

JULY/AUGUST 2026

CONNECTION

Business Is Blooming

Gardener's hobby brightens customers' days

PINES & PETALS

DAWSON
SENTINEL

By Mike Romano, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

More Than Service— A Commitment to Community

Before I begin this column, my first in your magazine, I would like to introduce myself. I am Mike Romano, the new CEO of NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. I look forward to sharing a national perspective on the vital work your broadband provider does, and there is no better place to start than with the connections that work creates. Of course, I'm not only talking about broadband connections, but community connections, as well.



MIKE ROMANO
Chief Executive Officer

Across the country, community-based broadband providers like yours deliver advanced, high-speed networks that keep rural communities connected. But these providers' impact extends far beyond the technology they deploy. They are also active partners in the communities they serve.

Rooted in their hometowns, these providers are invested in helping their neighbors thrive. That may mean hosting workshops to help teach community members how to use new devices or stay safe online, supporting local schools with back-to-school supply drives, sponsoring sports teams and community events, creating good-paying jobs or partnering with local economic development organizations to build stronger communities. Their success is measured not only by network speeds and connections, but by the opportunities those connections make possible.

I am excited to highlight these efforts and the remarkable things happening in rural communities in future columns. When you choose a local provider, you get more than quality high-speed internet. You also have a partner committed to your community's success, today and for years to come. 📶

A LEGACY OF SPEED AND RESULTS

Fast, reliable and irreplaceable, your internet service connects you to essential digital services and resources. The pace of change has been blazing.



1. The Dawn of the Internet (1970s–1980s):

Early computer networks connected universities, researchers and government agencies, laying the groundwork for the modern internet.



2. Bringing the Web Home (1990s):

Internet access entered the home. Connections were slow by today's standards, but suddenly information, email and websites were available—even if it took a noisy modem to make it happen.



3. Always-On Connections (Early 2000s):

Faster, more dependable internet changed expectations. Users could stay connected without tying up phone lines.



4. The Streaming Era Begins (Mid-2000s):

Rising speeds made online video, music and larger file downloads practical for more households and businesses.



5. A More Connected Lifestyle (Late 2000s–2010s):

Internet service became essential, supporting smart devices, online gaming, social media and remote work.



6. High-Speed Homes and Businesses (2010s):

Growing demand drove another leap in performance, enabling high-definition streaming, cloud services and multiple connected devices running at once.



7. Keeping Pace With Demand (2020s–Present):

Today's networks deliver remarkably fast speeds and reliability, powering everything from telehealth and online learning to smart homes and more.



8. The Future Is Unlimited: Thanks to your broadband service, you'll have the speed you need.



Adobe Stock image by Emilia

Rehearsing for Success

The best video is the one you practice

Story by LAURA MCGILL

Smartphones make it easy to capture video of life's important moments. From concert footage of your favorite band to milestone events like graduations and weddings, there are so many special moments worth recording. Don't risk the results by being unprepared.

IN ADVANCE

The video camera on your phone is an amazing tool. And like with any tool, you need to practice to get the most out of it.

- Familiarize yourself with the settings and features to use them effectively. Do test shoots to learn and adjust.
- Holding a phone steady is harder than you think. If you notice your practice videos are shaky, try using a selfie stick, gimbal stabilizer or tripod.
- Take your videos up a notch with editing apps. These apps allow for color corrections and audio adjustments, as well as transitions, cuts and captions to produce an enhanced video.
- Be as prepared as possible by thinking ahead. Start with a full battery. If you are planning to shoot a long video or multiple videos, consider a portable battery pack. Check your phone's available storage capacity. During a shoot is the wrong time to realize you are out of space.

IN THE MOMENT

Once the camera is rolling, be aware of your phone's settings and your surroundings.

- Switch your phone to airplane mode to avoid interruptions from calls or notifications. Make sure your lens is clean.
- Position yourself in the optimal location. It is better to

be closer to your subject than to use the zoom function.

Remember, while filming in landscape mode is best for traditional video, some social media platforms prefer vertical formats. Choose the best approach for your end goal.

- Think about the lighting and sound. Pick a spot that is well-lit and close to the sound. If possible, use a microphone to improve sound quality.
- Tap the record button, then double-check that you are recording.

