



JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023

# CONNECTION



## Coffee and community

SheBrews in Lafayette

SPLIT TREE BARBECUE

CRUISES ARE BACK!



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Building the broadband workforce

Partnerships prepare for future growth

As we greet the new year, it's natural to look ahead to the next 12 months, which will again show our members supporting rural America by providing critical broadband internet service. It has been gratifying to see providers like yours working so furiously to build out broadband to communities still waiting for robust service while also serving existing customers. Yet, the work is never truly done.

Whether it is installations, upgrades or maintenance, there is certainly more than enough work to go around. That is why it is fitting that NTCA is stepping up to help broadband workers. Because retention and recruitment in rural markets is more challenging than urban areas, we are especially proud to work with some new partners to support the broadband providers we represent in creating a 21st century workforce.

We recently joined the White House's Talent Pipeline Challenge, a call to action for employers, education and training providers, and others to support equitable workforce development in critical infrastructure sectors like broadband. We have partnered with Northwood Technical College, the National Rural Education Association and the Communications Workers of America to expand training and job opportunities for rural America's broadband workforce.

These efforts seek to prepare for immediate growth in the broadband industry because of significant funding for network deployment in the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act, as well as future demand for high-tech jobs.

It's an exciting time to work in broadband, and you are fortunate to live somewhere served by a committed community-based provider. As connections grow, so will the number and skills of broadband workers. Stay tuned for more information soon from your provider about these initiatives.

Happy New Year. 🍀

# A nourishing change

## FCC embraces new broadband labels

Rural broadband providers have a deserved reputation for openness, but not every national company can say the same — shopping for service can be trying.

The Federal Communications Commission, however, intends to require internet providers to prominently display a “nutrition label” clearly detailing the specifics of each plan. The FCC passed a rule late last year clearing the way for this change, although implementation may take time and require additional input.

The intent is to eliminate hidden fees, confusion about data caps and uncertainty about speeds and generally to shine a bright light on what can be a confusing choice.

Each label will show key information — details wise consumers should consider now:

- Monthly price and contract length
- Whether that price will change after a certain period and, if so, what it will change to
- A complete list of monthly and one-time fees, as well as any early termination fee
- Whether the company participates in the Affordable Connectivity Program and a link to check if the consumer qualifies
- Typical download and upload speeds
- Data cap and price for exceeding that cap
- And more

The FCC must complete additional steps before implementing this change, and internet service providers will have time to update websites and other sales material. 🗨️

### THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

The FCC is working to limit confusion about broadband services by creating a “nutrition label” providers must display to consumers. While implementation might take time, the example label provided by the FCC offers a guide to information shoppers might consider now when choosing a service.

### Broadband Facts

**Provider Name**  
**Service Plan Name and/or Speed Tier**  
Fixed or Mobile Broadband Consumer Disclosure

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**Monthly Price** **[\$]**

This Monthly Price [is/is not] an introductory rate. [If introductory rate is applicable, identify length of introductory period and the rate that will apply after introductory period concludes]

This Monthly Price [does not] require[s] a [x year/x month] contract. [only required if applicable; if so, provide link to terms of contract]

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**Additional Charges & Terms**

Provider Monthly Fees <small>[Itemize each fee]</small>	<b>[\$]</b>
One-time Fees at the Time of Purchase <small>[Itemize each fee]</small>	<b>[\$]</b>
Early Termination Fee	<b>[\$]</b>
Government Taxes	Varies by Location

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**Discounts & Bundles**  
Click Here for available billing discounts and pricing options for broadband service bundled with other services like video, phone, and wireless service, and use of your own equipment like modems and routers. [Any links to such discounts and pricing options on the provider's website must be provided in this section.]

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**Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**  
The ACP is a government program to help lower the monthly cost of internet service. To learn more about the ACP, including to find out whether you qualify, visit [affordableconnectivity.gov](https://affordableconnectivity.gov).

**Participates in the ACP** **[Yes/No]**

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**Speeds Provided with Plan**

Typical Download Speed	<b>[ ] Mbps</b>
Typical Upload Speed	<b>[ ] Mbps</b>
Typical Latency	<b>[ ] Ms</b>

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**Data Included with Monthly Price** **[ ] GB**

Charges for Additional Data Usage **[\$/GB]**

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**Network Management** [Read our Policy](#)

**Privacy** [Read our Policy](#)

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**Customer Support**  
Contact Us: [example.com/support/](https://example.com/support/) / (555) 555-5555

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Learn more about the terms used on this label by visiting the Federal Communications Commission's Consumer Resource Center.

[fcc.gov/consumer](https://fcc.gov/consumer)

[Unique Plan Identifier Ex. F0005937974123ABC456EMC789]

# GONE PHISHING

## Don't get hooked by a ransomware attack



If you lost access to everything on your personal or work computer, how much would you pay to get it back? It's a question more people are asking themselves as ransomware attacks have continued to grow in number and severity.

About 21% of all cyberattacks in 2021 were ransomware attacks, according to IBM Security, costing individuals and businesses an estimated \$20 billion. From 2013 to 2020, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center saw a 243% increase in ransomware reports. That growth comes thanks to services that offer ransomware-for-hire and the increased popularity of cryptocurrency, which make untraceable payments to these services easier than ever.

