

 **BTCFiber**

BROADBAND:
HELPING YOU SERVE



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020

CONNECTION



AN ARTIST'S GIFT

The talents of John
Phillips Ashley

SPREADING THE WORD

Churches using technology
to reach more people

SERVICE AND SOLACE

Broadband powers
community outreach



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Being thankful for broadband in 2020

When you're making your list of things to be thankful for this season, make room for this:

"access to broadband from a reliable, community-based provider." This year has taught us many things, one being that broadband is vital to so many areas of our lives — work, school, health and more.

I recently spoke with a journalist who has been covering the gaps in broadband connectivity across our country. She lives in a beautiful community in the mountains of Vermont and is lucky to be able to download emails — forget anything like streaming or VPN access. She has learned from working with NTCA and some of our members that building broadband is not a cheap proposition. There are physical hurdles (Vermont mountains?) that make the task even more formidable.

Several months into a remote world, her office is closed and her options for connectivity are limited. She joins the ranks of local school kids in nearby fast-food parking lots trying to complete their homework while she tries to upload her stories. In the most prosperous country in the world, in 2020, she has realized the hard way that having a broadband connection has become a lifeline and a necessity — and that speed and capacity actually do matter.

If you are holding this magazine, you are served by a community-based provider committed to keeping you connected. And that's a reason to be thankful! 📶



Wired up Hot spots rely on fast internet networks

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

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

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

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

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

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

The 2020 gift guide



\$200



Senstroke

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



\$59.99

SHOP FOR THE TECH THAT'S SURE TO PLEASE

Getting the right holiday gift for that special person in your life can be difficult. But whether they're into technology, music, sports or "Star Wars," our gift guide has something for everyone on your list. 📺



\$69.99



The CrazyCap

The CrazyCap uses ultraviolet light to kill germs inside your water bottle. This means you never have to worry about a smelly bottle again, even if you leave it overnight in your gym bag. It self-cleans every four hours. And forget about running low on water during a hike. The manufacturer claims you can safely disinfect any debris-free water, so you can refill your bottle from rivers, lakes or streams. The rechargeable cap can also disinfect surfaces or objects, such as your smartphone or keys. CrazyCap can be purchased with its bottle or separately, and it fits most cola-style bottles. The company donates 5% of every sale to water.org, a group that helps people around the world have access to clean water. The CrazyCap with 17-ounce bottle: \$69.99.



Gadget Discovery Club

\$96

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



The Child Animatronic Edition

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

Thank you to neighbors who help neighbors

Every day, we see neighbors helping neighbors. Never is this spirit more evident than during tough times, which 2020 has provided. At BTC Fiber, working together as a community is also part of our heritage as a cooperative. For decades, we've focused on making our area stronger, healthier and richer.



CHARLIE BORING
General Manager

But how do you measure those gains? Numbers provide some answers. How many new businesses opened? How many people built new homes? Did the number of jobs go up or down? Each of those is a valid way to determine how our community is doing. Statistics, however, are not the only gauge of success. Far from it.

As I think of our home, I'm reminded of a quote by Pat Summitt, the great University of Tennessee basketball coach who was reflecting on her team when she said, "I won 1,098 games, and eight national championships, and coached in four different decades. But what I see are not the numbers. I see their faces."

It's important to remember that behind every statistical data point is a face, a real person who may be celebrating a success or facing a challenge. At BTC Fiber, we know an individual, a family, or a business depends on the services we provide. You are never numbers to us. You are our neighbors, and we strive to help when help is needed most.

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

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

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

Even when we face struggles as a nation, as a state or as a local community, I believe there will always be helpers who work hard to serve where they can.

In this issue, we highlight some of those helpers and look at how they use technology to strengthen their mission. Whether through fundraising, recruiting volunteers, connecting with similar organizations or raising awareness of their causes, dozens of organizations in our region alone use broadband to do great work in serving their communities.

As we move into what may be a very different kind of holiday season, may we all pause to give thanks for those helpers. 📺

Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by BTC Fiber, ©2020. It is distributed without charge to all customers of the company.



is a member-owned cooperative dedicated to delivering advanced telecommunications technology to the people of Bledsoe and Sequatchie counties and portions of Van Buren, Cumberland and Hamilton counties.

