

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

# CONNECTION



## Saddle Up

The thrills of Smilin' D Arena

INTERNET  
BACKBONE

TRAVEL  
VLOGGING



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.

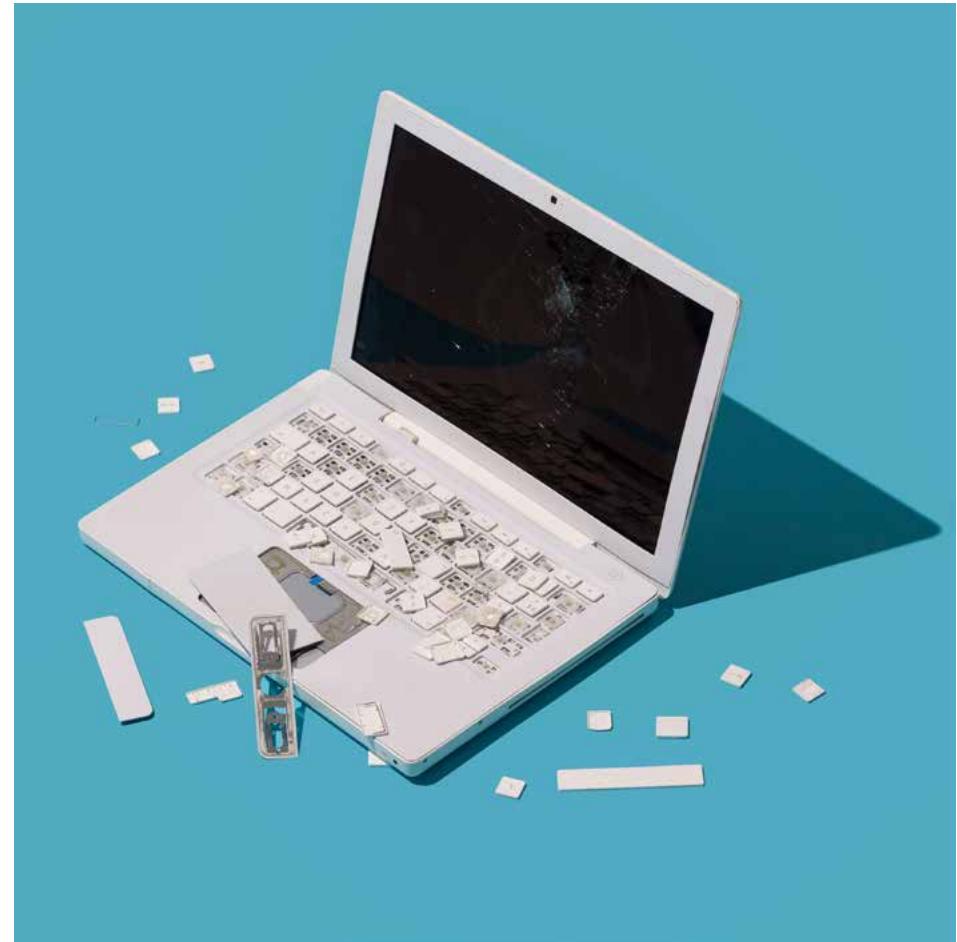
More than 150,000 new escort ads are posted online in America daily. Seventy-five percent of underaged victims report being sold online, and human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal activities in our country.

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](http://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Many people have outdated or unused electronic devices they aren't sure what to do with after the holidays.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](http://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.

# 250 Years of Connections

## We are stronger together



**KEVIN BEYER**  
Chief Executive Officer

This year, Americans will mark a significant milestone—one worthy of attention and reflection as we celebrate our nation's 250th birthday. After all, since the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, we've come a long way as a country and as a society.

News that once was delivered by horseback and word of mouth comes today through the modern, reliable communications services Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone provide. The progress achieved by our internet networks over the past five years alone is notable.

Early Americans depended on one another in ways that still feel familiar to those of us who live in rural communities. We know when people work together with a shared purpose, we can build something better for the next generation.

We see it every day when a neighbor steps up to help after an illness or injury, when volunteers combine their talents to put together a fundraiser and when students get online to learn and create from homes once considered too remote for reliable internet. That's what a community in action looks like.

