



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023

CONNECTION

Gypsy Moon



Christmas joy

GypsyMoon Marketplace
helps the season shine

PLEASANT SHADE'S
PERFECT CAFE

IMAGINATION
LIBRARY



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association


Committed to service and security

I always love hearing stories from the NTCA members who are bringing fast, reliable internet service to communities throughout rural America. It's exciting to see our providers pave the way for new jobs, better health care, fresh educational opportunities and so much more.

But their commitment to serving you goes beyond simply providing an excellent broadband network — they also want to help you navigate that online world safely.

Much of that work happens behind the scenes on their systems before you ever turn on a computer or search for something on your phone. But that's just the first line of defense in a world where your personal data — and, yes, even your money — are targets.

The experts at the National Cybersecurity Alliance, a nonprofit organization devoted to creating a more secure interconnected world, can help you figure out where to begin.

Multifactor authentication is a valuable way to add an extra layer of security to your online accounts but many people are unaware. Password manager software makes using complex and secure passwords easier, while keeping software updated and being aware of phishing attempts are also wise strategies. 



Add a layer of protection to your online journeys

Photo by A Stockphoto/Adobe Stock

The nonprofit National Cybersecurity Alliance is focusing its efforts in four specific areas: multifactor authentication, password management, software updates and phishing awareness.

HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR TIPS FOR YOUR SECURITY:



Multifactor authentication: For your online accounts, you likely have a password. But if there's an option for using multifactor authentication, go for it. Once activated on an account, you'll still need a password. But access will also require a one-time code delivered by text message or email.




Password management: Rather than trying to remember long, complex passwords, consider using software designed to not only store passwords but also make them easily accessible. There are several options, and most work in a similar fashion. You only need to remember one master password to unlock the rest.



Software updates: Both hardware and software manufacturers prioritize protecting you. Often when there's a potential problem discovered, they roll out software updates. So, it's important to be mindful of those changes and install updates regularly.



Phishing awareness: Whether it is a fake website or a bogus email that seems reputable, there is a range of phishing strategies designed to capture your personal information, money or both. They can be convincing, too. So, be cautious when receiving unsolicited messages, and verify requests for sensitive information before responding.

To learn more about online safety visit the National Cybersecurity Alliance at staysafeonline.org. 

Capture the season

Learn to make your photos pop

Whether it's Apple or Android, the photo technology in modern smartphones can create stunning images, complete with automatic adjustments for lighting and other effects. You don't have to look hard in the world of social media to see the results.

But give those images a closer look. Are they as good as they can be? While mobile software can clean up many of the more technical trouble spots, a few tried-and-true tips from the world of traditional photography can upgrade your seasonal or holiday photographs from passable to truly memorable.

SEEK THE LIGHT: For photography, there's a magical time just before sunset or after sunrise — the golden hour. The warm, soft light adds a natural artistic element, whether you're shooting a landscape or a portrait. So, when possible,

avoid the harsh light of the hours around noon and seek the golden rays instead.

KNOW THIS RULE AND WHEN TO BREAK IT: The idea of the rule of thirds is an artistic standard. An image is framed using two horizontal and two vertical lines to create nine equal parts. One strategy is to place the subject of the photo at one of the intersections to create a balanced composition. But you can also use the idea to know when to break the rule, shift the frame and take a unique photo.

GET THE CLOSE-UP: Don't be shy. Most phone cameras have a zoom feature. But you've got a better choice. Physically get closer to your subject, whether it's a person, flower or delicious dinner dish. Proximity not only makes it easier to frame the image but it also adds a sense of intimacy.

STEADY AS IT GOES: The latest phone cameras do well even when light is scarce. But there are limits, and sometimes when you're shooting in a dim room or when the sun is fading the resulting image can turn out blurry. A small tripod — there are plenty of phone-sized options — can help keep your photos sharp.