The FBI does not recommend victims of these attacks pay the ransom. Victims rarely see their data returned, and payment only encourages future attacks. Instead, the best protection against ransomware is to understand how it works, where it comes from and how to protect your data from the start.

### WHAT IS RANSOMWARE?

Ransomware is a type of malware, or malicious software, which locks the victim

out of data on their computer until they pay for access to be restored. Most ransomware attacks target individuals, although attacks on large organizations with even bigger payouts have grown in popularity.

In the past, these situations largely involved attackers demanding a ransom to unlock the data. Today, most are "double extortion" assaults in which attackers demand payment for returning the data and to prevent it from being stolen again.

### WHAT CAUSES IT?

Ransomware can infect your computer in many of the same ways as any other virus:


- **Phishing emails** — These emails trick users into downloading a malicious attachment disguised as a harmless file or visiting a website that can download the ransomware through their browsers.
- **Software vulnerabilities** — Hackers can find holes in a piece of software's cybersecurity protection or buy information on these flaws to download the malware onto a device or network.
- **Stolen logins** — Whether they're obtained through phishing, purchased on the dark web or hacked by brute force,

stolen credentials give cybercriminals direct access to download malware onto a device.

- **Repurposed malware** — Some ransomware is actually malware developed for other attacks like stealing bank information, and it's reworked to encrypt and lock personal data.

### HOW CAN I AVOID IT?

Since paying attackers is not a reliable way to deal with ransomware, the best defense is to protect yourself and your devices before an attack can begin:

- Keep backups of any important data to eliminate most of the leverage an attacker might have.
- Update your computer's software and operating system regularly to protect against the latest threats.
- Update your computer's cybersecurity tools to help response teams detect and react to new ransomware attacks faster.
- Always be aware of phishing, social engineering and other strategies that can lead to a ransomware attack. 

**TO LEARN MORE**, visit [www.stopthinkconnect.org](http://www.stopthinkconnect.org).

# Are you ready for the future?

## Embrace 2023 and beyond

**H**appy New Year! This is always an exciting time, because the months ahead are waiting to be filled with plans, hopes, dreams and accomplishments. At NCTC, we'll build on the successes of last year as we continue our mission to provide you with increasingly better services while supporting the community in meaningful ways.



**JOHNNY  
MCCLANAHAN**  
President/CEO

While we exist to provide critical communications resources, the mission at the heart of what we do and who we are extends far beyond our services. Consider how we provide financial support to area sports teams, both school-based and recreational leagues, as well as a range of organizations like 4-H. It's all part of our daily effort to demonstrate our commitment not only to be a good neighbor, but also to uplift the community wherever we can.

In this magazine issue, for example, you'll read how Macon County Schools will add a course in unmanned aircraft with the help of a \$5,000 grant from the Foundation for Rural Service. NCTC, a member of FRS, sponsored the grant for the program benefiting the agriculture department. We're excited for the day when the first students pursue a Federal Aviation Administration Remote Pilot Certification.

I'm happy to say that sponsoring this grant was just one of the many ways we helped organizations last year — the list is truly too long to include here. As a local company, we will continue to support our communities. But we couldn't do it without you — our members and our customers.

While community outreach is important, we believe our commitment to bringing a modern communications network and the resources to support it is just as vital. For example, we opened a new office in Bowling Green, at 176 Porter Pike Road, to better serve residents of that area. But there's no better showcase for our approach to helping our region than the fiber optic network bringing you unparalleled performance — we're 100% fiber throughout our service area.

As you know, there are immediate benefits for every home and business connected to this lightning-fast internet network. From telehealth and work-from-home opportunities to digital music and streaming videos, fiber provides a conduit to the tools and resources you deserve.

Those are the realities of today. Now, what about tomorrow? This is where an already exciting technology becomes even more magical. Fiber optic technology is built to stand the test of time. Our network already provides performance rivaling that found in metropolitan areas. Upgrades, maintenance and more will certainly be required, but that core technology is also ready for the future, capable of growing to meet our needs.

Simply, the significant investment in fiber was a prudent choice and another way to serve you in the practical manner guiding all our decisions. Even this publication operates in that same spirit. You see, the project supporting this magazine — celebrating its 10th year with this edition — is part of a co-op just as you are part of our co-op. By sharing the production costs with like-minded utilities, we can affordably bring you this unique, high-quality magazine.

We're excited to continue this journey with you in 2023. Happy New Year, and I hope you're as excited about what comes next as we are. [📧](#)

The North Central Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by NCTC, © 2023. It is distributed without charge to all member/owners of the cooperative.



North Central is a member-owned corporation dedicated to delivering advanced telecommunications technology to the people of Northern Middle Tennessee and Southern Kentucky, including Macon County, Tennessee, Allen County and Warren County, Kentucky. NCTC also serves portions of Sumner, Trousdale, Smith and Clay counties in Tennessee.

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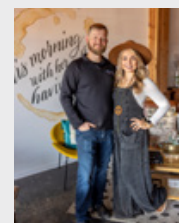
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#### On the Cover:



Derrick and Courtney Gann opened SheBrews in Lafayette Square in June 2021, and they've been growing ever since. See story Page 8.