BTC Fiber
P.O. Box 609
Pikeville, TN 37367
423-447-2121
423-949-2121
Email: customerservice@bledsoe.net

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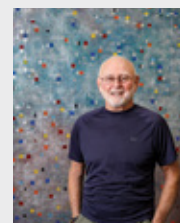
Richard Smith

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Produced for BTC Fiber by:

WORDSOUTH
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On the Cover:



John Phillips Ashley, renowned artist of oil paintings and metalscapes, makes his home near Dunlap.
See story Page 12.

Photo courtesy of Jim Madden.

A SALUTE TO VETERANS!

BTC Fiber thanks the brave men and women who have served our country. Take a moment to thank a soldier in your life on Veterans Day, which is Wednesday, Nov. 11.

BTC Fiber receives emergency grant funding

BTC Fiber received a grant totaling \$1.97 million from the state's Emergency Broadband Fund to ensure residents have the internet service they need for online learning.

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

The grant will allow BTC Fiber to provide broadband access to underserved homes in the College Station area.

The grant requires BTC Fiber to offer a minimum of "education level" speeds, which are defined as a download speed of 25 Mbps and an upload speed of 3 Mbps.

Holiday closings

A reminder that the BTC Fiber offices will be closed for the following holidays.

Thanksgiving:

Thursday, Nov. 26, and Friday, Nov. 27

Christmas:

Thursday, Dec. 24, and Friday, Dec. 25

New Year's Day:

Friday, Jan. 1

• Reminder: When our offices are closed, you can access your account 24/7 with online bill pay! Find out more at bledsoe.net.

CPNI: UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS

HOW BLEDSOE TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE, INC. PROTECTS YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION

Important notice to subscribers regarding your Customer Proprietary Network Information

Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative Inc. wants you to understand your rights to restrict the use of, disclosure of and access to your Customer Proprietary Network Information, or CPNI. You have a right and Bledsoe Telephone has a duty, under federal law, to protect the confidentiality of your Customer Proprietary Network Information.

WHAT IS CPNI?

It is the information that Bledsoe obtains that relates to the quantity, technical configuration, type, destination, location, and amount of use of the telecommunications service you subscribe to from Bledsoe. It includes the information that is found in your bills, but it does not include subscriber list information (name, address and telephone number). Examples of CPNI would be the telephone numbers that you call, the times you call them, the duration of your calls or the amount of your bill.

USE OF YOUR CPNI

CPNI may be used by Bledsoe to market services that are related to the package of services to which you currently subscribe or when marketing "adjunct to basic" services, such as Call Waiting and Caller ID. CPNI may also be used for the provision of customer premises equipment ("CPE") and services like call answering and voice mail and to protect Company property and prevent fraud. Bledsoe offers additional communications-related services. We seek your approval to access your CPNI so that BTC Fiber can provide you with information on new services and products that are tailored to meet your needs or may save you money.

IF YOU APPROVE OF OUR USE OF YOUR CPNI AS DESCRIBED ABOVE, NO ACTION IS NECESSARY ON YOUR PART

You have the right to disapprove this use of your CPNI by contacting us in writing at P.O. Box 609, Pikeville, TN 37367, or by telephone at 423-447-2121. If you disapprove of our use of your CPNI, you may not receive notice of new services or promotions, but your existing services will not be affected. If you do not notify us of your objection within thirty-three (33) days, we will assume you do not object and may use your CPNI for these purposes. You have the right to notify us at any time to object to the use of this information. Your election will remain valid until you notify us otherwise.



Visitors to Rock City's Enchanted Garden of Lights in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, are greeted with traditional holiday cheer.



'T is the time for Christmas lights, and cities around the South tend to take the holidays to a whole 'nother level, brightening the season and lighting up the town.

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

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

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

There are four areas that light up each Christmas season: Yule Town; Magic Forest; North Pole Village, where Santa and Mrs. Claus live and work with their magical elves; and the popular Arctic Kingdom, which has a brand-new look this year, offering one of the world's first of its kind — walk-through Christmas trees.