GIVE 'EM A BOOST: There's nothing wrong with a little editing, and most phones have great software built in. There are options for automatic adjustments, but don't be shy about exploring the possibilities. A little creative cropping or adjustments to settings like brightness can make a difference. You can even consider converting a photo to black-and-white for a classic look. 📱



Photos by JenKoltaman and MayatiniStudio/Adobe Stock

As real as it gets

As our community celebrates, NCTC is here for you

Although I enjoy the spring months best, I do look forward to this time of year, too. I like watching football, and of course, the approach of the holiday season. Like many of you, my wife stays tuned to the Hallmark Channel most of the time — especially during the holidays. I can't help but think about how predictable these storylines are, but my wife loves them. The good part about every Hallmark movie is that everything works out in the end.



**JOHNNY
MCCLANAHAN**
President/CEO

NCTC's storyline has been years in the making. Our efforts to deploy fiber over the past 15 years have resulted in a 100% complete fiber network in 2023. Few communities have an internet network like ours. Fiber is by far the fastest, most reliable system available. NCTC's network not only meets the needs of today but is also ready to expand to meet future demands. In fact, we are offering speeds as fast as 2 Gig in some areas, ideal for quick-moving small businesses or homes with multiple devices connected at once. If you work from home and move large files or use digital tools to create music or movies, the speed is so helpful. And if you have a gamer in the house, Gig speed can be the difference between winning and losing.

In 2018, NCTC had about 14,000 internet subscribers. Today, that subscriber number is up to 28,000! That growth is hard to believe and doesn't seem real, but that is what happens when neighbors work to help neighbors. None of this would be possible without the people who work every day to make NCTC the best it can be. Along with NCTC's board members, I couldn't be prouder of our team of dedicated employees. I truly appreciate their efforts. Of course, without you, our loyal members and customers, these efforts would be for nothing. You are the reason we do what we do, and our success is because of you and FOR YOU. In addition to providing thousands of dollars in sponsorships and donations, we are pleased we were able to return \$1.2 million in capital credits this year.

While our greatest recognition is the positive responses to our efforts from people like you, we're always appreciative when others in our industry note the gains we've made. This year, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association recognized us as a Smart Rural Community Showcase Award winner, and we were also selected as an Innovative Systems Broadband Award winner. These awards encourage us to keep moving forward.

Our story continues to be written as we evolve to meet your needs. As new technology comes along, we work to make sure you have the same opportunities in our rural area as you can get anywhere in the world.

Thank you for letting NCTC serve you. May you and yours have a wonderful Thanksgiving and a merry Christmas. 📧

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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On the Cover:



Photo by Lindsey Jones
Photography

The forces behind GypsyMoon MarketPlace and Highland Stables in Bowling Green join Santa Claus during last year's Christmas event. From left are Kaleigh LaBore, Santa, Whitnee Mosley and Angie Mosley.

See story Page 8.

NORTH CENTRAL TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE

BALANCE SHEET

Dec. 31, 2022

ASSETS

Current Assets	68,085,496
Other Assets	
Investments in Affiliated Companies	13,107,922
Nonregulated Investments	314,041
Total Current/Other Assets	13,421,963
Telecommunications Plant	219,819,980
Less Accumulated Depreciation	133,696,475
Net Telecommunications Plant	86,123,505
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 167,630,964

LIABILITIES and MEMBERS' EQUITIES

Current Liabilities	11,026,214
Long-Term Debt	18,780,925
Other Liabilities	13,536,165
Members' Equities	124,287,660
TOTAL LIABILITIES and MEMBERS' EQUITIES	\$ 167,630,964



A gift
for you!

FREE movies in December

NCTC offers FREE premium channels every weekend in December. Check your local listings for a channel lineup.



Holiday closing reminders

From all of us at NCTC, we wish you and your family the happiest Thanksgiving, the merriest Christmas and the most prosperous New Year!

In observance of these holidays, we will be closed on the following days:

- **Thanksgiving** — Thursday, Nov. 23
- **Christmas** — Monday, Dec. 25, and Tuesday, Dec. 26
- **New Years Day** — Monday, Jan. 1

Seeking a dose of CHRISTMAS CHEER?

These towns embrace the holiday spirit

Story by ANNE BRALY

The annual tree-lighting is a favorite event during Christmas celebrations in Childersburg, Alabama.



Photo courtesy of the Alabama Tourism Department

Santa greets the crowds at the Christmas parade in downtown Franklin, Tennessee.



