. You don't have to buy a console or PC, although many players still do," says Aubrey Quinn, senior vice president of communications and public affairs at the ESA. "Video games can be played anytime, anywhere, with devices almost everyone has on them all the time—smartphones and tablets."

Other than having fun, older gamers say they're drawn to the pastime because it helps them keep their minds sharp. And, as our world becomes increasingly digital, more people are turning to video games as a way to support their mental, social and emotional health.

IMPROVED COGNITIVE ABILITY

While everyone can benefit from enhanced attention, short-term memory

and hand-eye coordination, these can be especially important for seniors looking to keep their minds active. Puzzle games can help improve recall and mental agility, while action and adventure games can encourage problem-solving and support spatial reasoning, particularly those games that require navigating 3D spaces.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Over the last decade, social interaction has become an essential part of gaming for many players. Connection with players online or on the couch can help older individuals improve their social relationships and build healthier emotional lives. A comprehensive literature review in the journal *Brain Sciences* in 2024 found that older people who played games showed a significant improvement in sleep quality and psychiatric symptoms.

BETTER BALANCE AND MOVEMENT

As motion controls have become standard for modern gaming consoles, games built around movement have also become more popular. These games provide a fun way for older players to stay active and can improve balance, all in a safe and low-stakes environment. ☎

PRESS START

Haven't touched a video game since the heyday of arcade cabinets? Don't worry. It has never been easier to get in the game.

One-stop shop—Much like a smartphone, every major console has its own digital storefront with access to thousands of games. Once you're set up, you can start playing without leaving the house to buy physical games.

Play your way—Accessibility for games is at an all-time high. "Aging often includes the need for extra support in games," says Aubrey Quinn, senior vice president of communications and public affairs for the Entertainment Software Association. "Accessibility features like large text, clear subtitles and chat speech-to-text are making it easier for older players to experience the benefits of play." Even if players have limited dexterity or mobility, there is a wide array of customized game pads and adaptive joysticks that can help anyone play without frustration.

What to play—Aubrey finds that baby boomers and Silent Generation gamers are often drawn to puzzle games like Candy Crush, Wordle and Tetris that are easily available on mobile platforms. A significant portion of those players also enjoy simulation games, action games and shooters. If you're jumping in for the first time, games like the Portal series and Journey offer engaging problem-solving and exploration at your own pace.

A New Way to Stay Connected

WK&T introduces Trilight Mobile

At WK&T, we've always believed technology should make life easier and bring people closer together. That's why we're proud to share an important step forward: the launch of Trilight Mobile.



**KAREN
JACKSON-FURMAN**
Chief Executive Officer

Trilight is a consortium of seven Tennessee telecom cooperatives. It was originally formed to partner with Tennessee electric companies to expand fiber broadband deeper into rural areas, ensuring service reached the underserved and unserved. After surveying each cooperative's customer base, Trilight is now answering another call: providing mobile service that combines nationwide coverage with the local customer care our communities value.

For WK&T, joining forces with Trilight is a natural extension of our mission. It allows us to offer mobile service that's reliable, affordable, and supported by people you already know. When you have a question, you won't be routed to a distant call center—you'll talk to someone right here at home.

Trilight Mobile also runs on the strength of our fiber network, giving you better reception and a stronger signal at home. And with Hotspot 2.0 technology, your phone can connect securely to Trilight Wi-Fi routers throughout our community, helping you stay connected while reducing mobile data usage.

With Trilight Mobile, you don't have to choose between carriers. Our partnership allows you to ride on trusted networks while keeping WK&T as your local provider. That means seamless coverage wherever you go—without juggling two different companies or losing the personal service you rely on.

You already trust WK&T to deliver fast, dependable internet. Offering Trilight Mobile is a continuation of that same promise: technology backed by local people who care. We're excited to bring this service to our members, and we believe it will make staying connected simpler, stronger, and more personal.

If you're ready to learn more, stop by our office or visit [mywkt.net/trilight-mobile/](http://www.mywkt.net/trilight-mobile/).

Thank you for letting us serve you. You're the reason we keep working to bring the best technology home. ☎

The WK&T Connection is published by West Kentucky and Tennessee Telecommunications Cooperative, © 2026. It is distributed without charge to all members of the cooperative.