FESTIVALS *of* LIGHT

Have a merry time

Also new this year are the fashions on Inara the Ice Queen and Jack Frost. They will be decked out in colorful, new garments to prepare them for a journey through a stunning display of ice crystals in the Arctic Kingdom with a design reminiscent of the aurora borealis lights. Within this area of the Enchanted Garden of Lights is the Glacier Grotto, which offers a firepit to warm visitors passing through. Treats to warm the body and soul are also found at the North Pole Lodge, where kids of all ages can enjoy gingerbread cookie decorating and sipping hot cocoa while enjoying live music.

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



Whimsical light displays are part of a holiday stroll through Georgia's Rock City.



Mountain views are part of the Rock City experience.

Rock City Enchanted Garden of Lights

Nov. 20-Jan. 2, 4-9 p.m. (closed Christmas Eve)

Rock City Gardens, 1400 Patten Road, Lookout Mountain, Georgia

For information on special events and deals on weekday pricing during the holiday season, visit www.seerockcity.com/lights.

Lights around the South

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

• Magic Christmas in Lights

Bellingrath Gardens, Theodore, Alabama

Take a tour through the gardens and become illuminated with the more than 3 million lights sparkling throughout the gardens every Christmas. It's a holiday event that has become a tradition along the Gulf Coast. www.bellingrath.org

• Natchitoches Festival of Lights

Natchitoches, Louisiana

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

• Southern Lights Holiday Festival

Kentucky Horse Park, Lexington, Kentucky

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

• Anderson Christmas Lights

Anderson, South Carolina

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

• Dollywood's Smoky Mountain Christmas

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

The mountains come alive with color and cheer as Dolly's crew turns on the lights — 4 million of them — throughout the park. They are a backdrop for the amazing Parade of Many Colors and other events, including live shows with a holiday theme, such as the popular "Christmas in the Smokies." www.dollywood.com

• Galaxy of Lights

Huntsville, Alabama

The Huntsville Botanical Garden is all decked out in holiday finery as the annual Galaxy of Lights turns the gardens into a fantasyland of lights and color. It's a driving tour that takes you past nearly 200 animated displays, from those with holiday themes to dinosaurs and nursery rhyme characters for the kids. Special Galaxy of Lights Walking Nights are also available. Walk through snow falling inside a twinkling icicle forest, visit with Santa and enjoy hot chocolate along the way. www.hsvbg.org



Worshipping VIRTUALLY

Broadband internet provides
online opportunities Story by LISA SAVAGE

When Patsy Angel's cancer diagnosis kept her from attending church three years ago, services were one of the things she missed most.

Situations like that of Angel and others who had to stay home prompted First Southern Baptist Church in Pikeville to begin livestreaming services in 2019. Deanna Oxner, who works on the church's technology team, says they were still working out a few kinks when the pandemic forced churches to close early this year. Then they began streaming all the services on Facebook. "That's when it just exploded," she says.

Some churches already livestreamed services, but the pandemic led many organizations to make that leap sooner than planned. Broadband internet service available through BTC Fiber's network helps churches utilize technology to reach out and better meet the needs of their congregations.

FIRST SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH

Services at First Southern Baptist Church can be watched by members like Angel, but they also can reach missionaries in Africa and people from all over the country, Oxner says. "It made an impact in people's lives," she says, "and they didn't feel as isolated, and they could still be connected."

For Angel, the change means a lot. "Nothing replaces the camaraderie of being together, but it's nice to be able to watch from home," she says. Angel still undergoes treatment for cancer and has a compromised immune system, so she expects to continue watching from home when she can't attend.

"Nothing can replace actually going to church, but this is the next best thing," she says.

Initially, the church only livestreamed the sermons, but with so many events canceled, they began streaming and recording all their services.

"We made sure we had no more than 10 people in the church, and we had our pastor and the pianist, and a few people sang," Oxner says. "We had the crew we needed to keep everything going for the services to be livestreamed. We tried to keep it as normal as possible."