STORAGE OPTIONS

Now that you've shot that great video, you'll want to store it somewhere safe.

Physical external storage options include USB-C flash drives, SD cards and external solid state or hard drives. External storage means a one-time purchase of a device that gives you full control of your files.

Using a cloud storage service means that your videos and other files are stored with a third party. Some may offer a small amount of storage free of charge to their users. For example, Google provides 15 GB free for Google accounts. Additional storage is available for a monthly fee, maxing out at 2 TB for \$9.99 per month.

Amazon Prime members have access to 5 GB of free video storage from Amazon Photo. The free level also includes unlimited storage for photos. Additional video storage plans start at \$1.99 a month. iPhone users start with 5 GB of free storage through iCloud. They can upgrade to iCloud+ options, which range from 50 GB up to an impressive 12 TB. 

Back to School, Connected at Home

Broadband helps rural students shine

Summer still has a few weeks left, and I hope you're soaking up the long days, whether that means back-porch visits, a trip to a lake or a weekend on the road to see family. But right about now, signs of another season are starting to show up, too. Do you have school supply lists on the kitchen table or are sports practice schedules flying by text message? If they're not already, families will soon shift back into the weekday rhythm of school.



KEVIN BEYER
Chief Executive Officer

Many traditions tied to kicking off a school year haven't changed, whether that's buying new clothes and school supplies or bus rides and practices for fall sports or bands. Education itself, however, is now very different than even a few years ago. Technology, including the increasing use of artificial intelligence, plays a critical role in both the opportunities and challenges facing our youngest residents.

The news is filled with stories about the types of jobs that will need workers, as well as those that technology may reshape.

Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone remain committed to providing the technology and resources needed to support our children so they can succeed. A fast, reliable internet connection

is the gateway to the future and one that puts our community on the same playing field as any big city. No matter the technology, this network will put the latest resources at our children's fingertips.

We're in a time when homework may appear in online portals, and notes and reminders come through email or apps. And fast-evolving tools are creating fresh opportunities for creativity and research, as well as the vital need for future generations to learn critical-thinking skills.

The benefits of our fast, reliable network also extend beyond school, and the pages of this magazine often highlight how small businesses use broadband to run credit card machines, manage inventory and keep in touch with customers.

As new technologies become increasingly woven into our day-to-day lives, whether it's quickly editing a photo on a smartphone or a business finding new ways to complete day-to-day tasks, a broadband connection is the link that ties it all together. Without it, innovation can't occur.

That's why we keep investing in our company and services. We emphasize the ability, even the responsibility, to allow every student to log in without frustration. A business should be able to reliably keep working without the fear of interruption, and families can stay connected without worry.

Most importantly, we are committed to giving today's students the tools they need to develop the skills necessary for tomorrow even as our business community grows and innovates.

I hope you enjoy the last days of summer and are excited about the possibilities represented by our children and the future they will create. ☺

CONNECTION

JULY/AUGUST 2026

VOL. 10, NO. 4

Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, © 2026. It is distributed without charge to all of our customers.



POWERED BY FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY
AND FEDERATED TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE

Farmers Mutual Telephone Company

301 Second St. S.
Bellingham, MN 56212
farmers@farmerstel.net
320-568-2105

Federated Telephone Cooperative

201 State Highway 9 • P.O. Box 107
Morris, MN 56267
emailftc@fedtel.net
320-324-7111 or 320-585-4875

FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY BOARD

Jon Olson, District I
Dean Olson, District I, Secretary
Michael Sorenson, District II
Galen Jorgensen, District II
Scott Wittnebel, District III, President
Troy Hoyles, District III
Jerome Kallhoff, District IV, Vice President

FEDERATED TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE BOARD

Lucas deNeui, District 1, Vice President
Tim Danielson, District 2
Lynn Swenson, District 3
Kerry Bonk, District 4
Nancy Taffe, District 5, President
Jon Hanson, District 6
Dennis Schroeder, District 7, Secretary

Produced for Acira by:



On the Cover:



Amy Nelson, owner of Parle Petals, sells bouquets by subscription using the flowers she grows.
See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of Reese Ochsendorf

2026 Scholarship Winners

Federated Telephone Cooperative is proud to announce this year's scholarship winners.