WEST KENTUCKY AND TENNESSEE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COOPERATIVE

is your cooperative serving West Kentucky and Northwest Tennessee across nearly 24,000 network connections. The company is dedicated to using technology to keep its members connected through local and long-distance calling, high-speed internet, digital television, security and beyond.

WK&T is an equal-opportunity employer and provider.

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 100 WK&T Technology Drive
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www.mywkt.net

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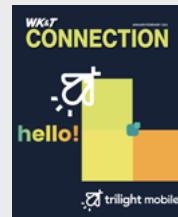
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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



WK&T is joining forces with Trilight Mobile, a cellular platform designed to make mobile service easy. See story Page 12.

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Each year, the Foundation for Rural Service offers multiple scholarships to graduating high school seniors across the country to help with the rising costs of college tuition.

FRS is accepting applications from members of the Class of 2026, with preference given to those planning to return to work in a rural community after college.

Applications and information packets about the program are available from high school guidance counselors or at www.frs.org. To be eligible, an applicant's parent or guardian must have service with WK&T. The application deadline is Feb. 14.

PUMPKINS IN THE PARK

Thank you to everyone who came out to enjoy Pumpkins in the Park in October. In addition to the fun and festivities, the day was a successful adoption event for the Mayfield-Graves County Animal Shelter.



A cast of characters enjoyed the festivities at Pumpkins in the Park.



The Mayfield-Graves County Animal Shelter held an adoption event.

DO NOT CALL REGISTRY

The Do Not Call Registry can help reduce the number of unwanted telemarketing calls you receive. Learn more at donotcall.gov or call 888-382-1222. You must call from the telephone number you wish to register. For TTY, call 866-290-4236.

HAPPY RETIREMENT



From left, WK&T CEO Karen Jackson-Furman recognizes recent retirees Ellen Thomas, Stacey "Rhobert" Riley, Stacey Brown and Jamie Thompson.

Welcome OUR NEW TEAM MEMBERS



Chance Barnes
Mayfield, Kentucky
Combination Technician

What do you do when you're not working?

I enjoy hunting, fishing, watching sports and spending time with my wife and dog.

What is your favorite use of technology?

I use technology to check the security of my home and check on my dog via camera when away.



Juan Castro
Mayfield, Kentucky
Tech Team Intern

What do you do when you're not working?

Work out or cut hair.

What is your favorite use of technology?

The phone, Netflix and TV. I also use TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat.

Discovering Hidden Gems

Travel vlogger highlights off-the-beaten-path destinations

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS

Gems exist in small towns all around you, but you might not know it. Take some time to explore interesting locales within a short drive or take a longer trip to make memories. YouTubers are traversing the country and taking audiences along for the ride—join them in uncovering the magic in places others may overlook.

BUILD THE DREAM

“There are so many things around me within driving distance that I had no idea about. And I believe that’s also the same for everybody else,” says Tony Hossri of the YouTube channel Build the Dream. Based in Georgia, Tony films his outdoor explorations and city tours for his vlog, or video blog.

With a little research, you can also find beautiful hikes and fun small towns. Tony searches the name of a building or other historic

sites on Google when he’s looking for places to experience. He also uses the AllTrails app to find great hiking destinations.

See what you can find and start making memories. While visiting Cincinnati, Tony saw around 50 people riding scooters. He joined up with the group on his bicycle. “They got to this random tunnel area where they had this giant scooter trick fest,” he says.