Photo by Tony Young

## NCTC employees celebrated



From left, President and CEO Johnny McClanahan presents milestone awards to Fellisha Adams, 10 years; Amy Phelps, 15 years; Charlie Buck, 20 years; Patrick Coley, 20 years; Tonya Brown, 20 years; and Leigh Anne Duncan, 25 years. Bridget Mays, 10 years, is not pictured.

## Blankenship and Cooksey win community service awards

NCTC recently honored two local volunteers with the company's 2022 Community Service Awards. The awards shine a spotlight on people who make a difference in their communities.



**Barbara Blankenship**, a longtime volunteer for the local Lions Club and a gospel singer, is "an example of what a true Christian should be," says her daughter, Rachel Hall. In addition to her charity work, Blankenship sings for benefits to help others in need. "She has helped so many others that I could never even count," Hall says. "She is such a caring and loving woman that I strive to be more like every day."

In recent years, Blankenship has experienced debilitating setbacks, including a cancer diagnosis, the loss of her husband in January 2022, and a March 2022 wreck that broke her back in seven places. Despite this, she plans to recover so she can continue to help others in need, Hall says. NCTC presented Blankenship with a plaque and offered a \$1,000 donation on her behalf to Crossroads Community Center.



**Michael Cooksey**, a decades-long volunteer for the Scottsville Fire Department and former captain of the group, works tirelessly in the community "at everything from water rescue, vehicle accidents and even rescuing animals from sinkholes," the person who nominated him says.

NCTC presented Cooksey with a plaque and donated \$1,000 on his behalf to the Center for Courageous Kids, a camp for children with life-threatening illnesses.

## Macon County Schools receives grant

Macon County Schools won a \$5,000 grant from the Foundation for Rural Service (FRS) to supplement coursework in unmanned aircraft, which will specifically benefit the agriculture department. The grant was sponsored by NCTC, which is a member of FRS.

This coursework will give students the foundational knowledge to pursue Federal Aviation Administration Remote Pilot Certification, which is portable to other industries and required to fly drones for profit.

The course will also be the capstone course for all three agricultural programs: veterinary science, horticulture science and agricultural engineering.

"The addition of the drones will enhance the learning opportunities for Macon County students and help them to pursue certifications that have not been possible in the past," Macon County Director of Schools Shawn Carter says. "We are grateful to NCTC for their support."

Marla Davis, academic career coach for Macon County Schools, thanked NCTC for its help in winning the grant.

"They have been a true partner to Macon County Schools in so many ways," she says.

NCTC will provide a 10% match to the grant. "I am excited about this program and believe it will provide a foundation of necessary and relevant skills for the students and hope it sparks an interest they pursue in higher education and beyond," says NCTC President and CEO Johnny McClanahan. "I look forward to continuing to work with the school system and am encouraged about the future of our students."



Macon County Schools received a \$5,000 FRS grant to help certify drone pilots for commercial activities. From left, Director of Career and Technical Education Kathy Cothron, Macon County Director of Schools Shawn Carter, NCTC President and CEO Johnny McClanahan, Director of Career and Technical Education Tony Boles and Academic Career Coach Marla Davis.

# Brighten the winter

## *Plan now to cruise this year*



Story by ANNE BRALY

When the days are cold, sun-down seems to arrive in the middle of the afternoon and skies are gray, there's no better time to turn daydreams of warm breezes, blue water and sand into reality. You might even save a little money while you're at it.

Cruising the Caribbean is a temptation thousands of people can't resist, and planning now can make a difference. "All of the major cruise lines have returned their fleets to full deployment," says Wes Rowland, president of [cruiseexperts.com](http://cruiseexperts.com). "Cruising is back."

As a result, more cruise lovers are going to be on the water, and finding a deal for the best rooms and views is getting harder. There's so much to decide — dates, itineraries, cruise lines, room types and more. One of the first considerations is the port of origin. Fortunately, Southerners have options. In

Florida, you'll find ports in Tampa, Port Canaveral and Miami. Or, you can set sail from Charleston, South Carolina, or New Orleans. Even Galveston, Texas, can be a short, affordable flight away.

"It helps if you can find an experienced and trusted travel professional who can help you navigate the variables of a cruise purchase, understand your needs and expectations, help interpret value and give good guidance so you can make an informed decision in your best interest," Wes says.

The best cruise deals are not only about getting the lowest price. Cruise lines now offer attractive options, including amenities that once cost extra. Check out some of the top cruise sites online and you'll find that cruises now include more in the up-front price, such as beverage packages, tips, free specialty dining and Wi-Fi.