Photo courtesy of Visit Franklin

Southerners celebrate Christmas in a big way. Whether it's light displays so outrageous they'd impress the Griswolds or picture-perfect trimmed trees, no time or expense is spared to make sure the holidays are truly magical.

Every town celebrates the holidays a bit differently, but one thing they all have in common is an undeniable spirit of the season. Here are several Southern towns that roll out the red carpet during the holiday season.

CHILDERSBURG, ALABAMA

"There's something special about small towns in Alabama, like Childersburg, during the holiday season," says Brooklyn Lundy, public relations manager for the Alabama Tourism Department.

During the holidays, Childersburg takes advantage of its natural features, primarily the limestone caves found around this central Alabama town in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, including Majestic Caverns. It becomes a magical fantasyland during the holidays as it's transformed into Adventus, an event filled with Christmas shows, performances and holiday characters around every corner. It's a fun event for the entire family that happens for four evenings only — Dec. 9, 10, 16 and 17 from 5-9 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at majesticcaverns.com.

There's more to Christmas in Childersburg, though. The annual tree lighting, scheduled for Nov. 28 at 6 p.m. at the Butler-Harris Rainwater Museum, is a town favorite with hot chocolate and carriage rides offered to all those who attend. And the Christmas parade brings St. Nick to downtown on Dec. 21 starting at 6 p.m.

FRANKLIN, TENNESSEE

Franklin turns Christmas into a monthlong celebration. "Every weekend is a special event or festival in its own right in Franklin," says Matthew Maxey, director of public relations for the city of Franklin.

One of the most popular events, the two-day Dickens of a Christmas festival — set for Dec. 9-10 — draws at least 100,000 people to town each year.



Downtown Helen, Georgia, lights up for the holidays.

Photo courtesy of Helen CVB



The good citizens of Mercer County sing carols on the streets of Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

Photo courtesy of Harrodsburg-Mercer County

“Franklin’s charm, relaxed pace and Hallmark-movie feel throughout the historic downtown are a significant draw for visitors,” he says. “From window shopping the holiday displays along Main Street to catching holiday movies at our 1930s-era Franklin Theatre, visitors are able to step back in a simpler, classic holiday time.”

On Dec. 1 there will be a tree lighting, and the city will shine with local celebrity talent — this year hosted by popular Christian artist Matthew West — followed by the Christmas parade down the town’s historic Main Street on Dec. 2. For more ideas to fill your holiday weekends, log onto visitfranklin.com.

HELEN, GEORGIA

The population of this small mountain town in north Georgia swells from 256 to more than 2,500 during the holiday season as visitors clamor to enjoy an Alpine Christmas.

The Lighting of the Village will be held on Nov. 24 at 6 p.m., followed by the 16th annual Christkindlmarkt in downtown Helen on Nov. 25-26 and Dec. 2-3. The traditional German event features gifts, decorations and assorted foods, both sweet and savory. The Mistletoe Market is another favorite event and ideal for checking things off your Christmas list. It takes place Dec. 2-3 at the Helen Arts & Heritage Center.

And what would Christmas in Helen be

like without its annual Christmas parade? That takes place on Dec. 9. For a list of all Christmas happenings in Helen, go to whitecountychamber.org.

“Helen has quickly become one of the top Christmas towns in the United States,” says Jerry Brown, executive director of the Alpine Helen/White County Convention and Visitors Bureau. “During the holiday season, the town turns its amazing village into a Christmas wonderland with a sprinkle of Bavarian charm that heightens the Christmas spirit.”

HARRODSBURG, KENTUCKY

“Santa’s elves are busy this year in Kentucky’s oldest town, trying to make Harrodsburg feel as much like a Hallmark movie as possible,” says Daarik Gray, executive director of Harrodsburg-Mercer County Tourist Commission. “One of the special things about being in a small town is that it truly does feel like you’re stepping into a Christmas movie, as everyone’s spirits seem to be a little higher, and the overall general mood of the community is jolly.”