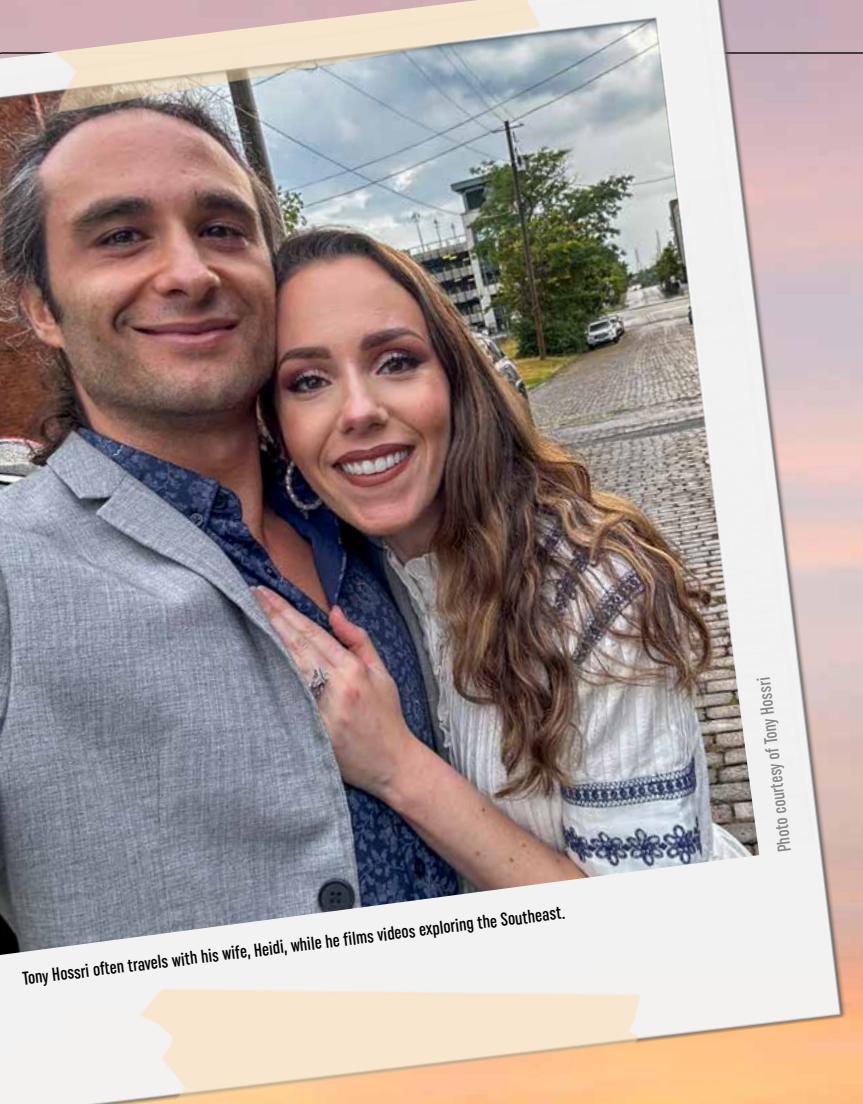
While researching online is a good place to start, Tony says, “Let your phone be a tool to give you a better life, not a way to waste your life by endlessly scrolling.” If using distracting apps gets in the way of having new adventures, consider deleting them like Tony did.

“Look up a neighboring town, neighboring city, neighboring hike,” Tony recommends. “Do everything you can to get out of the matrix to live a more fulfilling, memorable life.”

Visit buildthedreamnow.com and follow Build the Dream on YouTube to start getting ideas for your next adventure. ☺

The South Carolina Lowcountry is a great destination for travelers looking for adventures on the water and culinary experiences.

Adobe Stock photo by makassana photo



Travel Safely

Did you know posting your vacation on social media can pose a risk to you and your home? Consider waiting to post about your travels until after you've returned.



Nearby Adventures



Alabama: Monte Sano means “mountain of health” in Spanish. Since the late 1800s, visitors have been coming to Monte Sano State Park in Huntsville for hiking, biking, climbing and bouldering. Go to alapark.com.



Kentucky: In Corbin, Cumberland Falls, measuring about 68 feet tall and 125 feet wide, earns the title of the Niagara of the South. Go to explorekywildlands.com.



Tennessee: Located three hours east of Nashville, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area includes 125,000 acres of the Cumberland Plateau. Go to nps.gov.



South Carolina: Visit the Lowcountry, the four, southern-most counties in the state, for water-based outdoor adventures. For ideas and destinations, go to southcarolinalowcountry.com.

SMART RURAL COM

Connecting rural America to the latest technologies

STORY BY LISA SAVAGE

Ever see a sign along a highway identifying an area as a Smart Rural Community and wonder what it means? Smart Rural Communities have access to some of the best internet available anywhere, but it's more than just a fancy title.