They livestream and then post Sunday school classes and Wednesday night Bible study. The church also hosted a virtual vacation Bible school last summer, using VMix for editing live videos. Teachers made videos from their homes, providing episodes of about 30 to 40 minutes. After editing, Oxner posted the videos to Facebook and YouTube at 2 p.m. each Monday for four weeks.



Members from First Southern Baptist Church added puppets and photos of members so the sanctuary would not appear so empty for Pastor Jim Whitaker and his wife, Sheila, while livestreaming services during the pandemic.

“We know we’ve reached people we would not have reached if it hadn’t been for having this online platform,” she says. “It has been changing lives.”

As the church continues to use more technology, upgrades have been made to some of its equipment to improve quality. “It’s been trial and error for everybody,” Oxner says. “But we’ve opened up a ministry we didn’t expect to be doing.”

First Southern Baptist Church plans to continue livestreaming. “We’re excited for the ways God has opened doors for us to the new opportunities that allow us to spread the Word of Jesus Christ,” Pastor Jim Whitaker says.

► For more information on the church, see [Myfsbc.com](https://myfsbc.com).

DUNLAP CHURCH OF CHRIST

Dunlap Church of Christ updated its website five years ago and began streaming sermons on Facebook Live and YouTube two years ago.

The equipment wasn’t up to date, says Robert Farmer, the deacon who oversees the church’s technology and sound. When the pandemic prompted livestreaming of all services, upgrades were in order. “We did a lot of research to determine what would work best for us,” Farmer says. “We knew we needed to come up with something fast.”

The church went from livestreaming only the sermon to broadcasting the entire service, along with recording it for later views. With an average of 140 worshippers at services before the pandemic, the number of views surprised them all, Farmer says.

At the peak, views ranged from between 200 and 300 each week. “That wasn’t our intent, but we ended up reaching many more than just our members,” he says. “We’ve come a long way from where we were at two years ago.”

The effort has been successful, and the church expects to continue.

“We have been streaming our Sunday sermons for a few years, but with the onslaught of the virus, all of our services are streamed,” says Freddie Clayton, preacher at Dunlap Church of Christ.

“We know we’ve reached people we would not have reached if it hadn’t been for having this online platform. It has been *changing lives*.”

— Deanna Oxner, First Southern Baptist Church technology team

“This allows the sick, shut-ins and those at greater risk from the virus to more safely participate in all aspects of our services. We also regularly receive comments and questions from many people other than our members who watch, as well. After this virus is gone, we will continue this outreach tool.”

The church also provides educational videos for all ages through its website, with topics ranging from parenting and family to leadership and faith building.

“Having the technology makes it easier and more convenient for our members,” Farmer says. “In the past, if a church member was sick and couldn’t attend worship service, they had to stay home,

or if they couldn’t attend an educational program, it wasn’t something they could watch online. Now, we are able to provide a valuable tool for our members that they might not otherwise be able to access.”

► For more information, visit Dunlapcoc.org. 📺



The “Sunday School with Albert” series features Albert Roberts.



Tim Witt works with the camera and iPad while livestreaming a service at Dunlap Church of Christ.



CHOWGIRLS

Making a change

High-speed connections power service organizations across the country



Chowgirls Killer Catering in Minneapolis leveraged online tools to better serve their community.

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In March 2020, Chowgirls Killer Catering in Minneapolis was busy preparing for its Sweet 16 party, complete with signature food and a swing band. Like many events in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, the celebration was ultimately called off. The next day, while watching Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz recommend against large gatherings across the state, it occurred to co-owner and CEO Heidi Andermack that one canceled party was the least of her problems.

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

As service organizations, charities and churches throughout the nation learned,

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

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

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

Chowgirls prepared 30,000 meals weekly.



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



In Smithville, Tennessee, the Rev. Chad Ramsey of Smithville First Baptist Church used online tools to stay connected to members.

WORSHIP ON DEMAND

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

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

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

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

That approach has helped Smithville FBC build a church that appeals across generations, attracting millennials and seniors alike. And while their

preferences for how they worship may not break down as neatly as expected, the fiber connection provides the flexibility to meet everyone’s needs.