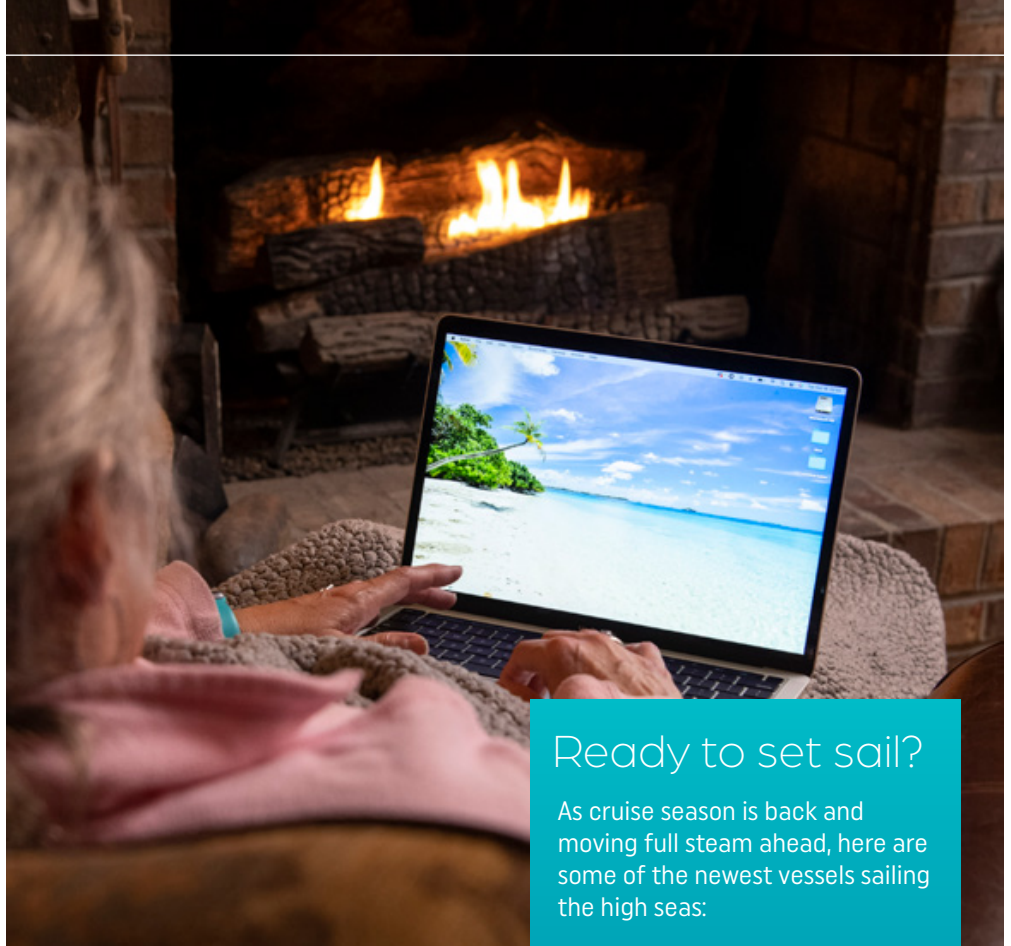
"It's a better value for the guest," Wes says. "Cruise lines took advantage of the unplanned downtime during the pandemic to retire the oldest ships from their fleets. With new ships coming on line, consumers have better choices of fabulous, amenity-packed ships than ever."

For example, Norwegian's 2023 schedule includes a seven-night cruise of the Western Caribbean, April 9-16, 2023, in a suite with a balcony for \$899 per person with double occupancy. The offer includes unlimited bar, a specialty dining experience, excursions and Wi-Fi.

### CONSIDER 'SHOULDER SEASON'

Supply and demand determine rates, so if your travel dates are flexible take advantage of what budget cruisers consider the Holy Grail of deals — shoulder season. This window between the peak

# blues



With cruises booking up for spring, planning now will help you find the adventure and pricing you want. So brighten the winter gloom with dreams of the sea.

## Ready to set sail?

As cruise season is back and moving full steam ahead, here are some of the newest vessels sailing the high seas:

- ▶ Royal Caribbean's Odyssey of the Seas embarked on its first cruise in 2021 and is the first Quantum Ultra-Class Ship in North America offering bumper cars, glow-in-the-dark laser tag and virtual reality games. Passengers can kick back and relax beside the newly designed, resort-style pool. This ship is a game-changer for the cruise industry.
- ▶ Princess Cruises' Enchanted Princess launched in 2019 and offers a touch more sophistication than ships geared toward the teenage set. Dining options are excellent on all the cruise line's Medallion Class vessels, the category to which the Enchanted Princess belongs.
- ▶ MSC Cruises' Virtuosa set sail in 2019. There's a humanoid robot bartender in the Starship Club. The ship has the longest LED dome at sea, and it towers over a promenade of retail shops and restaurants. There are five pools that range from a waterpark for the kids to a quieter place to relax for adults.

and off-seasons, from late September through mid-November, offers the best deals and smaller crowds. "Sometimes it's just the perception of when it's better or worse to travel. You need to know what your priorities are," Wes says.

### TIPS FOR BUYING A CRUISE

If you choose to go it alone, do your homework. There's no guarantee you'll find the lowest rate, but these tips from [cruiseexpert.com](http://cruiseexpert.com) will help you be smarter about buying your vacation:

- Final deposits are due three months before the cruise. Usually, that's the last date a cruise can be canceled without a penalty. This is when you can snag a good deal as cruise lines slash rates to try to fill empty cabins.
- Book for fall or spring when most families with school-age children cannot travel. There's typically more

availability, and lower pricing, during these times.