This commitment to serving others is exactly why Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone exist, and it's why we're so proud of what we do. Our broadband network is the modern version of the roads and bridges that tied those early American communities together. Every home we connect, every small business that reaches new customers online and every student who can join a virtual classroom help write the next chapter in our shared story of progress and possibility.

I'm especially proud that everyone at Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone lives right here in the communities we serve. We shop at the same grocery stores, cheer at the same ball games and enjoy the same local events. When we install a new service or upgrade a connection, it's not just another job—it's a continuation of the legacy of neighbors helping neighbors. That sense of shared purpose powered this company from the very beginning, and it still guides everything we do today. It's why we continue to invest in new technology as we strive to meet today's needs and prepare for tomorrow's opportunities.

Just as our founders once dreamed of a nation united by shared ideals, our community unites through opportunity and connection.

As celebrations begin across the country, I hope we all take a moment to appreciate not just the history behind this milestone, but the everyday work that keeps our communities strong. Because strong connections built this nation. And it's what will carry us forward for the next 250 years. ☺

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On the Cover:



Jessie and Dave Reigstad expanded their ranch to include the Smilin' D Arena, which hosts year-round rodeo events. See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of Tony Faith

## Partnering to promote scholarships

For many years, Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone Cooperative have partnered with the Foundation for Rural Service to support the continuing education of rural youth.

FRS awards more than 30 \$2,000 scholarships to graduating high school seniors across the country. If a student from Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone's service area receives an FRS Scholarship, Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone will supply an additional \$500, bringing the total award to \$2,500, toward the first year of college.

Zachary Dietz, of Morris, was a 2025 scholarship recipient and is currently attending the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

To be eligible, students must have at least one parent who is a member of Farmers Mutual or Federated Telephone Cooperative at the time they submit their application and at the time they attend college.

For 2026, FRS is adding a new scholarship for nontraditional students. This is for any adult learner enrolled in undergraduate studies at an accredited college, university or vocational school.

Full application requirements are available online at [frs.org/programs](http://frs.org/programs). Applications are due February 14, 2026.



## MTA Foundation scholarship

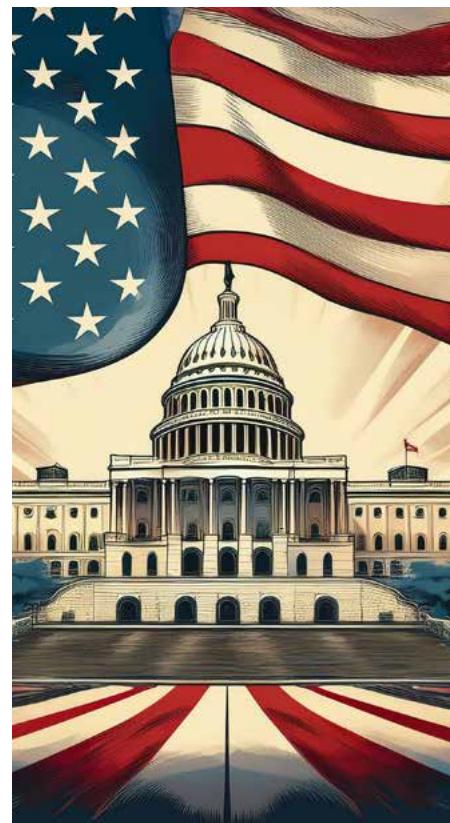
The Minnesota Telcom Alliance Foundation will award six \$2,000 scholarships to members of the Class of 2026. Last year, MTA and Federated Telephone awarded the \$3,000 Jon Tollefson Technology Scholarship to Brady Cronen from Hancock High School.

Recipients must pursue postsecondary education at either a university, college or technical college.

To be eligible, applicants must be Minnesota residents, and their families must subscribe to at least one service from either Farmers Mutual Telephone or Federated Telephone.

A panel will review and score each application based on grades, academic achievements and extracurricular activities. Scholarships are awarded after students' successful completion of the first year of college or technical school.

For more information and a scholarship application, go to [mtna.org/page/scholarship](http://mtna.org/page/scholarship) or see your school guidance counselor. Application needs to be dropped off at our office for General Manager Kevin Beyer's signature before the deadline on the form.