Jade Marty, a graduate of Chokio-Alberta High School, was awarded a \$2,500 college scholarship from Federated Telephone and the Foundation for Rural Service. FRS presents scholarships to students across the U.S. The scholarship program is open to all graduating high school seniors who

receive local telecommunications service from Federated Telephone or Farmers Mutual. Applicants must be accepted in an accredited two-year or four-year college or university or vocational technical school and have at least a C-grade point average.

Lincoln Schneider, a 2026 graduate of Morris Area High School, is the recipient of a \$5,000 college scholarship. Four

JSI Staurulakis Family Scholarships were awarded to students across the country. The JSI Scholarship is open to all graduating high school seniors with an interest in science, math, medicine or engineering who receive local telecommunications services from a member of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, like Federated Telephone and Farmers Mutual.

Photos courtesy of Federated Telephone



FAR LEFT: Chokio-Alberta High School graduate Jade Marty, center, accepts an FRS General Scholarship from General Manager Kevin Beyer and Customer Experience Specialist Shelley Evink.

LEFT: Shelley presents a scholarship to Morris Area High School graduate Lincoln Schneider.

Ready for Vacation?

Do you use smart devices to help secure your home while you're away? Here are a few suggestions to protect your network while you enjoy a summer vacation.

UPDATE THE ROUTER BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Log in to the ACIRA Wi-Fi app to make sure you have access to your router while you are away. We handle the software and firmware updates automatically for you. However, if you have your own router, remember to log in to your router and install any firmware updates. Also update Wi-Fi extenders, smart hubs, cameras, doorbells and smart locks.

SECURE SMART HOME DEVICES

Turn on multifactor authentication for the apps and services that manage cameras, doorbells, thermostats, garage doors, smart locks and alarms. Enable notifications for motion, doors, locks and service outages.

KEEP ESSENTIAL NETWORK GEAR POWERED SAFELY

Plug your router, security cameras, alarm hub and smart home hub into surge protectors. Consider a small battery backup for the router.

UNPLUG NONESSENTIAL DEVICES

Power down or unplug computers, game

consoles, smart speakers, printers and other devices that will not be used while you are away.

TEST REMOTE ACCESS BEFORE DEPARTURE

From your mobile device using cellular data, confirm you can view cameras, receive alerts, control smart locks or thermostats and access your router.

USE SAFE INTERNET HABITS WHILE TRAVELING

Avoid managing cameras, banking, email or smart locks over public Wi-Fi. When possible, use cellular data for sensitive logins.



Adobe Stock images by Sunshine Art, iStock



This year is the **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA'S 250TH BIRTHDAY**. At Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone, we're grateful for the communities we serve and the freedoms we celebrate together.

Our teams wish everyone a safe and festive holiday.

In recognition of **INDEPENDENCE DAY**, our offices will be closed **THURSDAY, JULY 2, at 1 p.m. and FRIDAY, JULY 3.**

Take Family Fun on the Road

Tips for traveling with kids

Story by LAURA MCGILL

Nothing ruins a family road trip faster than an unhappy child. Meltdowns at the museum and refusals at restaurants are the stuff of parents' nightmares. However, with a little planning, family getaways can be enjoyable experiences for everyone.

Consider the ages and tolerance levels of your kids when deciding how many miles you should drive, how many days to stay and what activities to plan. If this is your first family getaway, pick a closer destination and a shorter stay. If everything goes great, you can extend your visit. If things don't go so well, you can end the trip early and be back home quickly.

ON THE ROAD

Pack a few favorite toys and games and bring along plenty of snacks. Keep a supply of over-the-counter medications for cuts and scrapes, upset tummies and motion sickness handy. Look for convenient stops along the way to take short breaks.

Spend some time getting your children excited about the destination before you leave. Check for coloring pages and puzzles from the tourism office. You can also share details about the places you are going to visit to build interest and to set expectations.

AT YOUR DESTINATION

Make sure your plan includes where to stay and where to eat. Pick a family-friendly accommodation close to the places on your itinerary to cut down on time in the car. Do some research in advance to check out restaurant menus, especially if you have a picky eater.