Stores come alive with their windows decorated for the season. This year, the season kicks off on Dec. 1 with Christmas on Main, an event with food trucks, caroling, live music and more, including the Christmas parade at Anderson-Dean Community Park. The annual tree lighting happens on Dec. 2.

For more on Harrodsburg’s holiday festivities, visit mercercountyky.com.

GREER, SOUTH CAROLINA

Downtown Greer, best known as Greer Station, transforms itself into a Christmas fantasyland come the holiday season. With brick-paved streets and lampposts wrapped in garland and twinkling lights, as well as the two main roads leading into town festooned with candy canes, Christmas trees and shooting star lights, the city looks like a movie set, says Lindsey Shaffer, tourism specialist for the city of Greer.

The holiday season kicks off with Christmas in Greer, a one-weekend celebration that begins with arts, crafts, roaming carolers, s’mores and more before Santa comes to town and reads “T’was the Night Before Christmas.” Then the countdown to the lighting of the tree begins. It all happens at Greer City Park on Dec. 1.

The City of Greer will host Breakfast with Santa on Saturday, Dec. 2, and the Greer Farmers Market will be open Dec. 2-3 with local artisans so you can check off some items on your gift list.

Christmas in Greer weekend comes to a close with its annual Christmas parade on Sunday, Dec. 3.

For a complete rundown of all holiday festivities, go to discovergreer.com. 📱

Bright stars

Highland Stables and GypsyMoon Marketplace charm and delight



From left, Whitnee Mosley, Angie Mosley and Kaleighn LaBore work hard to create beautiful settings for weddings and GypsyMoon Marketplace.

Photo by Lindsey Jones Photography

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Before Highland Stables hosted gorgeous weddings and highly curated shopping events, the 25,000-square-foot building served as a boarding and training facility for Tennessee walking horses. Built by Charles Mosley in 2000 as a gift to his wife, Betty, the stables served as the dream embodiment of her lifelong passion for horses.

Since then, a few things about the building may have changed, but the original sentiment remains. “We have an attachment and love for this big, old building,” says Angie Mosley, the couple’s daughter-in-law and one of the founders of Highland Stables, a wedding venue that also hosts the wildly popular biannual barn sale events, GypsyMoon Marketplace. “We like to say the love continues through our events and our market. It’s also kind of the evolution of the family farm at this point in time.”

FROM BARN TO BRILLIANT

When the family transformed the building in 2014 from a horse haven to an all-season event space, they weren’t always sure what the next steps would be, Angie says. But with the help of her daughter-in-law, Whitnee Mosley, and Whitnee’s friend, Kaleighn LaBore, Angie pushed forward.

“Honestly, our first dream was hosting GypsyMoon Marketplace — even more so than the weddings,” she says. “But hosting weddings made sense. Now it’s almost two full-time businesses.”

As a wedding venue, Highland Stables offers indoor and outdoor wedding and reception space for up to 990 guests. But most weddings there tend to stay in the 200- to 250-guest range, says Kaleighn, who coordinates wedding bookings. The beautifully lit, Southern-style venue is surrounded by 168 acres of farmland located just a few miles from the city. A four-bedroom, two-bath home is also available for short-term rentals.

HAPPY PLACE

GypsyMoon Marketplace is a three-day shopping barn sale event that happens twice a year — in April and late fall. The next GypsyMoon

GypsyMoon Marketplace offers a three-day shopping experience with around 80 vendors from about nine states.



Photos by Lindsey Jones Photography



Photo by Lindsey Jones Photography



Photo by Billie-Shaye Style Photography



Photo by Billie-Shaye Style Photography

LEFT: GypsyMoon Marketplace has attracted a growing customer following by enlisting quality vendors and creating a magical space. The Christmas marketplace takes place Nov. 9-11.

ABOVE: Acres of natural beauty surround Highland Stables, which offers space for weddings and houses the biannual GypsyMoon Marketplace barn sales.

RIGHT: A recent wedding at Highland Stables.

will be on Nov. 9, 10 and 11 and will include about 80 vendors from several states, as well as visits from Santa Claus. Vendors will sell everything from clothing, food and home decor to vintage items, pottery and other unique products.