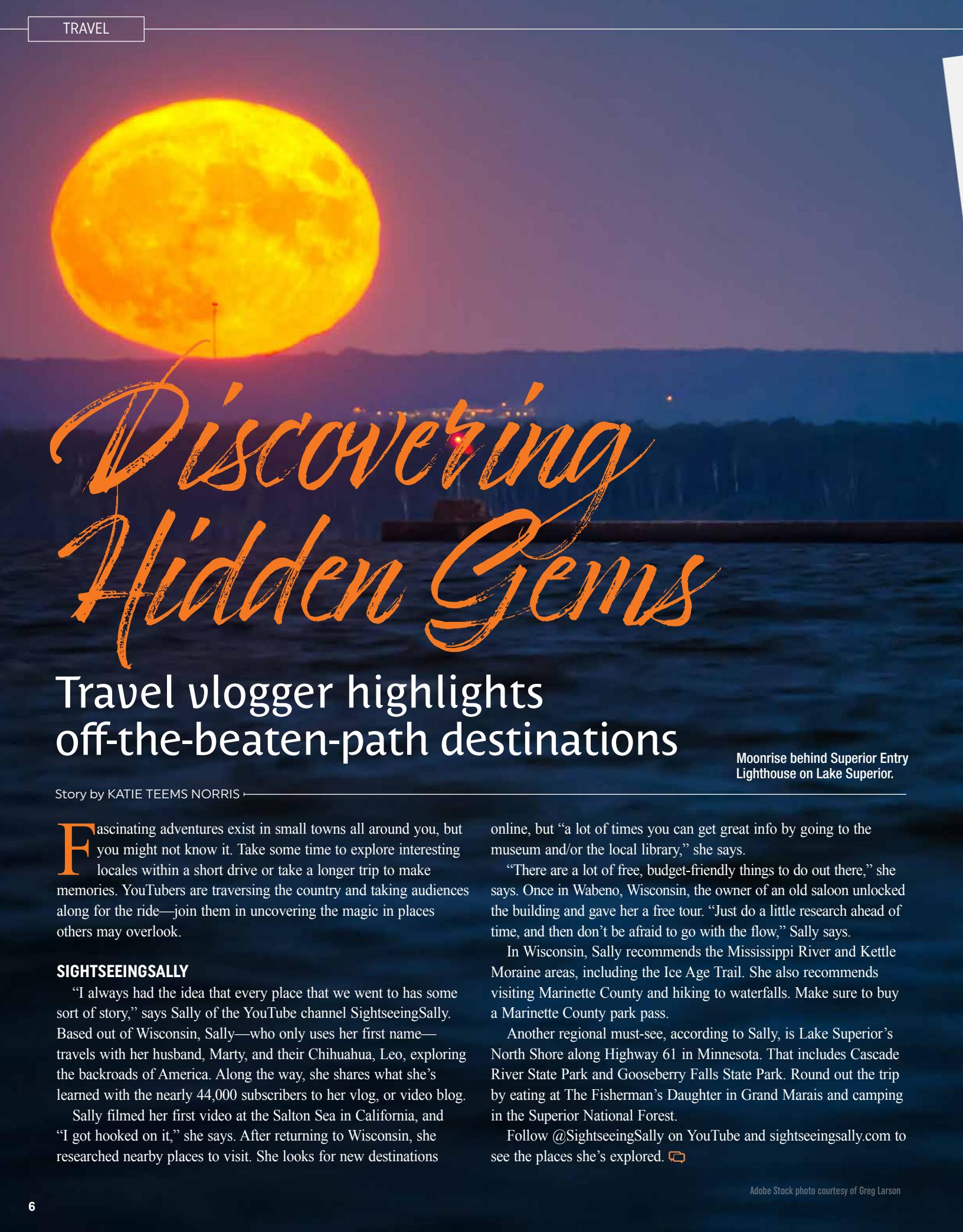
## YOUTH TOUR

Farmers Mutual Telephone and Federated Telephone also partner with FRS to give an opportunity to two high school students—one from each of our cooperatives—to tour our nation's capital.

This year's tour of Washington, D.C., will be June 1-5. The trip includes visits to many landmarks, including the Lincoln Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, Vietnam and World War II memorials, the Kennedy Center, Smithsonian museums, the Federal Communications Commission and a meeting with congressional staff members.