Pace yourself and be flexible because something will likely not work out as planned. Have options in mind if you need to adapt to weather conditions or need to slow things down with a low-key activity. ☺



Adobe Stock image by Halpoin





Adobe Stock image by kleberpicui

Where to Go

To increase your chances of having a fun family trip, pick some activities you know your children will enjoy. Maybe they are all about dinosaurs, or perhaps they love animals or are obsessed with their favorite sport.

GET PREHISTORIC

You'll be on track for fun at the Southern Minnesota Museum of Natural History in Blue Earth. Exhibits include tyrannosaur tracks from a 77 million-year-old riverbed and a display of fossils from the Badlands of South Dakota, Wyoming and Nebraska. A visit to the Science Museum of Minnesota in St. Paul includes a scavenger hunt featuring the Dinosaurs and Fossils Gallery.

A short drive to Valley City, North Dakota, will lead to an unexpected find at the Barnes County Historical Society Museum. Nestled among display cases of military uniforms and arrowheads is Gundy the Triceratops, whose fossilized remains were found in 1992.

EXPLORE NATURE

A trip to the National Eagle Center in Wabasha will bring your family up close to powerful avian hunters like the red-tailed hawk and American kestrel. But the stars of the show are most definitely the center's four bald eagle ambassadors, Angel, Latsch, Was'aka and Perseus.

In Roseville, the Harriet Alexander Nature Center features trails and a boardwalk winding through 52 acres of marsh and forest habitats. Stop by the Interpretive Center for interactive displays about local wildlife.

CATCH THE GAME

If your child likes baseball but major league prices aren't in the budget, try a minor league game. Tickets are more affordable, stadiums are smaller, which puts you closer to the field, and the atmosphere is relaxed and family friendly with a children's play area at many of the ballparks.

Home games for the Triple-A St. Paul Saints are known for fun promotions and theme nights ranging from bobblehead giveaways to Sundays when kids get to run the bases after the game. For more minor league options, make the drive for three Iowa teams, the Triple-A Iowa Cubs and the High-A Quad Cities River Bandits and Cedar Rapidsernels.

This summer's biggest sporting event is the FIFA World Cup. With 48 clubs playing games in 16 host cities, it's generating lots of excitement. If your children now have soccer fever, take them to St. Paul to watch Major League Soccer's Minnesota United. The club's post-World Cup schedule starts in late July and runs until early November.



Adobe Stock image by Monkey Business

Peddling

Photo courtesy of Reese Ochsendorf



Amy Nelson

Petals

Brilliant colors keep flower gardener growing

Story by MELANIE JONES

Amy Nelson likes to stroll through her flower garden in the evenings, admiring the brilliantly colored tulips, cosmos, snapdragons and dahlias and breathing in the heady fragrance as she cuts the blooms to make bouquets.

"I go around the garden and cut a bouquet at a time. It's not like I cut all the dahlias I need and then all the snapdragons that I need. I really try to build a bouquet that looks cohesive as I'm going," she says. "I enjoy that process. It's a nice way to end my day and get the flowers ready for the next morning's pickups."

Amy sells her carefully curated bouquets through her business, Parle Petals. However, she didn't grow up dreaming of a career in the floral industry. She loved living in Bloomington, where she owned her own home and enjoyed the array of entertainment and dining

options. Then she fell in love, got married and moved to the small town of Dawson.

BLOOM WHERE YOU GROW

"Moving from the city to a super-small town, I didn't really know what to do with my time," Amy says. She had a full-time remote job, but that only filled 40 hours a week. She wanted to do more.

Amy followed flower farmers on Instagram and wanted to try her hand. She grew 300 tulips in a single raised bed. "I wanted to see what it was like, and I just enjoyed it so much that I continued to expand," she says.

Amy sells her flowers by subscription, with a variety of options available in season. Farmers Mutual internet service helps her business thrive, allowing her customers to order bouquets through her Facebook page and website.

It also keeps her remote job secure. When she first moved to Dawson, Amy used a different internet service provider. She lost connection seven times in three weeks. Her employer wasn't happy. She knew Farmers Mutual

already had fiber in the area, so she assured her boss she would switch, and she says it's been smooth sailing ever since.