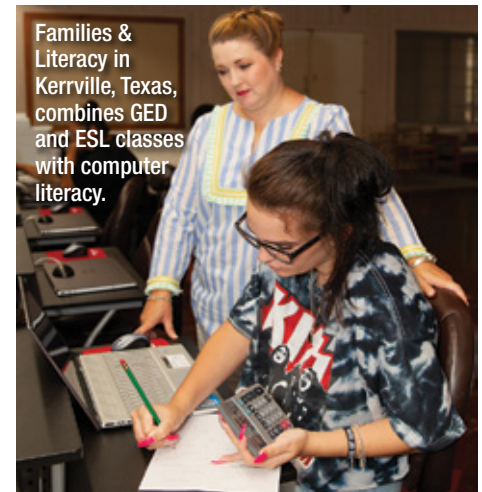
“You might see someone really young who wants things to be done the way they were decades ago, and then there are other people who are much older who want to know why we aren’t making the changes we need to be around for another 100 years,” says Ramsey. “That’s the challenge: Getting the focus not on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

DIGITAL LITERACY

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

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

Families & Literacy even offers an



Families & Literacy in Kerrville, Texas, combines GED and ESL classes with computer literacy.

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

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

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

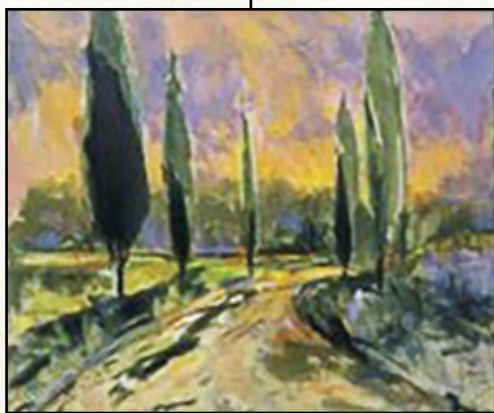
“We have always had a mission of reducing food waste, but now we’re looking at it as hunger relief,” she says. “It’s become essential to our business, helping us give jobs to chefs who would otherwise be unemployed and keep the lights on at our facility. Sometimes you just need to support each other,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



A passion for painting

At home with renowned artist John Phillips Ashley

Story by LISA SAVAGE



John Phillips Ashley vividly remembers how cold the water felt when he jumped in and swam to a floating platform in the middle of the lake. The summer after he graduated from high school, he worked as a camp counselor, and the campers wouldn't take the plunge until he did.

"I wasn't going to jump in, but they challenged me, so I did it," he recalls.

The memories of the frigid water many years ago stayed with him and served as the theme for one of his favorite paintings — "Cold Challenge."

Just about all his paintings come from some memory, often an event from years ago.

"I have no idea where the ideas come from. They just come to me," he says. "It's like an inspiration."

Another favorite — "Dan and the Blue Spruce" — is from an experience when he and his wife, Lea, visited Maine. On a hike in the forest, they encountered a white dog he called Dan. "I never forgot about that dog," he says. But the painting isn't an exact picture of the scene he remembers. It's an example of Ashley's style — impressionism. He's influenced by curiosity, mood and observation.

"These factors create impressions that play a large role in executing the subject of any work," he says.

Ashley's style makes him renowned for his creative approaches to his craft. "I want to do something that no one else has done or will do," he says. "That's where my interest lies."

IT'S IN THE GENES

Ashley doesn't remember a time when he didn't paint or do something creative with his time.

He grew up in the Chattanooga area, and his father worked at the Tennessee Valley Authority while his mother, a housewife, had many talents. She created dresses and overcoats for the well-to-do members in their church with her sewing skills. At the time, Ashley didn't realize he was part of a unique group of artisans. His father designed and built their house, and Ashley helped. "I thought everybody built their own house," he says. His late brother later worked as a master potter. "We painted and created things, and it was mostly out of necessity," he says. "The creativity is inherited and runs in the family. I've accepted this as a gift."

Beyond creating art at home, he recalls painting a mural on a classroom wall while in middle school. "I can't remember a time when I didn't paint," Ashley says.