- If you're willing to risk it, book a Caribbean cruise during hurricane season when prices are much lower. Just be sure to invest in travel insurance and make sure your prepaid deposits and other expenses are covered.
- Aggregate sites — independent websites offering trips on multiple cruise lines — allow you to check out many options at once. Sites include [cruisecritic.com](http://cruisecritic.com), [gotosea.com](http://gotosea.com), [cruises.com](http://cruises.com) and [cheapcruises.com](http://cheapcruises.com).
- If you're new to cruising and want to see if it's right for you, try taking a short, two- to three-night cruise first. Royal Caribbean's recently refurbished Freedom of the Seas is one option. It makes short cruises between Miami and the Bahamas. [👉](#)

# Cool beans

SheBrews brings a new buzz to downtown Lafayette

Story by JEN CALHOUN

SheBrews co-owner Courtney Gann remembers exactly what she was doing at 2 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 27, 2020. “I was sitting in one of our favorite coffee shops in Lebanon with my husband,” she says. “It was Black Friday, and the place was really hopping.”

That’s when her husband, Derrick, then a police officer, made the comment that would change their lives forever. “He said we should open a coffee shop,” says Courtney, who was an elementary school teacher at the time. “I mean, it was something we’d talked about before, but

this time, he was really serious. I could tell it was no longer just a dream or a retirement thing. He wasn’t joking.”

## JAVAPHILES

Courtney and Derrick loved coffee long before they opened SheBrews in Lafayette’s Public Square. On trips, they would visit coffee shops to take in the atmosphere, sip the brews and collect coffee cup sleeves.

After scouting out a few locations for their shop, the couple found what they thought would be the perfect

spot — a downtown building on the Public Square in Lafayette.

“When we approached the owner of the building, we found out we were fourth in line,” she says. “That was fine with us because it would give us a little time to get things together. So, we put our name on the list.”

## LEAP OF FAITH

The couple was surprised when, in early December that same year, the owner of the building called them to say he wanted them to lease the

building. “We thought it wasn’t going to happen,” Courtney says. “But the landlord skipped down the list because he liked what we wanted to do.”

The decision surprised the Ganns, who thought they might have a few years to make plans. They also worried about opening a gathering spot during those earlier, more uncertain days of the pandemic. “I knew we had to try it, though,” Courtney says.

She called her father, and without telling him the situation directly, asked him about an opportunity that might require her to leave teaching. “He said, ‘I don’t know what it is, but you’re young, and if not now, when?’”

A Bible verse, Hebrews 11:1, also helped keep them strong: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

They even named the coffee shop SheBrews as a play on “Hebrews.”

## BUILDING A DREAM

Over the next few months, Courtney, Derrick and their family renovated the building. They gave the space a warm,



Coffee drinks done with style.



Photos by Tony Young

stylish feel, complete with a cedar bar, ambient lighting and wooden booths. The overall look is both cozy and sophisticated, like a coffee shop in a much larger city.

A mural on one wall quotes Johnny Cash, who famously said his definition of paradise was, “This morning with her having coffee.” The “her” he was talking about was his wife, June Carter Cash.

When they opened on June 24, 2021, a line snaked out the door from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. “It didn’t stop,” Courtney says. “I could not believe it. And we had one employee at the time. It was two weeks before we leveled out.”

### SEASONS OF LIFE

SheBrews is now a popular spot for business types and students using Wi-Fi. Others come to visit friends, stream movies or sit at the bar to talk. “We don’t care if people stay the whole time we’re open,” Courtney says. “We wanted it to be a gathering place, and that’s what it is.”

The Ganns continue to work hard and change with the times. They serve specialty drinks, breakfast all day and

paninis and other foods for lunch. Their website also offers online ordering, which has proven to be a hit. The couple plans to roast their own beans by the beginning of 2023, and they want to offer K-Cups and whole-bean coffee from their own brands. They also hope to build on their success by opening a drive-thru coffee shop in the future.

“We’re kind of crazy,” Courtney says with a laugh. “But it’s taught us that if you have a dream, shoot for it. You never know where it’s going to lead you later. So many things point to the fact that, OK, we did the right thing.” ☺

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** SheBrews owners Derrick and Courtney Gann left their careers to build the business.

A mural on the wall quotes Johnny Cash’s idea of paradise. The “her” he refers to is June Carter Cash.

Courtney Gann says she wanted the shop to feel warm, inviting and sophisticated.

## Brews, foods and more

SheBrews offers coffee, specialty drinks, paninis, breakfast all day and loads of cool merchandise at 104 Public Square in Lafayette. It’s open from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday. Beat the rush by ordering online at [shebrewscoffeetn.com](http://shebrewscoffeetn.com), or join the SheBrews community on Facebook and Instagram.

# 8 apps for every pet owner



Story by DREW WOOLLEY

New pets are always popular gifts around the holidays. But the new year is when the responsibility for all that feeding, walking and those never-ending bathroom breaks can really set in. Fortunately, technology is here to help you stay on top of all of your new best friend's needs, from training and wellness to games and socialization. Check out these apps to see how they can make pet care simpler, whether you're a new pet owner or an amateur zookeeper.



**Puppr** — Every new dog owner could use some help with training. With Puppr, you have access to training videos, over 100 lessons,

live chats with trainers, progress tracking and more. Celebrity dog trainer Sara Carson leads the programs, and your pup will be able to keep up with her “super collies” in no time.