FLOWERS BRING SMILES

Most of her bouquet subscribers just love having fresh flowers around, Amy says. But others donate their bouquets to a local nursing home. "The activities director up there says the residents just absolutely love the fresh flowers and the brightness and cheerfulness they bring," she says.

Parle Petals customers are also Amy's best advertisers. "They are definitely the unspoken salesmen, because they always are sharing how much they love the flowers with their friends," she says. "I'm just really appreciative of the community that welcomed me, the city girl, and helped me turn a side hobby into something bigger."

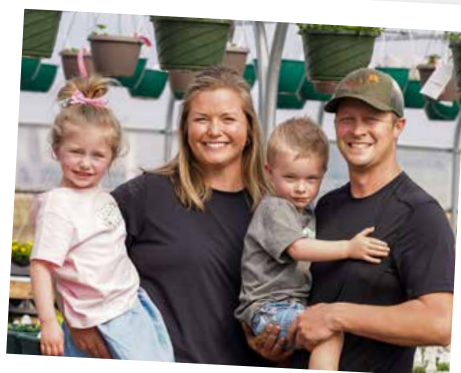
Follow Parle Petals on Facebook or go to parlepetals.com for more information on ordering bouquets. 📞



Photo courtesy of Amy Nelson



Courtney Lesmeister and her husband, Lloyd, are excited to watch their business, Pines & Petals, grow along with their daughter, Ellary, and son, Cade.



Photos courtesy of Brooke Kern



New Nursery



Takes Root

Pines & Petals grows from Morris couple's 'simple idea'

Story by SARA DIAMOND PATTERSON

Every day at Morris' newest nursery is an educational experience for former teacher Courtney Lesmeister and her husband, Lloyd.

"If there's one thing we've learned so far, it's that Pines & Petals is becoming something bigger than we ever expected, and we're just really grateful to be able to do it," she says of the full-service nursery the couple opened in May. "It really started with a pretty simple idea—we just wanted to create something beautiful that feels warm, welcoming and just makes you happier when you walk through the doors."

The idea of opening a nursery blossomed while Courtney worked at the tree farm the couple co-owns with Lloyd's parents, Wayne and Jean Lesmeister. Pines & Petals carries flowers, plants, baskets and potted trees, along with seasonal favorites, home and gift items and a clothing line.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

Cultivating a nursery from the ground up brought the Lesmeisters opportunities

to learn and grow. "As soon as we got our plants in, we got 65-mph winds, and it was freezing. So, we had to make sure our plants were OK as we were learning how to prepare them for that kind of weather," Courtney says. Mastering the greenhouse heating system was a learning curve of its own.

Documenting these daily challenges is important to the couple. Using social media to honestly share the knowledge they're gaining along the way is already building a community in the few months since Pines & Petals opened.

"People have been able to follow along with our journey as we've built this, and they feel like they're a part of it," Courtney says. "Our Facebook following has grown because we try to keep things real—not just the pretty flowers, but the late nights, the windstorms, the greenhouse stress and the excitement when things finally start blooming. It really feels like we're building Pines & Petals alongside our community."

Helping Courtney and Lloyd along the way are their children, Ellary, 4, and Cade, 2, who love to greet customers. Courtney is

glad the children are along for the ride on good days, as well as the more challenging ones, and she's thrilled they can grow right along with the family business.

"I hope they remember that they got to watch their mom and dad build something together and that they were right there with us the whole time," she says.

Courtney's dream is for Pines & Petals to become more than just a place to buy flowers. "We want it to be somewhere people bring their kids, walk through the greenhouse on a sunny day, pick out plants for their yard, grab a bouquet and just enjoy being here," she says. 📱

PINES & PETALS

8 MN-28, Morris

pinesnpetals.com

Find Pines & Petals on Facebook and Instagram.

Without a Trace

Bigfoot researchers hope to turn myth into reality

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Charlie Raymond knows all the best spots for Bigfoot hunting in Kentucky. As founder of the Kentucky Bigfoot Research Organization, he can tell you where you're most likely to run into the dark-haired Skunk Man or an Anderson County Sasquatch nicknamed Howdy for its habit of waving at spotters.