WK&T worked hard to earn the Smart Rural Community designation—a national recognition for telecommunications organizations delivering the technologies that make rural communities vibrant places to live and work.

WHAT IS A SMART RURAL COMMUNITY?

WK&T is one of more than 200 rural broadband providers to earn the Smart Rural Community designation since NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association established it in 2013. The SRC network is a group of carefully vetted broadband providers committed to driving growth and creating opportunities.

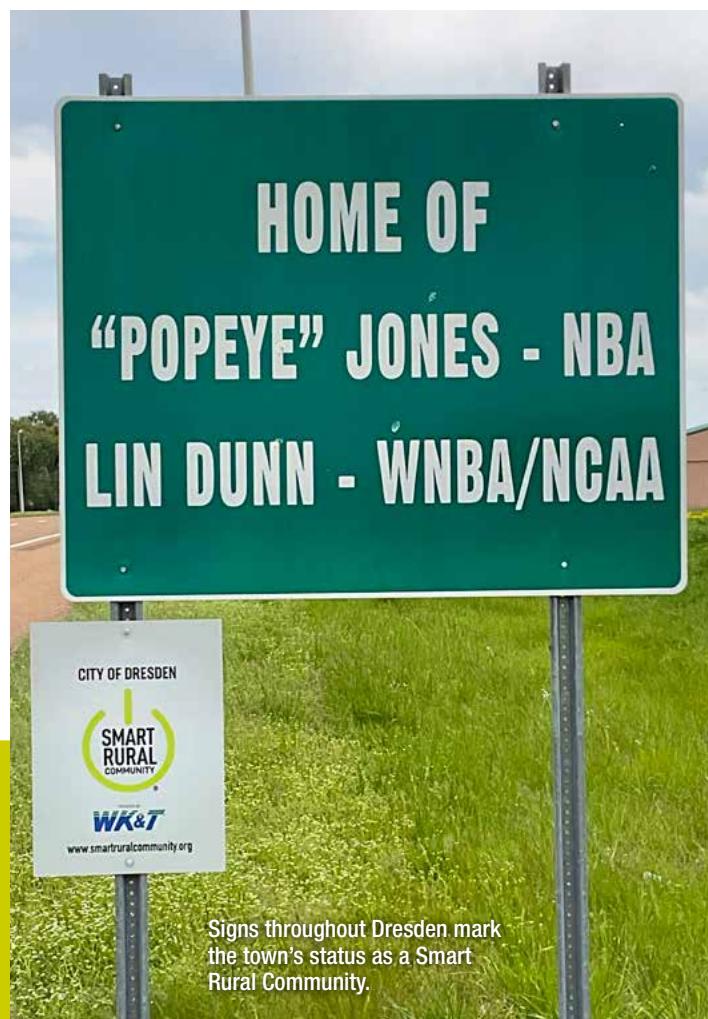


WANT A SMART RURAL COMMUNITY SIGN?

Any community with WK&T internet service is part of the Smart Rural Community and can request signs identifying the designation. For more information or to obtain a sign, contact WK&T at marketing@wk.net.

SRC providers enable the fast, reliable and sustainable connectivity necessary to thrive in an online world, especially as the demand for distance learning, telemedicine and remote work grows. Residents of Smart Rural Communities have equal opportunities for education, resources, entrepreneurship and more.

WK&T received recognition after a panel of experts in education, health care, telecommunications, finance and rural economic development reviewed applications. "We have worked hard to ensure our citizens have access to advanced communications and the many benefits those services enable," WK&T CEO Karen Jackson-Furman says.



MUNITY

Any city or community within the WK&T service area is part of the Smart Rural Community. A few years ago, Dresden became the first city in the area to post road signs proclaiming the designation.

INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

In 2018, WK&T expanded its fiber network to Dresden, and that expansion continues in other areas of Tennessee, Kentucky and Southern Illinois. Dresden relies on its fast, reliable fiber connection to run the day-to-day operations of the city government. “Internet connections were brought into the city limits, and every home in Dresden had the opportunity to be connected,” says City Recorder Jennifer Branscum.

Dresden officials used the fiber project as an opportunity to install more than 1,500 water meters that could be read remotely. Before the installation of the remote-read meters, a Dresden Public Works Department employee would drive from meter to meter to physically read each device and record the usage information. Now, the meter reader’s role has changed, and he is able to use his time to recheck high readings for water leaks or other problems that may have occurred during the month.