**Cat Training Tips** — If you're looking to establish ground rules with a new feline friend, the more streamlined Cat Training

Tips app is a good reference for practical tips on common issues like litter box training and scratching.



**Pet First Aid** — Every pet owner worries about what to do in an emergency situation. The Pet First Aid app from the American Red

Cross has you covered. It offers step-by-step instructions for situations like your pet being attacked by another animal or eating something toxic. You can even learn how to give your pet CPR, check for warning signs and look up the closest veterinary hospital.



**11pets** — Keeping up with your pet's medical needs on top of your own can be a challenge, which is why it helps to have an app like

11pets to keep everything covered. Store your furry friend's medical history, medication and vet schedules, or track their weight and nutrition to make sure they're on the healthy path.



**Cat Fishing 2** — Humans aren't the only ones who enjoy a good mobile game. Cat Fishing 2 from Friskies is designed specifically for

cats, and you can download it to your phone or tablet. Start it up, place your device on the floor and let your cat kill time swiping at colorful fish on the screen.



**BarkHappy** — If you're looking for dog-friendly people and places in your area, BarkHappy is the app for you. Use the interactive

map to find hotels, restaurants, bars and more where your dog will be welcome. You can also send out the call if your pup goes missing or find nearby dogs with whom to set up a play date.



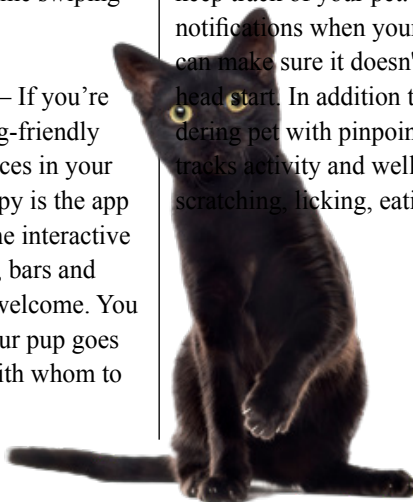
**Rover** — Rover is the top pet sitting app with over 200,000 caretakers in the U.S. and Canada. Rover's team handles the vetting,

and over 95% of reviewed services on the app have earned a five-star rating. Despite the name, Rover offers services for all kinds of pets, not just dogs. The app is also great for pet lovers looking for new job opportunities.



**Whistle** — You probably know an adventurous dog who likes to explore every chance it gets. With the

Whistle app and accompanying GPS tracker, it's never been easier to keep track of your pet. The app sends you notifications when your pet gets out so you can make sure it doesn't get too much of a head start. In addition to finding your wandering pet with pinpoint accuracy, the app tracks activity and wellness indicators like scratching, licking, eating and drinking. 🗨️



# SIT, STAY, BINGE



Your furry friends might fetch the remote for these programs

**W**ith more TV shows streaming every day, there is more entertainment than anyone can keep up with. But did you know your pet might enjoy a good binge as much as you?

Programming for pets is on the rise but it's not a new idea. In 2012, the dog food brand Bakers began running a 60-second commercial targeted right at their canine consumers, complete with barking dogs to get their attention and high-pitched sounds human viewers couldn't hear.

If you're worried that your pets might get bored while you're away at work, or you just can't give them your full attention 24/7, consider some of this programming that can help stimulate, relax and even train your pet throughout the day.

## DOGTV

When it comes to man's best friend, there's a dedicated streaming service to keep your dog happy and occupied. Available on major streaming devices like Roku, Chromecast and Apple TV, DOGTV offers a variety of programming.

Some programs offer playful sequences to prevent boredom and provide mental stimulation, while others offer calming scenes to keep pooches relaxed. Training programs help dogs get used to common

noises like doorbells and car sounds. There are even a few shows available for their humans.

## SQUIRREL!

Think your furry friends might be getting bored while you're away from home? Many cats and dogs respond to videos of birds, squirrels and fish. Cats, in particular, are visual animals, making them more likely to be entertained and mentally enriched by watching the quick movements of prey across a screen.

Because dogs rely more on their sense of smell, breeds with better eyesight are more likely to show interest in the TV. They tend to respond to images of other dogs running or socializing and might try to interact as they would in real life by barking or sniffing. Fortunately, no matter what grabs your pets' attention, there are plenty of videos available on sites like YouTube designed to keep them occupied for hours while you're out.

## FOR THE BIRDS

Birds can be extremely smart and emotionally sensitive animals, making it especially challenging to keep them occupied. Many birds have a natural interest in new sounds and colors, making the TV a

good way to keep them engaged throughout the day.

If you're trying to expand your feathered friend's vocabulary, some programming might even help to train them while you're out. Repetition is key for helping any bird pick up a new word or phrase, and there are numerous videos available that will repeat common phrases for hours on end. Hit play and run, keeping your bird mentally engaged while you're away.

## FUN AND GAMES

If your cat likes to curl up next to you during a gaming session, consider adding "Stray" to your list. When BlueTwelve Studio released its cat-themed adventure game last year, it was an instant hit with cat owners. But it turns out the game was just as interesting to their feline friends.