“We have vendors set up inside of our horse stalls, as well as outside and pretty much everywhere,” says Whitnee, co-creator of GypsyMoon Marketplace and a big force behind the events. “We have food trucks and live music. It’s just a really cool and different shopping event.”

Vendors for the event are carefully selected and their booths are highly stylized, so customers can enjoy GypsyMoon Marketplace as an experience, not just a shopping trip. “We spend a lot of time curating vignettes all over the stables,” Angie says. “We want to give people a place where they can come in and leave stress behind and make memories.”

They work with vendors to create the perfect atmosphere, Whitnee says. “We try to find people who do a really good job of setting up their space, and we encourage each and every vendor to create their own storefront,” she says. “It makes it feel really special, and it creates a memory.

People have said it’s like walking into a Hallmark movie.”

SHOOTING FOR THE MOON

As the popularity of the venue and marketplace has grown, Angie, Whitnee and Kaleighn continue to grow and change with it by staying flexible and meeting challenges head-on. “When I started helping Angie, it was just her and me,” Whitnee says. “We just kind of winged it. As the years went by, Kaleighn came on board, and she had some new ideas. We also take classes, and we try to stay up on things and to not get stale.”

One of their better ideas, they say, was installing NCTC’s fiber broadband throughout the property. “NCTC was life-changing

for us,” Whitnee says. “We basically had dial-up before, the previous provider’s service was so bad. A lot of the time, we had to run off hot spots from our phones, and it really caused problems for our vendors. Now, they don’t have to run outside to get their cellphones to process payments.”

“NCTC’s service has really changed how we work in the office, too,” Angie adds. “Marketing our business is all done online, so we love it.”

The efficiency of a reliable, high-speed broadband network helps them take the business in new directions, too. “We have a Loretta Lynn quote hanging in our office,” Whitnee says. “It says, ‘You either have to be first, best or different.’ That’s our goal — to think differently.”

★★★★ *Going there* ★★★★★

Highland Stables is one of Bowling Green’s premier special event venues and the home of GypsyMoon Marketplace, a twice-annual barn sale. The next marketplace happens Nov. 9-11 and will host about 80 vendors at Highland Stables, 1301 B Hunts Lane, just 3 miles from Interstate 65.

To find out more about holding a special event or staying overnight at Highland Stables, visit highlandstablesbg.com, or find the business on Facebook and Instagram. To see the latest information and news on GypsyMoon Marketplace, as well as a shoppers’ guide and map, visit gypsymoonmarketplace.com. You can also follow the market on Facebook and Instagram.

Passion project

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program
inspires a love of learning



Story by JEN CALHOUN

Getting a book in the mail always made Andrea Robertson's children hop with joy. "Kids hardly ever get mail, so they just loved it," says the Lafayette, Tennessee-based educator and mother of three. "I think that excitement most definitely helped fuel their interest in reading and learning."

Andrea's children received the monthly books through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, a program that sends free books to children from birth to 5 years old no matter the family's income.

Although her children have aged out of the program, Andrea believes it has had a positive impact on their futures. "Having books from an early age helps children build content knowledge that they might not get otherwise," she says. "It helps give them a foundation that's so important when they get to school."

FOR THE LOVE OF BOOKS

Today, more than 2 million children are enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

The programs, which are established and maintained locally, are available in all 50 states, including 15 statewide programs — with more starting up every year.

The Macon County Education Foundation in East Tennessee was one of the earliest adopters of the program, says Linda McCrary, one of the founders of the foundation and its president at the time. "Our board was approached by a member of the Tennessee Library Association Board to be a champion for this new program that the library board was sponsoring," says Linda, a former educator and the program's local coordinator.

The foundation's board agreed readily, she says. Soon after in 2004, then-Gov. Phil Bredesen and the Dollywood Foundation partnered to create the Tennessee Governor's Books from Birth Foundation. The governor's foundation paid 50% of the program's costs while local organizations funded the rest in their communities. Today, the Macon County Education Foundation also receives help paying for the program from the county commission and school board.



Set it up!

If your city or county does not offer an Imagination Library program, there are ways to set one up. Visit [imaginationlibrary.com](https://www.imaginationlibrary.com) to learn out more or to find a program in your area.

POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY

These partnerships are good for the community at large, says Nora Briggs, executive director of the Dollywood Foundation, which launched the first program nearly 30 years ago. “Simply getting books into the home changes the trajectory of children, families and communities,” she says. “Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is an accomplished, simple and effective way to make communities better places to live by supporting and nurturing a love of books, shared family time and early learning.”

While the goal is to inspire a lifetime love of reading to give children opportunities to succeed, research shows an even greater impact. The program has led to significantly stronger reading skills and a better understanding of letter and word concepts when children start school. In addition, the establishment of reading routines has been found to bring about increased stability, emotional well-being and an improved family atmosphere, according to summaries of research distributed by The Imagination Library.

ON A MISSION

Dolly Parton started the book-gifting program in Sevier County, Tennessee, in 1995, as a tribute to her father, Robert Lee Parton Sr., who worked as a sharecropper and went on to farm his own acreage. Despite his lack of education, he had a knack for turning a profit. “He was the smartest man I have ever known, but I know in my heart his inability to read probably kept him from fulfilling all of his dreams,” Dolly says.

Now, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library has gifted nearly 200 million books to children in the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and the Republic of Ireland. More than 24 million books were gifted in 2022 — a nearly 12% increase over 2021.

And while the program started small, Dolly’s ambitions for it grew as other organizations and volunteer groups implemented the Imagination Library

concept in their own communities. “Inspiring kids to love to read became my mission,” she says.

WORKING ON A DREAM

Communities that invest in children from a young age show a commitment to bettering their cities and towns, says Linda, who was an educator for 37 years and founder of the Macon County Education Foundation.

To make sure education ranked high in children’s minds, they need a strong foundation from birth. Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library fit the bill. “Placing books in the hands of children is the basis of educating children,” Linda says. “It’s the basis for preparing them for school.”

The importance of the work done by volunteers, government officials and local businesses isn’t lost on Dolly. “The seeds of dreams are often found in books, and the seeds you help plant in your community can grow across the world,” Dolly says. 📖



Photos contributed by Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dolly's daddy



Robert Lee Parton, Dolly Parton's late father, never learned to read or write — not because he didn't want to, but because he needed to work to help his family survive. His parents raised 15 children in the mountains of East Tennessee, where food was scarce and the one-room schoolhouse was more than a mile away, Dolly wrote in her 2020 memoir, “Songteller: My Life in Lyrics.”

As an adult raising 12 kids of his own, Robert planted tobacco in the rugged and rocky hills of East Tennessee but often took on construction jobs to make ends meet. Money was always tight. When Dolly was born, he paid the doctor with a sack of cornmeal instead of cash.

“He was such a smart person. I always thought that if Daddy had an education, there's no telling what he could have been,” Dolly wrote. “Because he knew how to barter, he knew how to bargain. He knew how to make everything work, and he knew how to count money. He knew exactly what everything was worth, how much he was going to make from that tobacco crop, what he could trade and how he could make it all work.”

While he was embarrassed about his lack of literacy skills for most of his life, Robert took pride in Dolly's efforts with the Imagination Library. “I got him involved helping me with [the Imagination Library], and he felt so great about that,” she wrote. “I told him, ‘Daddy, there are probably millions of people in this world who don't know how to read and write, who didn't get the opportunity. Don't be ashamed of that. Let's do something special.’”



Photos by Tony Young

“It’s because you can’t get this kind of cooking anywhere. There are fast-food and chain restaurants closer, but it’s hard to find a meat-and-three anymore.”

— Franklin Grandstaff, owner of Jane Reed’s Pleasant Shade Cafe

THE REAL DEAL

Jane Reed’s Pleasant Shade Cafe

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Franklin Grandstaff was delivering pizzas a few years back when he stumbled upon the abandoned building known around Pleasant Shade as “the old store.”

After 30 years of working for McDonald’s and Arby’s, he was asked to run a pizza place in the county. “I thought it would be a good idea to deliver, but I didn’t realize how big Smith County was,” Franklin says. “So, I had customers in Pleasant Shade that kept ordering pizza. I would be driving at night trying to find these houses.”