Current students 15, 16 or 17 years old at the time of the tour, and whose parents or guardians are cooperative members in good standing, are eligible to apply. Students 18 or older are ineligible.

Applicants must write and submit an essay, up to 500 words, explaining why they would like to attend and their interest in rural broadband. Find out more at [frs.org/programs/youth-programs/youth-tour](http://frs.org/programs/youth-programs/youth-tour). Submit essay in person, mail or email to [farmers@farmerstel.net](mailto:farmers@farmerstel.net) or [emailftc@fedtel.net](mailto:emailftc@fedtel.net). Deadline to submit essay is January 31, 2026.



# Discovering Hidden Gems

## Travel vlogger highlights off-the-beaten-path destinations

Moonrise behind Superior Entry Lighthouse on Lake Superior.

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS

Fascinating adventures 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.

### SIGHTSEEINGSALLY

“I always had the idea that every place that we went to has some sort of story,” says Sally of the YouTube channel SightseeingSally. Based out of Wisconsin, Sally—who only uses her first name—travels with her husband, Marty, and their Chihuahua, Leo, exploring the backroads of America. Along the way, she shares what she’s learned with the nearly 44,000 subscribers to her vlog, or video blog. Sally filmed her first video at the Salton Sea in California, and “I got hooked on it,” she says. After returning to Wisconsin, she researched nearby places to visit. She looks for new destinations

online, but “a lot of times you can get great info by going to the museum and/or the local library,” she says.

“There are a lot of free, budget-friendly things to do out there,” she says. Once in Wabeno, Wisconsin, the owner of an old saloon unlocked the building and gave her a free tour. “Just do a little research ahead of time, and then don’t be afraid to go with the flow,” Sally says.

In Wisconsin, Sally recommends the Mississippi River and Kettle Moraine areas, including the Ice Age Trail. She also recommends visiting Marinette County and hiking to waterfalls. Make sure to buy a Marinette County park pass.

Another regional must-see, according to Sally, is Lake Superior’s North Shore along Highway 61 in Minnesota. That includes Cascade River State Park and Gooseberry Falls State Park. Round out the trip by eating at The Fisherman’s Daughter in Grand Marais and camping in the Superior National Forest.

Follow @SightseeingSally on YouTube and [sightseeingsally.com](http://sightseeingsally.com) to see the places she’s explored. 

# Affordable Travel Tips

Take a road trip—it's cheaper than flying.



Try camping to save on lodging. Find free and low-cost campsites at [freecampsites.net](http://freecampsites.net).



Pack drinks, snacks and meals in a cooler to save on food costs.



Visit well-traveled places in the offseason to avoid crowds and get off-peak pricing.



Explore parks and hiking trails.

Listen to live musicians at local venues.



Check with chambers of commerce or Facebook groups for free and low-cost activities.

## 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.



Sally enjoys finding colorful and offbeat local spots, including this mural outside the Twigs Museum in Shawano, Wisconsin.



Sally, her husband, Marty, and their Chihuahua, Leo, use their camper even in the offseason.

Photos courtesy of SightseeingSally



Sally recommends exploring Lake Superior's North Shore along Highway 61 in Minnesota and camping in the Lake Superior National Forest.

# ROPPING THE DREAM

## Family builds Western event arena as a hub for the community

Story by LAZ DENES

**A** new kind of arena is making waves in the horse and ranching community. The unique space, just 10 minutes down the road from Belgrade, blends family values, Western traditions and modern comforts.

Smilin' D Arena, owned and operated by Dave and Jessie Reigstad and their family, was built on their passion for the

ranching lifestyle and a desire to create the ultimate Central Minnesota venue for Western events.

Opened in September 2024, Smilin' D Arena is not just a place for ranch sorting or barrel racing. It's the realization of a dream more than two decades in the making. The Reigstad family's horse story began in an unlikely way—with a toddler's first word.

Terry Drost hangs on during the draft horse pull, as Cameron Wi watches the path of the horses.



When Dave and Jessie's son, Brady, spoke his first word, he didn't say mama or dada. Instead, Brady's first word was horse. That one word changed everything.