Videos and photos of players' cats being entranced by the digital kitty on screen became so popular that PlayStation even put out the call for submissions for a charity event with the hashtag #StrayReactions. The best ones went into a digital photo book presented to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals along with a \$25,000 donation. That's a win for everyone. 🐾

# Tasty TRADITION

## Split Tree's storied barbecue is in good hands

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Jessica Casto remembers getting excited about her family's trips to Split Tree Barbecue in Alvaton when she was a kid. She loved the hickory smoked barbecue cooked to perfection, but she also enjoyed walking into the log-cabin restaurant and staring at all the different animals stuffed and hanging on the walls — deer, rams, a gray fox, a groundhog and even an alligator holding a fish in its mouth.

"It's just like nothing you've ever seen before," says Jessica, whose parents were friends of the restaurant's founder, Jerome Wilson.

But Jessica never — not even in her wildest dreams — thought she would own the place one day.

### BARBECUE BACKSTORY

Jerome started Split Tree in 1981 on his family's farm just off Huntsville Road. He built a smoker and asked his father for some trees, then went to work making and selling barbecue.

After the original building was demolished due to a road-widening project, Jerome rebuilt in 2005 at the restaurant's current location on Wilson Road.

Jessica was still a kid when all this was going on, but she still remembers the taste of the savory pulled pork, chicken, ribs and brisket that attracted barbecue connoisseurs from across the country.

It wasn't until she needed a job during her summers off from college at Western Kentucky University that she called on Jerome. "I worked there part time in the beginning doing dishes, then as a cashier, and kept climbing the ladder," she says.

"I worked for him for eight years. Jerome taught me everything I know."

### PASSING THE BATON

Around 2018, while Jessica was moving on to teaching jobs, Jerome was doing some soul searching. He'd traveled to Alaska, and he wanted to slow down. "He had done a lot of thinking, and he was close to 65 or 70 at that time," Jessica says. "He just wanted to live the good life and hunt and fish and do everything he wanted to do. But he also wanted to keep the restaurant going."

With that in mind, Jerome approached Jessica about buying the business. The two had developed a lasting friendship and bond. "We had a great relationship.

We were always able to tease each other, and I worked beside him for so many years. For a lot of that time, I handled the larger catering events he had."

It made sense to both of them, she says. "It all lined up. I was the right person at the right time."

Jessica liked the idea of owning the popular restaurant she knew and loved so well. "I figured if things changed, I could always fall back on teaching," she says. "I just didn't want to regret giving up the chance. I was never scared. For me, it was a big adventure, and it was especially exciting because there are relatively few women in the barbecue business. The worst thing I could do is fail, but that's just lessons learned."

### KEEPING THE TRADITION ALIVE

When Jessica took over, she kept most of the restaurant as it was. After all, Split Tree was already famous in Kentucky and beyond with write-ups in *Southern Living* magazine and a book by the barbecue expert Wes Berry.

Every night, the Split Tree staff still cooks the barbecue on racks in a masonry pit stocked full of hickory. And every



Jessica Casto bought Split Tree from founder Jerome Wilson after working her way up at the restaurant.



Split Tree Barbecue founder Jerome Wilson with his protege and the restaurant's current owner, Jessica Casto.

Photos by Tony Young



Split Tree Barbecue, with its memorable animals on the wall, has been an institution in Alvaton since the 1980s.



morning, they make all the sides by hand. Sides include barbecue beans, coleslaw, potato salad, mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese. In addition, they've become famous for their corn cakes, which are fried cornbread patties.

One thing Jessica did change, however, was in adding more sauce styles to the menu. "Jerome used a traditional vinegar-based mild sauce," she says. "I kept that, but I also added other vinegar-based sauces, as well as some of the Memphis-style and Carolina-style sauces. I have a variety now."

These days, when longtime customers walk into Split Tree, they like to reminisce about their experiences of it when they were children. Jessica knows it holds a place in their hearts, their memories and their imaginations.

"They always remember the animals," Jessica says. "You could spend hours in there and find something different every time." 🍷



## BEAUTIFUL BARBECUE

Split Tree Barbecue is at 115 Wilson Road in Alvaton. Long hailed as a destination spot for barbecue lovers from all over the region, the restaurant offers dine-in, to-go orders, catering and a room for private parties. Visit the restaurant's website at [splittreebarbecue.com](http://splittreebarbecue.com) to see a menu and find out more about family packs.

For call-ahead orders, call 270-842-2268. A third-party food delivery service can also bring Split Tree to your home. For more information, visit the website or find the restaurant on Facebook.

Split Tree's pulled pork draws people from all over the region.

# AIR FRYERS

*can solve dinnertime dilemmas*

The savior of simple dishes and leftover pizza

**A**ir fryers have crisped their way into America's heart. Ranging from models with one knob and a basket to others with lots of bells and whistles, they've become as common in the American kitchen as toasters and coffeepots.

So how do you know which air fryer is the best fit for you?

You'll become a champion of the air fryer with the Ninja. Priced around \$150, it has a large basket and multiple settings that allow for dehydrating, reheating, baking and, oh yes, air frying. If you plan to do a good bit of cooking in your air fryer, this may be the model for you.

But if you're cooking for one, or just want to see if an air fryer is right for you, then a less-expensive option like Dash's air fryer — \$49.95 at online retailers — might be better. With just one setting and a compact size, it's perfect for one baked potato, a handful of French fries or a chicken thigh or two. It comes in multiple colors to add a little pizzazz to your kitchen counter.