So, when a group of Girl Scouts visiting from Ohio wanted to go on their own expedition about 10 years ago, he knew Mammoth Cave was the place to take them. Bigfoot sightings at the edge of the park spiked after a park employee reported seeing what he thought was a bear stand up on two legs and run off.

"I told them Bigfoots are curious, so the best thing to do is go out there with no flashlights and just laugh, talk and act natural," Charlie says. "Here I've got two dozen giddy girls, aged 10 to 14. I said, 'You're perfect bait.'"

Much like the skeptical Scout moms who joined them, Charlie didn't really expect the group to run into Big Mo, the name of the Bigfoot living in the area, according to local legend. But Charlie showed the girls how to knock trees with a baseball bat and make whooping noises, which he believes the creatures use to communicate.

Then, they heard a distant knock and whistle in response. Shortly after, there was a loud bang as something big struck the boardwalk they were standing on. The entire group was so startled that Charlie recalls one of the moms making a break for the parking lot, leaving the girls behind.

"I think it thought we were another Bigfoot calling for help, then it stomped or jumped on the boardwalk as kind of a bluff charge," Charlie says. "But I heard when they drove back to Ohio, those girls didn't talk about putt-putt or riding horses. All they talked about was that night."

MYTH AND MEMORY

Charlie is just one of many Bigfoot researchers around the country hoping to find definitive

proof of the legendary elusive creatures. Driven by true believers, skeptics and gawkers alike, the ongoing hunt has produced hit TV shows, museums and even festivals that bring people together from all corners.

Robert Dobler, a senior lecturer at the Indiana University Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, says the lasting power of these creatures is fundamentally human.

"I think it's human to need to think about things outside of the everyday or the mundane," he says. "We're interested in these creatures that exceed language as often as they exceed categories. These stories are how we can take something that is unknown and unknowable and still find ways to talk about it."

That sense of the unknown is often inseparable from the creatures themselves. For Bigfoot or his Florida cousin, the Skunk Ape, it might be the wilderness of the forests or swamplands where they're believed to reside. In West Virginia, the dangers of munitions dumps often conjure sightings of the Mothman. Similarly, in Texas, stories of the Chupacabra are more likely to swirl when anxieties about uncontrollable livestock loss due to disease are at their height.

But that doesn't mean those stories are entirely false.

"A lot of skeptics think these claims are made for attention," Robert says. "But the reality is most people know they are vulnerable and subjecting themselves to potential ridicule. So, they're usually reluctant to talk about it and kind of careful about who they tell."

David Bakara, who owns the Expedition: Bigfoot museum in Blue Ridge, Georgia, has had much the same experience when people share their stories. Some people are still terrified of their experiences. Others are driven by curiosity. But they are all trying to confront something they know shouldn't exist.

"Almost all the Bigfoot researchers I know used to be just normal people that watched football and cooked ribs in the backyard. Then they saw one of these things, and it kind of happened on accident," David says. "Some things, the more you dig into them, the more boring they are. But that's not the case here. The more you look into Bigfoot, the more interested you become."

UNTAMED PLACES

That allure of the unknown is one of the reasons Charlie





Photos courtesy of Charlie Raymond

The Wendigo

Algonquin oral tradition tells of a creature that embodies greed, hunger and the dangers of winter. In modern Minnesota folklore, the Wendigo is associated with reports of a tall, gaunt figure seen in the snowy northern forests. Whether as a spiritual figure or a spooky story to tell on a cold night, it continues to serve as a warning and reminder of the need for balance in both community and nature.

AI-generated image by Brandon Pomrenke/ChatGPT



Photos courtesy of David Bakara

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Charlie Raymond carries along a bat on Bigfoot investigations in hopes of communicating with the creatures through tree knocks. Charlie's wife, Lyndsey, is a fellow Bigfoot investigator and a police officer with experience in forensics and fingerprint analysis. David Bakara opened Expedition: Bigfoot in Blue Ridge, Georgia, in 2016. David built the museum in the style of the roadside attractions he loved as a kid.

helped start the Red River Gorge Bigfoot Festival, which takes place in Stanton, Kentucky, each May. The idea originated with a drive-in screening of "The Legend of Boggy Creek," a 1972 documentary about the Fouke Monster, a Bigfoot-like creature spotted around Fouke, Arkansas.