Dave was working at an Arizona construction site when Jessie called to say they needed to move to the country so they could get Brady a horse. Within weeks, Jessie found the perfect farmstead that, unbeknownst to her, was the same property where Dave grew up. His parents sold the farm in 1986, and 18 years later, Dave and Jessie bought it back.

"We built stalls, moved horses in within two weeks, and the rest is history," Dave says. Their modest 64-by-120-foot barn quickly became a hub not only for family enjoyment but for local ranch sorting events.



Rockstyn Kath takes his turn mutton busting.



Jessie and Dave Reigstad congratulate Terry Ross, center, from Cameron, Wisconsin, on his victory.

## VISIONS OF GREATNESS

Those early years planted the seed for something bigger. In 2024, after the Reigstads converted their barn into a shop for the family's construction business, a real estate opportunity arose that enabled their dream of building a world-class horse arena.

"I'd announced horse events all over the country," Dave says. "Most were in huge steel buildings with no good seating for spectators. People were always standing along gates trying to peek in. I wanted to build something designed with the spectator in mind."

The result is Smilin' D Arena. The 100-by-200-foot structure features a 90-by-180-foot arena floor, wraparound balcony seating, LED lighting, a premium sound system and a cozy brick fireplace. With the capacity to accommodate up to 300 spectators and food, drinks, a media center and modern restrooms, it offers a complete event experience.

The facility quickly earned a reputation as one of the premier Western event spaces in the region. Its heated

environment and amenities are a welcome escape for families during Minnesota's long winters. "It's a facility that allows us to have 12 months of options, a place to go when it's cold in winter, and it's great for the industry, great for all of us," says Nikki Studenski, a regular competitor and event commentator.

Smilin' D hosts everything from ranch sorting and barrel racing to bull riding and high school rodeos. Local businesses, sponsors and community members play key roles in supporting events, and the Reigstads are grateful for their contributions.

## ONE RIDE AT A TIME

From the beginning, the Reigstads knew they wanted Smilin' D to be about more than competitions. They wanted to create a gathering place. One of their signature offerings is the Wild Henke Showdown Kids Fun Day, a series of youth programs where youngsters spend hours honing their skills in an array of horse and ranching activities.

"It's a very fun, positive, upbeat place

for families to go and hang out, and they love all the variety of stuff Dave and his family have brought to the area," says Angie Henke, namesake and director of the Fun Day alongside her good friend Chelsea Sterling. "People really appreciate having something like this around here. Dave puts his heart into it. He's always thinking about what'll make it better."

Commitment to kids is at the heart of everything Smilin' D represents. Dave, Jessie, their four children and five grandchildren are all part of the effort, alongside arena event coordinator Brigitta Irene. "It's such a warm, welcoming atmosphere, just a fun place to go. It's a cowboy's dream playground," says Randy Knutson, Dave's brother-in-law who competes along with his wife, Jill. "Dave does all this for the sport, for the people, for the kids that come up behind us."

From a toddler's first word to a state-of-the-art arena, the Reigstads' journey has come full circle. And for Central Minnesota's horse and ranching community, Smilin' D Arena is more than a venue, it's a dream come true. ☐

# 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



A member of the American Farriers Team competes in Stoneleigh Park, England.



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

Photos courtesy of Danielle Longotano

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,

## 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:

### MINNESOTA

#### Minnesota Farriers Association

President Marcus Lindquist

Email: [marcuslindquist90@gmail.com](mailto:marcuslindquist90@gmail.com)

Website: [mnfarriers.com](http://mnfarriers.com)

#### Northern Minnesota Metalsmiths

Email: [olsonforge@gmail.com](mailto:olsonforge@gmail.com)

Website: [northernminnesotametalsmiths.com](http://northernminnesotametalsmiths.com)

#### The Guild of Metalsmiths

President Martin Masters

Website: [metalsmith.org](http://metalsmith.org)

### NORTH DAKOTA

#### High Plains Farrier Association

President Jake Stonefield

Email: [jstone751@gmail.com](mailto:jstone751@gmail.com)

Website: [highplainsfarrierassociation.com](http://highplainsfarrierassociation.com)

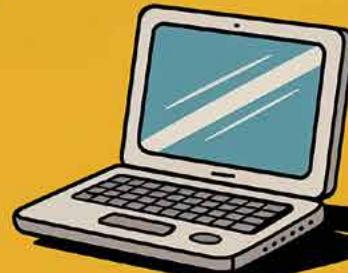
Texas, where they now focus on making farrier tools like tongs, punches and 27 different styles of hammers.