The meter-reading process used to take a full workweek to complete, Branscum says. Now, the usage information is transmitted to a computer, where it’s processed and displayed for monitoring and billing. “With the installation of fiber internet, meters are able to be read in a matter of minutes,” she says. “Fiber internet has allowed us to streamline our processes, reduce a chance for error, assist customers in knowing when high usage occurs and free up time to be spent doing other necessary tasks.”

City hall staff also use fiber internet to update the website and make announcements on Facebook to keep the community informed. The police department relies on fiber to enter citations into its system and complete accident reports. The Dresden Fire Department uses its connection to apply for grants and file reports with the state.

“Without fiber internet, the city of Dresden would not be able to be as efficient as it is today,” Branscum says. “We are thankful for the partnership we have with WK&T in providing this resource for us. We are thankful to WK&T for the availability to keep our community connected.” ☎



City Recorder Jennifer Branscum uses a WK&T fiber internet connection to monitor Dresden’s more than 1,500 water meters remotely.



The Dresden Fire Department benefits from WK&T’s fiber internet, which is among of the requirements for being designated as a Smart Rural Community.



WK&T recognized the city of Dresden for its efforts in the Smart Rural Community designation. From left are Branscum, Natalie Morgan, WK&T marketing and revenue manager, and Dresden Mayor Mike Mattox.

FORGED IN FIRE

Metalworking opens opportunities for rural farriers

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

There have always been parts of metalworking that feel a little bit supernatural to Jim Poor. While most of the craft is the product of diligent training and hard work, some elements of working with heat and metal are stubbornly unpredictable and come down to a touch of each smith's own personal sorcery.

"In my world of making tools, lastability is the most important thing," he says. "There's a lot of heat treating that goes into tooling, and that's magical stuff because you can't see it. You do it, but you can't really know the results until you send it out to the customer. So, it becomes kind of like black magic."

Jim has been trying to unravel the mysteries of metalworking since he was 12 years old. When he was growing up in Abilene, Texas, his father shod horses on the racetrack circuit, and Jim helped him after school. Once he graduated from high school, Jim found himself shoeing horses after work to make extra cash. It was at one of those jobs that he heard about the Texas Professional Farriers Association.

"One of my customers used to read the local news to me while I was shoeing his horses. And one day he read that this group was going to be at the Abilene County Fair shoeing horses for \$40," Jim says. "I was only getting \$25, so I thought I should see what these guys were doing."

Meeting other local farriers and blacksmiths opened up new opportunities to turn his side gig into a full-time job, hone his craft and even compete across the globe.

"I love competing the most. It's a small community, but it allowed me to travel all over the world and have so many

experiences," Jim says. "I don't think anything else I could've done with my limited education would allow that."

HEAT TESTING

Despite his years of experience, Jim remembers having plenty of nerves the first time he smithed competitively. It was 1985, three years since he started shoeing professionally, when he decided to take part in an event in his hometown.

"I thought it was pretty interesting, but it was scary at the same time," he says. "There were people there who knew a whole lot more about this craft than I did. I was still pretty young, but I just loved it."

A few months later, Jim joined some of his TPFA colleagues at a competition in Oklahoma, followed shortly by a trip to the nationals in Jackson, Mississippi. Farrier competition is divided into novice, intermediate and open divisions, with competitors earning points based on how well they finish and how many others are in their division. Farriers face off in classes where they have a set time to complete a task. Judges rate their performance.

For all his lack of experience, Jim climbed the ranks in short order. After just three competitions, he was already shoeing in the open class. Those competitions quickly became highlights of his year, regularly testing himself against hundreds of other farriers as part of major competitions in Texas, California, Florida and Calgary. At one of those events in California, Jim met Kathleen, the woman who would become his wife.

"She can do just about anything, but she does more of the artistic work than I do," Jim says. "We met each other out there



Competitors race the clock to get their work ready for judging.

and just became inseparable from that day forward. We dated but could only meet at competitions for several years. Of course, that was another reason to go."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Over the course of his competitive career, Jim earned a position on the American Farriers Team nine times, while Kathleen helped establish the first women's international team, Women Horseshoers of America. After years of traveling the world to compete and teach, they established Flatland Forge in Tuscola, Texas, where they now focus on making farrier tools like tongs, punches and 27 different styles of hammers.