After high school, he applied to the acclaimed Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. "I would work a semester, then I'd go to college for a semester," Ashley says.

His last year there, his parents chipped in to help pay tuition, and he finished without taking a break.

He says the degree from such a prestigious art school opened doors for him as a designer, illustrator and artist at various companies from Chattanooga to Chicago.



Artist John Phillips Ashley.

Ashley's designs showed up as bank logos, greeting cards and on all kinds of printed items around the country. "I never looked at it like I was good. I did it to make a living," he says. "But it was what I was interested in."

In the 1980s, he knew it was time to move on. "I took two big black portfolios of the printed advertising pieces I had created and took it to the recycling center," he says. "I no longer felt they served a purpose. There was satisfaction in the commercial accomplishments, but it was time to embrace my personal aspects of oil paintings and the creation of the metalscapes which clients found impacting."

He built a studio at his home in Chattanooga and began another career, painting.

He's also created unique metalscape sculptures using a form and covering it in tempered aluminum. He dyed the metal using a special layering process and coated each piece with clear polymer.

The larger pieces hang with a cleat system. Smaller sculptures can hang conventionally similar to a painting. He no longer creates the metalscapes because the materials aren't available.

HOME SWEET HOME

Now, Ashley and his wife live near Dunlap in a house he designed and built several years ago on 4 acres overlooking the Sequatchie Valley.

He once displayed and sold work in galleries, but he decided to pull his pieces from the galleries to have something to display in his own home. Most of the rest of his paintings and metalscapes hang in the home of a friend. "You can't store art very easily," Ashley says.

His creativity carried over to his home. He used much of the rock on the property to create a unique stone patio that gives him and his wife a place to be close to nature. With an array of birds, turkey, deer and chipmunks, it's a haven they love.

Ashley maintains a low profile now and doesn't paint as much as he used to. But like most artists, it's a passion and something he can't stop.

"Paintings are no more than visual stories," he says. "The hope for an artist is to have viewers respond to what he tells." 🗨️

Ashley hasn't sold his work in several years, but he plans to make some of his remaining paintings and metalscapes available to purchase. For information about making a purchase, go to johnphillipsashley.com.



A tart treat

Cranberries are a longstanding staple at holiday time



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

People have been eating cranberries for centuries. Native Americans first used them as food and medicine, well before Pilgrims set foot here. The absence of sugar in the colonies in the early 1600s meant cranberries, which benefit from sweetening, were probably not at the first

Thanksgiving table. Nonetheless, it didn't take long for them to become a part of that holiday's menu, and today, consumers eat more than 80 million pounds of cranberries from Thanksgiving to Christmas.

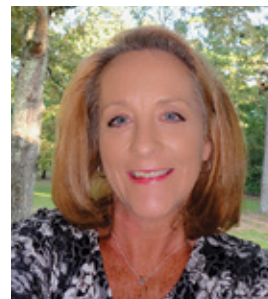
Every year, holiday celebrators enjoy more than 5 million gallons of the canned sauce that jiggles like Santa's belly, and cranberries are a simple way to add color to your table and a sweet, tart flavor to your turkey. But as Americans are latching on to the farm-to-table trend, fresh cranberries are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

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

- **Baking with cranberries** — Cut cranberries in half before adding them to baked goods to prevent them from swelling and popping.
- **Cooking cranberries on the stovetop** — Simmer whole berries gently in a small amount of water, uncovered, since

too much steam might cause them to swell and explode.

- **Freezing cranberries** — To freeze and enjoy them throughout the year, spread the berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet and place it in the freezer. Once they are completely frozen, transfer the berries to freezer-safe bags or airtight containers. There's no need to thaw your cranberries before cooking. Just give them a quick water bath before using.



FOOD EDITOR
ANNE P. BRALY
IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.

CRANBERRY APPLE HOLIDAY BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

Make this casserole a day ahead.