Now, the festival is an opportunity to gather researchers and cryptozoologists to speak to believers and naysayers alike. The celebration is one of many across the country focused on Bigfoot and other local cryptids that give enthusiasts a chance to gather without fear of judgment. But Charlie's hope is that the experience can also open more people's minds and encourage them to ask questions.

Barring that, it's an opportunity to step away from technology and gain a better appreciation for all wildlife, whether it's the creatures we know or those yet to be discovered.

"There are lots of things in this world we don't know about. A lot of animals we discover every year," he says.

"We like to say, 'Leave only footprints. Pick up your trash, stop and smell the flowers every now and then and respect the wilderness.' Just like Bigfoot." 🐱



Original AI-generated image by James Middleton/Adobe Stock

ON THE HUNT

Ready to track down your own Bigfoot sighting? The Bigfoot Mapping Project has you covered. The site tracks reported encounters all over the country, with filters for locations where footprints, vocalizations and tree knocks are part of the accounts. Visit bigfootmap.com to find the location of your next adventure.

Breaking News!



Paper adds e-edition, but print isn't going anywhere

Story by MELANIE JONES

Dave Hickey is an old-fashioned newspaper man. As the Dawson Sentinel's editor, publisher and part owner, as well as chief photographer, reporter and ad salesman, he's constantly busy. And he loves every minute of it.

On winter nights, Dave is on the sidelines with his camera, clicking away at wrestlers, basketball players and dance teams. In the summertime, he's back behind the lens, snapping photos at the baseball diamond, soccer field and

Dave isn't a one-man band, though. He says Damaris Bergeson is a very important, dedicated staff member who designs ads, lays out pages and handles the subscription list and print-setting work, to name just a few of her roles at the weekly newspaper.

STRATEGIC DECISIONS

The newspaper added an e-edition, but traditionalists who enjoy sitting at the kitchen table sipping a cup of coffee while

Tel, there have been no drops and not one interruption of services, which is important on the deadline to print," Dave says.

Dave's not worried the Dawson Sentinel will face the same fate as many larger papers.

"They made the mistake of providing content online for free," he says. Across the nation, as newspapers' circulations and ad revenues dropped, many papers started charging for online subscriptions. But readers rebelled at the notion of paying for what they once got for free.

The corporates are making the mistake when they buy smaller papers of trying to do them remotely, and you can't do that. Not in the rural communities, it doesn't work.

—Dave Hickey, Dawson Sentinel co-owner and editor

golf course. In between, he attends local government and school board meetings in stuffy chambers and sells ads. Then he writes the stories, designs the pages and gets the paper to press.

"Newspapers aren't just a full-time job. They're 24/7," Dave says. "You can't run a town paper and just say, 'Hey, we're done at 5.'"

flipping through the paper don't need to worry. The Sentinel's print edition isn't going away. "People around here love their broadsheets," Dave says.

The paper switched to Farmers Mutual Telephone Company internet service and now has the dependable high-speed connection necessary to send pages to the printing facility. "Since changing over to Farmers

Service. Some papers just haven't been delivered on time. "With the e-edition, you'll be able to sign up and read it Tuesday morning when the papers are printed," Dave says.

Sentinel subscribers can choose the delivery method they like best. The paper offers a digital subscription to read the news online at dawsonsentinel.com,

The Sentinel's decision to add an online option wasn't so much based on reader demand as problems with the U.S. Postal

traditional delivery of the printed version or a combination of the two.

As an added service, readers will be able to buy the newspaper's photos directly from the website. Not only can people see their kids and grandkids in the paper and online, but they can buy the photos to keep with just the click of a button.

GOING STRONG

As a weekly, the Sentinel may not work the same way as larger papers, but it delivers to more readers per capita than many midsized publications. Between mail subscriptions and newsstand sales, the paper averages about 1,450 readers a week—in a town where the population is under 1,600.

"We're really strong right now. We're having a good year," Dave says. He's especially pleased that people keep up their subscriptions when they move away, some as far as California. "They seem to keep the paper, which is a good way to keep in touch," he says.