It goes without saying that air frying is a healthier alternative to deep frying. Think of an air fryer as multiple appliances in one. It cooks quickly like a microwave, toasts like a toaster oven and fries like a deep fryer.

These kitchen wonders work magic on vegetables, proteins and baked goods because they're basically small convection ovens. They have a fan-and-exhaust system that blows hot air across your food for even cooking and browning. It works just as well whether you're making breaded onion rings from the freezer, roasting fresh broccoli or frying up some wings. Baking powder in the rub helps make air fryer wings crispy.



FOOD EDITOR  
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Photography by MARK GILLILAND | Food Styling by RHONDA GILLILAND



## AIR FRYER CHICKEN WINGS

- 12 chicken wings, whole
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup Buffalo hot sauce

Cut the wings into pieces so you have 24 wings. Preheat the air fryer to 380 F. Spray the fryer basket after preheating. Place the wings in a large bowl and add olive oil, garlic powder, baking powder, salt, cayenne pepper and

black pepper. Toss wings until fully covered. Place the wings in a single layer — as many as will fit without overlapping — on the air fryer basket.

Air fry the wings at 380 F for 20 minutes, flipping them every 5 minutes. Increase the temperature to 400 F and cook an additional 2 minutes for extra crispy skin. Use a digital meat thermometer to ensure the internal temperature is 165 F.

Carefully remove the wings from the air fryer, cover with Buffalo sauce and serve with your favorite sides.



## CRISPY AIR FRYER POTATOES

- 1 pound small Yukon Gold potatoes, halved
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon Cajun seasoning (optional)
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Lemon wedge, for serving
- Freshly chopped parsley, for garnish

In a large bowl, toss potatoes with oil, garlic powder, Italian seasoning and Cajun seasoning, if using. Season with salt and pepper.

Place potatoes in basket of air fryer and cook at 400 F for 10 minutes. Shake basket and stir potatoes, and then cook until potatoes are golden and tender, 8 to 10 minutes more. Squeeze lemon juice over cooked potatoes and garnish with parsley before serving.

## AIR FRYER EGG ROLLS

- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1/2 pound ground pork or ground chicken
- 4 cups coleslaw mix
- 1/2 cup matchstick-cut carrots
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 green onions, sliced
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons rice or white vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/8 teaspoon Chinese 5-spice seasoning
- 12 egg roll wrappers
- Nonstick cooking spray
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Sweet chili sauce, duck sauce or hot mustard sauce, for dipping

Heat sesame oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the pork and cook until crumbled and cooked through, about 4 minutes. Add the coleslaw mix, carrots, ginger and garlic. Cook 2-3 minutes or until the cabbage has wilted.

Remove from the heat; stir in the green onions, soy sauce, vinegar, pepper, salt and 5-spice seasoning. Transfer to a plate and let cool slightly.

Place 1 egg roll wrapper flat on a work surface with the points of the wrapper facing up and down (like a diamond). Place about 1/3 cup of the pork/chicken mixture in the middle of the wrapper. Dip your fingers in water and dampen the edges of the wrapper. Fold the left and then right points of the wrapper in toward the center. Fold the bottom point over the center just like you would a burrito, rolling the wrapper toward the remaining point to form a tight cylinder. Press edges to seal. Place on a plate and cover with a dry towel. Repeat the process with remaining wrappers and pork/chicken mixture.

Preheat the air fryer to 375 F and spray the air fryer basket with cooking spray. Brush the tops of the egg rolls with olive oil. Working in batches, place the egg rolls in the basket and cook 7 minutes. Flip the egg rolls over and brush with more oil. Cook for an additional 2 minutes. Serve with your favorite dipping sauce. 🍴





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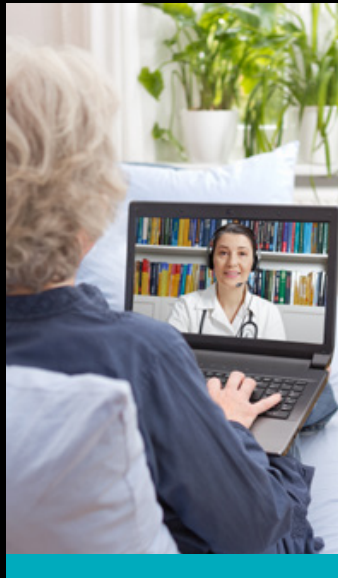
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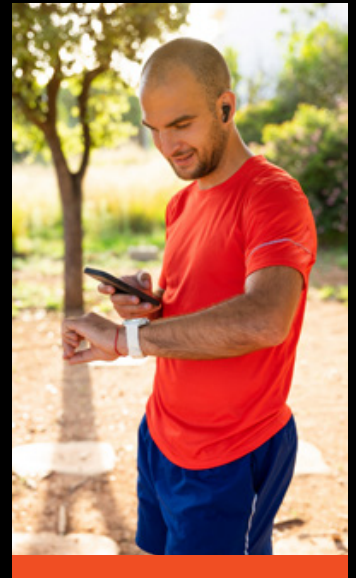
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