"Most people are pretty surprised we produce that many different hammers. But I've found out that some people are just collectors," Jim says. "They may not even use them. They just like the look of them and the craft of them."

In many ways, Jim envies aspiring farriers and blacksmiths today. With the rise of the internet, it is much easier to discover new techniques and learn from the best artisans in the world. Even before the internet, that accessibility was what drew him back to the craft as a young man. But the best advice he can give to anyone forging their path now is the same as it was then.

HAMMER DOWN

For anyone looking to build a career as a farrier or blacksmith, Jim Poor's advice is simple: "Find people who are close by to you, and don't be a jerk. You'll get a lot of help."

The easiest way to do that is connecting with a local group. Jim joined the Texas Professional Farriers Association as a young man, while his wife, Kathleen, connected with the Western States Farriers Association early on. If you're looking for organizations in your state, start here:

ALABAMA

Alabama Professional Farriers Association
President Sam Howard
Email: sam.howard18@icloud.com

KENTUCKY

Derby City Horseshoeing Association
President Zeke Evans
Email: horseshoes92@gmail.com

INDIANA

Indiana Farriers Association
President Dustin Shuck
Email: dustinshuck@yahoo.com
Website: indianafarriers.org

SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina Farriers Association
President Dusty Newby
Email: dustynewby@gmail.com

TENNESSEE

Rutherford County Blacksmith Association
President Matt Clarady
Email: rcbabblacksmiths@gmail.com
Website: rcbabblacksmiths.org

"What I've always loved most is that blacksmithing is something that you don't need money to learn. All it takes is effort," Jim says. "You have to be a self-starter. You'll work 10 times more hours than somebody with a day job. But all you need to succeed in this craft is a willingness to learn and work."

Constant Connections

WK&T launches partnership with Trilight Mobile



WK&T members are used to having a fast and reliable connection at home thanks to the co-op's 100% fiber network. A new partnership means members can now enjoy that same superior quality connection and customer service no matter where they are.

WK&T is joining forces with Trilight Mobile, a cellular platform built on dedication to members, innovation and simplicity, to offer the best mobile service available.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Customer service is a top priority for Trilight. Users aren't just customers—they are family, friends and neighbors. When a Trilight subscriber calls with a question, a local customer service representative answers the call, eager to help. A team of local technicians is ready to respond whenever necessary.

BETTER RECEPTION

Trilight Mobile is one of the first rural carriers in the nation to deploy Hotspot 2.0 technology. This innovation uses WK&T's existing fiber network to support and enhance the Trilight Mobile network, allowing mobile devices to connect seamlessly, privately and securely to WK&T's Wi-Fi routers throughout the community.

NATIONAL REACH

WK&T members with Trilight Mobile service are covered no matter where they travel. Trilight partners with two of the most powerful networks in the country to provide coverage away from home.

Trilight Mobile is the first network of its kind in the United States. Members benefit from a powerful mobile network built on WK&T's unparalleled fiber backbone as well as the infrastructure of other partners with national reach. ☎

CLEAR, HONEST AND EASY PRICING PLANS

WK&T is committed to making mobile service simple. With Trilight Mobile, there are no hidden fees or surprise charges. The price advertised is the price members pay.