After getting yelled at a couple times — “I’m just across from the old store,” one customer kept saying — Franklin decided to do a little daytime sleuthing on his day off. “I finally found this store that everyone was talking about,” he says.

At first, he thought it would be a great

place for his brother-in-law to open a barbecue joint. When that didn’t happen, Franklin took matters into his own hands. In 2018, he and his wife, Frances, opened Jane Reed’s Pleasant Shade Cafe, a full-service, country-cooking restaurant with a small shop attached.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

The store had been a fixture in the farming community for years. When Franklin went to start a Facebook page, the previous Pleasant Shade Cafe name was taken. That’s how he came up with Jane Reed’s Pleasant Shade Cafe. It combines his wife’s middle name, Jane, and his own middle name, Reed.

“Sometimes I get people in here asking for Jane Reed,” he says. “I always say, ‘She’s not here, but I might be able to help you.’”

COUNTRY FOOD MADE RIGHT

In addition to its daily regulars, the cafe hosts people from as far as Lafayette, Lebanon and Alexandria. “It’s because you can’t get this kind of cooking anywhere,” Franklin says. “There are fast-food and chain restaurants closer, but it’s hard to find a meat-and-three anymore.”

Jane Reed’s cooks up main courses like meatloaf, fried catfish and smashburgers and sides of squash casserole, mashed potatoes and pinto beans. Milkshakes come in vanilla, chocolate, caramel and strawberry, and homemade desserts range from fried pies to banana pudding and pecan pie.

“I worked in fast-food restaurants for 30 years, but you don’t really learn to cook that way,” says Franklin, who grew up in Bellwood in Wilson County, near the Smith County border. “When I opened



ABOVE: Franklin and Frances Grandstaff, owners of Jane Reed's Pleasant Shade Cafe, used their middle names for the cafe's official title, because there were several older Pleasant Shade Cafes on Facebook.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Jane Reed's Pleasant Shade Cafe offers traditional country cooking in a relaxed atmosphere.

Meatloaf is one of the favorites at the cafe.

The cafe offers homemade foods, including pies, from local and family recipes.

here, I hired people and asked what they were doing. They schooled me. And before my mom died, she had written down a bunch of her recipes. I also got a family cookbook that my aunts had made.”

DARK DAYS

Despite the cafe's popularity, the COVID-19 pandemic nearly shut it down for good, Franklin says. He'd show up at the restaurant every day to fill the few take-out and delivery orders they received, but he had to lay off most of his employees. At the height of it all, he broke down in tears, knowing he couldn't pay his bills.

About eight or nine months into the pandemic, however, he got a call from someone who said he was from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. “They said they needed catering for a school system to feed kids,” Franklin says. “They needed stable food at room temperature, which isn't what I do really.”

Still, Franklin figured out a menu of wraps, took the last few dollars from the cafe's bank account and loaded up two

vehicles of ingredients from Sam's Club. With help from his family, he made 800 box lunches.

“I still wasn't sure this was a real person,” Franklin says. “But I didn't have a choice. I told my wife this would kill us — that we'd go bankrupt. I didn't know this man.”

When Franklin rolled up to the drop-off point and found sheriff's deputies ready to hand out the food, he heaved a sigh of relief. “I got back to the store, and he wired the money to my account,” he says. “It was enough to pay payroll and a payment on every one of my bills. I didn't make any for myself, but that was OK.”

STRONG TIES

The fact that the cafe is still going strong today is evidence of the hardworking community and its people — along with a few newcomers. Franklin has met people who moved from California, Florida and Minnesota because they could live in a small town with NCTC fiber internet that allowed them to work from home.

“In fact, that one lady from Minnesota said that was one of her requirements for moving here,” Franklin says. “So, yeah, we owe a big thanks to NCTC.”

But locals and newcomers alike love the scenery, the livable pace and the strong sense of community that comes with life in a rural town. “I think it's good that the cafe's here,” Franklin says. “It sort of grounds the community.”

Country cooking in Pleasant Shade

Jane Reed's Pleasant Shade Cafe is at 725 Pleasant Shade Highway in Pleasant Shade, Tennessee. To find out more, visit janereeds.com, or find the Jane Reed's Facebook page for the latest information and daily specials.