Casserole:

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

Streusel topping:

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

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

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

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



Cranberry Crumble Bars

Crust and topping:

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup ground slivered almonds
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup chilled butter
- 1 egg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Filling:

- 4 cups fresh cranberries
- 1 cup sugar
- Juice of half an orange (4 teaspoons)
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

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

In a large bowl, mix the flour, 1 cup sugar, almonds, baking powder and

salt. Cut in the butter, using a pastry blender or pulling 2 table knives through the ingredients in opposite directions, until the mixture looks like coarse crumbs. Stir in the egg. Press 2 1/2 cups of crumb mixture in the bottom of the pan. Stir cinnamon into the remaining crumb mixture. Set aside.

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

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

the nuts and stir to completely combine. Refrigerate.

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Remove the casserole and topping from the refrigerator. Bake the casserole, covered, until heated through and steaming, 35 to 40 minutes. Break up any large topping pieces if necessary.

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



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WORKING HARD FOR OUR MEMBERS



***2020
ANNUAL
REPORT***

 **BTC Fiber**

ASSETS

as of Dec. 31, 2019 and 2018

	2019	2018
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 5,481,485	\$ 4,910,410
Certificates of deposit	2,869,584	3,239,407
Debt securities held-to-maturity	55,779	259,392
Accounts receivable		
Due from customers, less allowance		
of \$7,865 for 2019 and 2018	410,438	336,693
Other	321,008	312,381
Interest receivable	50,525	27,274
Materials and supplies	1,447,287	1,334,755
Prepaid expenses	549	549
Total current assets	10,636,655	10,420,861
Noncurrent Assets		
Certificates of deposit	2,815,162	1,993,602
Other investments	3,460,077	3,534,900
Debt securities held-to-maturity	1,297,363	1,370,587
Prepaid pension	1,538,191	1,514,815
Deferred charges		560
Total noncurrent assets	9,110,793	8,414,464
Property, Plant and Equipment		
Telecommunications plant in service	73,911,896	70,004,480
Cable television plant in service	3,597,257	4,132,039
Telecom plant under construction	3,940,872	2,808,819
Less accumulated depreciation	60,319,326	59,026,117
Total property, plant and equipment	21,130,699	17,919,221
Total assets	\$ 40,878,147	\$ 36,754,546

LIABILITIES AND EQUITY

as of Dec. 31, 2019 and 2018

	2019	2018
Current Liabilities		
Current maturities on long-term debt	\$ 132,000	\$ 125,233
Accounts payable	1,142,956	461,259
Customer deposits	179,679	138,314
Accrued taxes	158,543	162,217
Accrued employee leave and wages	709,224	642,011
Other current liabilities	645,733	554,859
Total current liabilities	2,968,135	2,083,893
Other Liabilities		
Postemployment benefits other than pension	1,256,549	1,567,225
Total other liabilities	1,256,549	1,567,225
Long-Term Debt, Net of Current Maturities		
Notes payable	1,575,405	1,674,291
Total long-term debt	1,575,405	1,674,291
Total liabilities	5,800,089	5,325,409
Equity		
Memberships issued	113,960	111,412
Patronage capital	36,360,155	33,108,766
Accumulated other comprehensive loss	(1,396,057)	(1,791,041)
Total equity	35,078,058	31,429,137
Total liabilities and equity	\$ 40,878,147	\$ 36,754,546

These are the consolidated financials of Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative and its subsidiary.

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY

	Memberships	Patronage Capital	Accumulated Other Comprehensive Income	Total Equity
Balance, Dec. 31, 2017	\$ 111,581	\$ 30,618,697	\$ (254,995)	\$ 30,475,283
Net margins for 2018		2,665,401		2,665,401
Memberships, net	(169)			(169)
Capital credits retired		(52,470)		(52,470)
Deceased capital credits		(122,862)		(122,862)
Postemployment benefit plan unrecognized loss			(1,536,046)	(1,536,046)
Balance, Dec. 31, 2018	111,412	33,108,766	(1,791,041)	31,429,137
Cumulative affect on adoption of ASU 2016-01		(200,062)	200,062	
Net margins for 2019		3,812,742		3,812,742
Memberships, net	2,548			2,548
Capital credits retired		(332,707)		(332,707)
Deceased capital credits		(28,584)		(28,584)
Postemployment benefit plan unrecognized gain			194,922	194,922
Balance, Dec. 31, 2019	\$ 113,960	\$ 36,360,155	\$ (1,396,057)	\$35,078,058