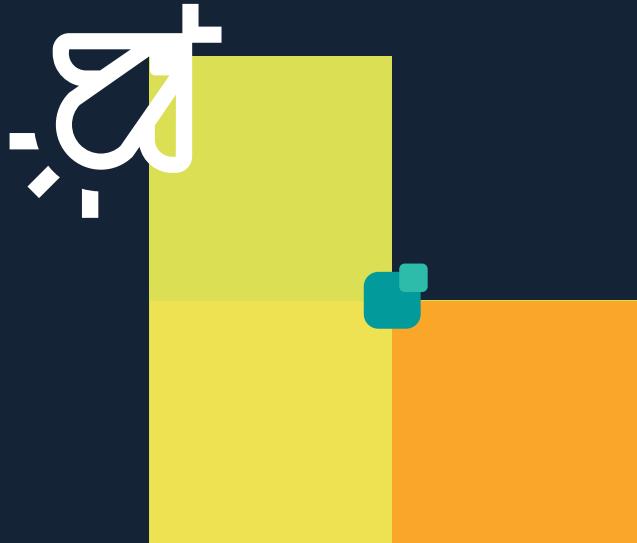
By the Gig	Best Value	Unlimited Max
FIRST LINE FREE Promo* FREE for 1 year \$29.99 per month** Premium Data 1GB	Unlimited FIRST LINE FREE Promo* FREE for 1 year \$39.99 per month** Premium Data 30GB Hotspot 5GB	FIRST LINE FREE Promo* \$10 per month for 1 year \$49.99 per month** Premium Data 50GB Hotspot 10GB

**Subscribers will receive a \$10 monthly credit if they have WK&T'S Autopay and Paperless Billing plans and a WK&T GigaSpire router. A \$5 credit will be awarded to subscribers who have two of the three.

To learn more about Trilight Mobile and the partnership with WK&T, call 877-866-7228, email trilight.sales@wk.net or visit www.mywkt.net.

*FIRST LINE FREE promotion requires new WK&T internet service or an internet speed upgrade, plus enrollment in Auto-Pay, Paperless Billing and an active lease of WK&T Wi-Fi router. Up to \$29.99 per month. Mobile plan credit applied for 12 months. Standard rates apply thereafter.

The \$10 monthly discount for enrollment in AutoPay, Paperless Billing and an active GigaSpire router does not expire after 12 months.



trilight mobile



Living Connected

Fiber for the speed of life!

Wi-Fi and Worship

Keep your congregation protected and connected

Did you know that religious organizations and nonprofits are often victims of cyberattacks?

As churches livestream services, accept donations via apps and websites, offer community Wi-Fi and build out staffing teams, it's more important than ever to have a safe and secure network. However, churches' networks aren't always built for all that.

WK&T's SmartBiz provides distinct networks ideal for places of worship.

How are you currently handling internet access across staff, guests and ministry areas? Is having ample bandwidth a challenge during peak use times? Do you want to ensure content accessed on your network is appropriate? If so, SmartBiz for congregations could be perfect for you.

It works great for office and guest use, streaming equipment, even child care areas—all with time limits, content filters and easy visibility. Plus, automatic network prioritization ensures business-critical devices get the bandwidth needed, so streaming won't suffer, even when the congregation is using the Network.

THE BENEFITS OF SMARTBIZ:

- Church office staff can use a separate network.
- Guests connect through a filtered portal to ensure a safe internet experience.
- Built-in network prioritization ensures business-critical devices always have the bandwidth they need.
- Strong Wi-Fi reaches every corner of your building. 

SMARTBIZ OFFERS SAFE AND SECURE CONNECTION

Always-on cybersecurity

Networkwide cybersecurity provides automatic 24/7 protection from malware, viruses and other threats for staff members and the congregation.

Leading reliability and coverage

SmartBiz provides fast and reliable Wi-Fi across your entire property.

Smart filters, safer access

Create a safe internet environment by blocking offensive content, inappropriate websites and unapproved applications.

For more information about WK&T's SmartBiz for places of worship, call 877-954-8748 today.



Adobe Stock image by tutye

**Experiencing
internet issues?
LET US HELP!**

If you're having any problems with your internet, please call us so we can work through service issues together. We are committed to making your connection an outstanding experience.

Fiber-fast internet is the future. And it's here!



877-954-8748 | www.mywkt.net

The Ultimate Comfort Food

Beans or no beans, chili always hits the spot

Is there any food in America that creates more of a stir than chili? It's certainly a bowlful of contention.

If your heart lies in Texas, beans take a hike. Southerners, though, love their beans. In the Midwest, it's all about comfort with ground beef, tomatoes and beans, or a simple, creamy chicken chili full of flavor. But every bowl of chili, no matter where you live, has one thing in common—each is a serving of comfort that wraps around you like a well-worn blanket.