A tasty tradition

Whether in your PJs or your Sunday best, holiday brunch hits the sweet spot

A holiday brunch has two musts: The time served — just a bit later than the usual morning rush hour. Then, there's the menu with dishes that put a little flair into the typical breakfast fare.

A brunch can be quiet and cozy or a grand seated affair that shows off all your culinary talents and best china. You can make it whatever you want it to be. After all, there's a special connection between brunch and the holidays — a wonderful combination that satisfies the stomach and the soul. Whether you're hosting or joining friends for brunch, the magic of this midmorning meal will weave its spell.



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

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

STUFFED FRENCH TOAST

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1 tablespoon plus 1/2 teaspoon vanilla, divided
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans or walnuts
- 1 (16-ounce) loaf French bread
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- Butter for frying
- 1 (12-ounce) jar apricot preserves
- 1/2 cup orange juice

Beat together cream cheese and 1 tablespoon vanilla until fluffy. Stir in nuts. Cut bread into thick, 1 1/2-inch slices. You should get 10-12 slices per loaf. Cut a pocket in the top of each slice and fill with 1 1/2 teaspoons of cream cheese mixture.

Beat together eggs, heavy cream, 1/2 teaspoon vanilla and nutmeg. Dip stuffed slices into egg mixture.

Melt butter in frying pan and fry slices until golden brown on both sides.

Heat together preserves and orange juice and serve alongside the hot toast. Makes 5-6 servings.



EGG BRUNCH

- 4 slices bacon, diced
- 2 packages (4 1/2 ounces each) sliced dried beef, cut into thin strips
- 2 small cans sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1/2 cup butter, divided
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 4 cups whole milk
- 16 large eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

In a large skillet, cook bacon until almost done, then add dried beef, mushrooms and 1/4 cup butter. While hot, add flour, then stir in milk. Simmer sauce, stirring constantly, until thick and smooth.



In a large bowl, whisk eggs, evaporated milk and salt. In another large skillet, heat remaining butter until melted. Add egg mixture. Cook and stir over medium heat until eggs are completely set, but not dry.

Add all ingredients to a casserole dish and bake, covered, at 275 F for 1 hour.

Note: May be made a day ahead and refrigerated, covered, then baked as directed. Very good served with baked curried fruit.

MAMA'S CINNAMON ROLLS

Easy and delicious, these cinnamon rolls make a mouthwatering addition to your holiday table and are perfect for brunch or any meal.

- 5 tablespoons butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 2 (8-ounce) cans crescent rolls
- 3 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon

Heat oven to 375 F. In a 9-by-13-inch baking pan, melt the 5 tablespoons of butter. Stir in brown sugar, water and pecans.

Separate each can of crescent roll dough into four rectangles; seal perforations. Spread the rectangles with the 3 tablespoons of softened butter. Combine granulated sugar and cinnamon; sprinkle over butter dough rectangles. Roll up each rectangle from the short side. Cut each roll in four slices and place in prepared pan over butter-pecan mixture cut side down.

Bake for 20-25 minutes. Invert immediately onto rectangular serving platter or sheet of aluminum foil. Spoon any remaining sauce on top of rolls. Makes 32 small cinnamon rolls.



CURRIED FRUIT

Rich, buttery, sweet and savory, this baked fruit dish is a delicious change of pace as a side dish for brunch.

Maraschino cherries in green and red add a holiday touch.

- 1 can peach halves (see tip)
- 1 can apricot halves
- 1 can pear halves
- 1 can pineapple chunks
- 10-12 maraschino cherries (red or green or a combination of both)
- 1/2 cup pecan halves
- 1/3 cup butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons curry powder

Drain fruits and arrange in baking dish. Add nuts. Melt butter and stir in brown sugar and curry powder. Bake, uncovered, at 325 F for 1 hour, basting every so often with drippings in dish. Makes 8-10 servings.

Tip: Whole fruit makes a lovely presentation, but cutting the fruit into bite-sized pieces makes it easier to serve and eat. 🍷



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