The local response is strong, too. "I see people getting the paper out of the post office and sitting in their cars to read it," Dave says. "That's a good feeling, because they couldn't wait to get home to read our stuff. That's really fun."

TAKING OWNERSHIP

Dave has been with the Dawson Sentinel 34 years, starting as managing editor working for publisher Rick Gail. He bought Rick's interest in the Sentinel and worked with partners Bill Kremer and his father, Mike Kremer, of Wheaton. Bill passed away, leaving Dave and Mike co-owners.

Some people may think buying into the newspaper business now is a risky move. Dave isn't one of those people. "The corporates are making the mistake when they buy smaller

papers of trying to do them remotely, and you can't do that. Not in the rural communities, it doesn't work," he says. "You have to have your life here. I live right across from the school, me and my wife, Denise. Our daughter was 3 when we moved here, so she went through the whole school system."

The formula for success, he says, is the way he covers the town. "I go to as much as I can. I get their kids in there and their grandkids," Dave says. "I think the stories I try to write are the ones that I would want to see, that the community wants to see."



ABOVE: Dawson Sentinel subscribers can choose between the printed newspaper, a digital copy or both.

LEFT: Dave Hickey's newspaper career has allowed him to meet many celebrities and politicians, including Jack Hanna, pictured here at the Columbus Zoo, Kirby Puckett from the Minnesota Twins, Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, Sen. Paul Wellstone and governors Tim Pawlenty and Tim Walz.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Dave wears many hats at the Dawson Sentinel, including photographer, reporter, editor and co-owner.



Summer

Potluck Staples

Reliable, affordable dishes perfect for warm-weather sharing



Potlucks call for recipes that can handle travel, sit happily on a table and please a wide range of tastes.

These summer-ready dishes rely on ingredients readily available in July and August, use straightforward techniques and are developed for home cooks. All are budget-conscious, and none require special equipment. 🗨

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

OVEN-BAKED BARBECUE CHICKEN DRUMSTICKS

- 3 pounds chicken drumsticks
- 1 1/2 cups barbecue sauce
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 400 F. Pat chicken dry and season with salt and

pepper. Toss with oil and arrange on a foil-lined baking sheet. Bake 30 minutes, turn, brush generously with barbecue sauce and bake 15 minutes more until cooked through and sticky. Serve warm or at room temperature.

EASY PEACH CRISP

- 6 cups fresh peaches, peeled and sliced
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

TOPPING:

- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup butter, melted



LEMON HERB ORZO SALAD

- 1 pound orzo pasta
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- 2 cups English cucumber, diced
- 1/3 cup red onion, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped

DRESSING:

- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Cook orzo in salted water until tender.

Drain and rinse with cold water. In a large bowl, combine orzo, tomatoes, cucumber, onion, feta and parsley. Whisk dressing ingredients and toss with salad.

Chill at least 30 minutes before serving.



SLOW-COOKER PULLED PORK SLIDERS

- 4 pounds pork shoulder or pork butt
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 cup barbecue sauce
- 1/2 cup chicken broth
- 12 slider buns

Season pork with salt, pepper and paprika. Place in slow cooker and add broth. Cover and cook on low for 8 hours until very tender. Shred meat with forks, discard excess fat and stir in barbecue sauce. Serve warm on slider buns.



WARM DILL AND MUSTARD POTATO SALAD

- 3 pounds small red or Yukon Gold potatoes
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons whole-grain mustard
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 1/2 cup celery, finely sliced
- 1/3 cup red onion, finely diced
- 1/4 cup fresh dill, chopped
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Boil potatoes in salted water until fork-tender. Drain and cut into bite-size pieces while still warm.

In a large bowl, whisk together olive oil, vinegar, mustards and sugar. Add warm potatoes, celery and red onion, tossing gently so the potatoes absorb the dressing. Season with salt and pepper. Fold in dill just before serving. Serve warm or at room temperature.



Preheat oven to 375 F.

Toss peaches with sugar and lemon juice and spread in a baking dish. Mix topping ingredients and sprinkle evenly over fruit.

Bake until golden and bubbly, about 40 minutes. Cool slightly before serving.





320-324-7111 | fedtel.net



320-568-2105 | farmerstel.net