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

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

WHITE CHICKEN CHILI

Prep time: 20-25 minutes
 Cook time: 1 hour
 4 boneless chicken breasts
 1 teaspoon dried basil
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon onion powder
 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
 1 teaspoon dried thyme
 1 teaspoon dried parsley
 1 tablespoon butter
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 large onion, chopped
 3 stalks celery, chopped
 3/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
 2 cans whole green chilies, chopped
 3-4 cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
 2 teaspoons cumin
 1 cup sour cream
 1/2 cup heavy cream
 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
 1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
 Additional chicken broth, if needed

In large pot, add chicken breasts and completely cover with water, 4-6 cups. Simmer chicken breasts with basil, salt, onion powder, garlic powder, thyme and parsley until completely cooked.

Remove chicken from broth. Reserve the seasoned broth for the chili. Once chicken is cooled, chop and set aside.

In a large pot, add butter and olive oil, and sauté onion, celery and bell pepper until vegetables are tender. Add chopped chilies and two cans cannellini beans. When mixture is warm, mash beans with a potato masher.

Add 2-3 cups of the reserved broth, chicken, cumin and 1-2 more cans cannellini beans. Let simmer 30 minutes to 1 hour. If mixture becomes too thick, add more broth. Add sour cream, heavy cream and fresh cilantro. Stir well. Taste and adjust seasonings. Just before serving, stir in grated cheese and ladle into serving bowls.



TEXAS-STYLE CHILI

Prep time: 45 minutes
Cook time: 3-4 hours
1/4 cup ground ancho chile pepper
1 tablespoon ground chipotle chile pepper
2 tablespoons ground cumin
2 teaspoons dried oregano
1 teaspoon ground coriander
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 cup cornmeal
1 4-pound beef chuck roast, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes
8 slices bacon, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
2 teaspoons salt
2 small yellow onions, large dice
5 garlic cloves, chopped
3 jalapeno chiles, cored, seeded and finely diced
4 cups low-sodium beef broth
2 cups water, plus more for the chili paste and deglazing the pan
1 1/4 cups dark beer
1 cup canned crushed tomatoes
1 tablespoon molasses

2 teaspoons unsweetened cocoa powder
1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
Additional chicken broth, if needed

Mix the chile powders, cumin, oregano, coriander, cinnamon and cornmeal in a small bowl and stir in 1/2 cup water to form a thick paste. Set aside.

Season the beef with the salt and set aside.

In a Dutch oven, fry bacon over medium heat until the fat renders and the bacon crisps, about 10 minutes. Remove the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate. Pour all but a few teaspoons of fat from the pot into a small bowl. Set aside.

Increase heat to medium high. Sear the meat in three batches in single layers until well browned on one side, adding more of the reserved bacon fat as necessary. Place the seared meat on a plate. Add about 1/4 cup of water to the pot and scrape the bottom with a wooden spoon to release all the flavorful brown bits. Pour the dark liquid over the seared meat.

Reduce heat to medium and add 3 tablespoons of the reserved bacon fat to the pot. Add the onions and cook, stirring frequently, until softened.

Add garlic and jalapenos, and cook 2 minutes more. Add the reserved chile paste and sauté until fragrant.

Add the broth and stir with a whisk until spice mixture is completely dissolved. Again, scrape the bottom of the pot to release any spices. Stir in the water, beer, crushed tomatoes, molasses and cocoa powder. Add reserved bacon and seared beef back to the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cover, leaving the lid just barely ajar. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the meat is tender and the juices are thickened, 2 1/2 to 3 hours. Taste and adjust seasonings. Ladle the chili into bowls and serve with desired toppings.



TWO-MEAT CHILI

Prep time: 20 minutes
Cooking time: 1-1 1/2 hours
1 pound ground beef
1 pound ground pork
1 onion, diced
1 green pepper, diced
1-2 tablespoons flour
2 28-ounce cans chopped tomatoes
1/2 cup chili powder (more or less, to taste)
Salt, to taste
Cumin, to taste
1-2 8-ounce cans tomato sauce

Brown meats together in large chili pot with onion and green pepper. Drain grease and stir in flour. Add remaining ingredients, starting with 1 can tomato sauce. If it seems too thick, thin it out with more tomato sauce.

Simmer for at least 1 hour. Serve with sour cream, corn chips and shredded cheese. ☺





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