"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.

"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."

# 3 KEYS TO HIGH PERFORMANCE



Freepik All generated image by Brandon Pommereh

## Speed, bandwidth and Wi-Fi

Fast, reliable internet is more important than ever, connecting you to work, school, friends, family, fun, health care and far more. Quality matters. Your system is built upon three pillars of internet performance—speed, bandwidth and Wi-Fi.

### SPEED

More speed means everything online works better. It's particularly critical when using applications requiring seamless, buffer-free performance. Do you stream high-quality videos or make video calls? Is someone in your household a gamer, when a tiny delay can be the difference between victory and defeat? Do you work with video or online editing tools?

Speed makes all the difference.

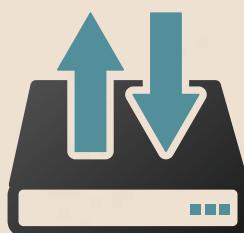


### BANDWIDTH

Think of bandwidth like a highway. A higher number of lanes means more vehicles can travel at the same time. Fewer lanes, particularly at rush hour, create bottlenecks and slowdowns.

How does this relate to your home? Every device you connect to your network—smartphone, TV, computer, appliance, security system and more—adds traffic.

So, the more devices you have, the more bandwidth you need.



### WI-FI

Wi-Fi makes internet service available to a wide range of devices without physically connecting them to your router. However, it's important to remember that the strength and quality of your signal can be influenced by several factors, including the distance between the router and your device. A computer in a second-floor bedroom, for example, may have a weaker connection than a computer on the first floor where the router is located. The number of devices sharing your Wi-Fi connection can also affect the signal's strength and quality. ☎





# OUT OF SIGHT

# Behind the scenes big companies keep the internet moving

The internet and all the services connected to it, whether they're social media and entertainment or vital businesses and critical government agencies, are incredibly reliable. Every once in a while, however, there's news about a widespread issue creating roadblocks for seemingly unconnected services.

Why would your favorite shopping site, streaming media provider and digital payment app all go down at once? They're not owned by the same parent company. While the specifics of each outage vary, a surprisingly large number of critical digital services depend on the reliability of a relatively few companies.

# THE CLOUD BENEATH THE CLOUD

Behind most websites and apps is a vast network of computers quietly doing the heavy lifting. Rather than each company buying and maintaining its own servers, many rent space and computing power from giant providers.

Amazon Web Services, known as AWS, Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud are three of the biggest players. They run massive data centers packed with powerful servers that store information, run applications and keep everything connected to the internet. When you open an app to check the weather or stream a movie, there's a good chance one of these facilities handles that request.

These services don't just provide storage. They offer tools that help companies process data, manage security, run artificial intelligence and ensure their systems scale up smoothly when demand spikes.

## ONE PROBLEM, MANY RIPPLES

Because so many businesses rely on the same infrastructure, a problem with one of these cloud providers can have far-reaching effects. When AWS or another major provider experiences an outage, it can cascade across services.

For instance, a temporary glitch in one region served by AWS could disrupt everything from food delivery apps to airline booking systems to video streaming services. These aren't isolated coincidences. That's why headlines about an AWS or Azure outage often read like a laundry list of familiar names that are suddenly offline.

## WHY IT WORKS SO WELL MOST OF THE TIME

Of course, those large-scale problems are rare. Companies spend billions of dollars to make their networks resilient. They use layers of backup systems, duplicate data across locations and continuously monitor for signs of trouble.

When something does go wrong, it's often a matter of seconds or minutes before engineers reroute systems and restore service. That's a big part of why we take the internet's reliability for granted.

So, the next time your favorite site slows down or briefly disappears, it's likely part of a much bigger story. Behind the simple tap of an app there is a hidden infrastructure, an enormous, coordinated system run by a handful of companies ensuring that the digital world keeps spinning almost without interruption. 

# The Ultimate Comfort Food

Beans or no beans, chili always hits the spot

**I**s 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.



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## 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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