STATEMENTS OF REVENUES AND EXPENSES

as of Dec. 31, 2019 and 2018

	2019	2018
Operating Revenues		
Basic local network services	\$ 2,616,961	\$ 2,812,014
Network access services	6,848,512	5,995,543
Internet operations	5,955,818	5,229,521
Video operations	2,657,062	2,797,356
Nonregulated	529,872	553,784
Miscellaneous	432,742	427,116
Less uncollected revenues	(15,288)	(10,413)
Total operating revenues	19,056,255	17,825,747
Operating Expenses		
Plant specific operations	2,915,662	2,689,133
Plant nonspecific operations	1,356,947	1,249,035
Depreciation	2,931,578	3,241,833
Customer operations	746,668	682,370
Corporate operations	2,123,446	2,007,127
Internet operations	3,612,744	3,220,629
Video operations	2,637,545	2,860,162
Operating taxes	268,677	291,851
Other	294,684	562,891
Total operating expenses	16,887,951	16,805,031
Operating Margins	2,168,304	1,020,716
Fixed Charges		
Interest expense	2,395	10,532
Total fixed charges	2,395	10,532
Operating Margins After Fixed Charge	2,165,909	1,010,184
Nonoperating Margins	1,646,833	1,655,217
Net Margins for the Year	\$ 3,812,742	\$ 2,665,401

A WORD FROM YOUR CEO



CHARLIE BORING, CEO

The cover of this insert is aptly titled "Working hard for our members." It's more than just a saying though. It's something we live by.

Our installers and repairmen display this as they work to install or repair internet, phone and video service to members. Our customer service representatives exhibit this as they find new ways to serve members in the midst of a pandemic.

You see that same unwavering commitment to our members by the hard work our board of directors does to position BTC Fiber to expand the fiber optic network to more members while keeping your cooperative financially sound.

I'm proud of the remarkable work all of our employees do every day to serve you. They are building on the promises that Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative first made when it started in 1953. It was telephone service that members desperately needed back then. While we still deliver crystal-clear voice service, today it is fast fiber internet that will pave the way of the future for BTC Fiber.

It is our desire to continue our legacy of delivering the communications needs of the communities we serve well into the future no matter what that looks like. As we continue our transformation into a world-class fiber communications provider, we will also continue working hard for you — our members.

SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

BTC Fiber congratulates these employees celebrating service anniversaries.

Front row, from left, are Roberta Smith (30 years), Maranda Keith (20 years), Megan Morris (5 years) and Deana Cranmore (5 years).

Back row, from left, are Jamey Guy (30 years), Cory Smith (5 years), John Davis (5 years), Ron Triplett (20 years), Brian Fann (20 years).





BTC FIBER LOGO REFLECTS RENEWED COMMITMENT TO OUR MEMBERS

Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative has changed its name to BTC Fiber to more accurately reflect the industry today and the focus on fiber optic broadband for the future.

Bledsoe Telephone was begun in 1953 to fill in the area's gaps in phone service, and for 65 years, the cooperative has focused on serving the people of Bledsoe and Sequatchie counties and portions of Van Buren, Cumberland and Hamilton counties with the best technology available.

That has not changed. BTC Fiber is the same local, dedicated company

it has always been. The new name simply reflects the daily work, which now predominantly involves fiber optic broadband.

Fiber optic broadband is the fastest, most reliable internet connection available. It is the wave of the future, and BTC Fiber is making sure its members are not left behind.

BTC Fiber launched plans in 2016 to connect all homes and businesses in its service area to a lightning-fast fiber network capable of providing internet speeds up to a gigabit per second. Since then, BTC Fiber has installed 220 miles of

fiber cable that passes more than 6,000 homes. Fiber technology is now available to 36% of BTC Fiber members, with a goal of providing access to all members by 2024.

"An investment in fiber is an investment in the future," says BTC Fiber General Manager Charlie Boring. "This new name better reflects who we are today, but we have the same mission and dedicated focus as always: to provide top-notch service and technology for our members."