



MARCH/APRIL 2024

CONNECTION



Autism awareness

Cason's Cause helps kids thrive

ELLER SISTERS
FRAMES

BACKYARD
CHICKENS

By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
 NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Agriculture thrives with broadband

Every day I hear examples of how the fast, reliable internet service provided by NTCA members brings telemedicine, rich entertainment resources, educational opportunities, jobs and far more to rural communities like yours.

But that’s just the beginning. These internet networks also create a vital foundation needed by a range of industries critical to the nation’s economy. While agriculture might not immediately come to mind when considering the internet, the \$4.4 billion ag tech market is a showcase for how broadband can bring farms and ranches the internet-connected tools that make agriculture more efficient, productive and sustainable.

Smart irrigation systems, farm management and automation software, drones and sensors that can remotely monitor factors such as soil moisture are just a few of the innovations used in modern agriculture. They make a real difference, too.

For example, consider just one part of the agricultural equation — water. Leveraging these high-tech tools can reduce water use by 4%. When considering the scope of the industry, that’s a tangible difference, the equivalent of filling 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Without reliable internet access, these tools wouldn’t be possible, nor would the benefits to consumers. When agricultural production is less expensive and yields are higher, we can all enjoy more favorable prices.

So, when you think about all your internet service provider does for you personally, take a moment to appreciate they’re making a difference for all of us, nationwide. 📶



The ag tech advantage

CONNECTED TOOLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Internet-connected technology makes a bottom-line difference in agriculture, responsible for as much as an **8% increase** in the value of the corn crops alone. That’s an attention-getting result, and it makes it worth a closer look at ag tech.

THE DETAILS:



Ag tech includes smart irrigation farm management software, drones, remote sensing, biotech, automation and more. Many of these tools rely on the internet to share access and store and share data.

Value of the U.S. ag tech market:
\$4.4 billion

Value of agriculture, food and food-related industries:
\$1.26 trillion

Agriculture supports **43 million jobs**, **\$2 trillion** in wages and generates **\$718 billion** in taxes.

CURRENT AG TECH OFFERS:



9% reduction in chemical use



6% reduction in fossil fuel consumption



4% reduction in water use — enough to fill 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools



30-million-pound decrease in herbicide use

THE BOTTOM LINE: Ag tech enables farmers to lower costs while increasing yield and productivity.

Truly personal fitness

Online fitness offerings bring workouts to wherever you are

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

After an exhausting workday, heading to that boring fitness class that's way too expensive to skip sounds like about as much fun as a root canal. What if you could just click an app or website and join a class from home? Think of the time, energy and frustration you could save.

With live and prerecorded classes and a fast and reliable internet connection, it's easy to turn any space into a gym. Thanks to apps and an array of online workout programs, you have the ability to exercise whenever, wherever and with whomever you want.

Some apps create personalized daily workout programs, while others provide a library of on-demand classes. Take a live class and become part of a community where everyone feels the burn.

PICKING THE PERFECT PLAN

As the popularity of online exercise programs continues to grow, so does the number of available options. Before choosing one, here are some factors worth considering.

Cost: Pricing can vary widely, but many apps and programs offer a free trial before requiring a subscription or financial commitment.

Instructors: Check their credentials to make sure they're certified in whatever they're teaching.

Variety: You'll maximize your results by

finding a program that keeps you interested while increasing the difficulty over time.

Devices: Make sure the program you choose works across all your devices. Compatibility is important since one of the biggest benefits of online fitness is the ability to take it with you anywhere.

FITNESS TO GO

While the at-home workout might seem isolating, it's actually a gateway to a digital community of like-minded fitness enthusiasts. The classes can provide a connection to a new whole world.

Onepeloton.com: Most famous for its much-advertised, in-home bike revolution, the Peloton digital app features on-demand and live classes of all kinds — no equipment needed.

Nike.com/ntc-app: This free app provides a variety of classes and styles for folks with busy schedules.

Apple.com/apple-fitness-plus: These classes, including yoga and Pilates, are personalized and perfected for Apple Watch users.

DailyBurn.com: This site offers the opportunity for one-on-one instruction. You can discover a favorite series or search for a specific workout depending on your mood.

Beachbody.com or BODi: This platform features '80s-style bootcamp classes, progress-tracking and nutrition hacks. 📱

Moving and grooving

Some mobile fitness fans are turning to more creative ways to work out at home. Harkening back to the days of Richard Simmons and Jazzercise, online dancing is fast becoming a personal fitness staple.

Online dance classes can be less expensive than in-person sessions and offer more style options. And, many people feel more comfortable staging a dance party in their own living rooms rather than in a studio full of strangers.

Zumba.com: The Latin-inspired cardio workout has motivated millions around the world to get moving since dancing into the spotlight in 2001.

Obefitness.com: With more than 8,000 classes and 20 different class types to choose from, there's something for everyone. Up to 22 live classes are available, seven days a week, starting at 6 a.m. Eastern time.

Dancio.com: Here you'll find hundreds of recorded classes covering various dance styles.

Steezy.co: Work out while learning a variety of urban dance moves.

Broadband brings a never-ending spring

This winter was a little too eventful, with snow, slick roads, high winds and heavy rains. I know I'm excited to see spring slowly take hold, and I look forward to the bright sunny days in our immediate future. For me, spring is my favorite season of the year as the days get warmer, flowers and trees begin to blossom and the world seems to come alive again. Spring also is the time that we can get caught up on some of the outside work that we may have had to delay during the winter and prepare for the summer season.



**JOHNNY
MCCLANAHAN**
President/CEO


Still, while there are few things I love more than working with my hands on a beautiful spring day, even I prefer to work smarter instead of harder when I can. We've often talked about the benefits of our fiber network, whether it's easier access to health care or being able to do business remotely without the headache of choppy video calls. But it can also be a big help to farmers in our community.

For those with bigger operations than mine, that high-speed connection lets them use cutting-edge technology like drones to quickly get the lay of the land or a bird's-eye view of their livestock. It also powers new approaches to farming like precision agriculture, which makes it possible to track and respond to factors like crop yield, moisture and soil quality faster than farmers of the past ever imagined.

At the end of a long day, it also brings modern conveniences straight into your home. Streaming music services, like Spotify, and video services, like Hulu or Netflix, are well established. Online gaming is wildly popular and promises to be for a long time. Devices from slow cookers and refrigerators to door locks and thermostats can use the power of Wi-Fi to link to smartphone-based apps.

It's a powerful online world that helps us do more with fewer hurdles, and it's only growing. As highly online families connect more devices, you're going to need broadband performance that can keep up. We're already starting to see more virtual and augmented reality resources. They might be in the early stages, but these devices are examples of the increasingly connected future that's just around the corner.

Those new developments can also be opportunities for business leaders to grow our local economy. We can all use these tools to make connections with people who are miles, or entire countries away.

So, as we move from the cold and darkness of winter to the longer days of spring, we are proud to serve you throughout the year. Thank you for being part of NCTC. 

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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:



From left, Cason Russell poses with his brothers, Camden and Caden, during the 2020 Cason's Cause 5K Run/Walk for autism awareness.
See story Page 8.

Photo contributed by
Cason's Cause

Happy Easter!

The NCTC Board of Directors and staff wish you a joyous Easter. Our business offices will be closed for Good Friday on March 29. As always, our helpdesk is available 24/7/365 at 270-622-2056. Happy Easter!



WHAT IS CPNI? *A special notice regarding your account information*

NCTC knows the importance of privacy to its members. Federal law requires telecommunications companies to explain the use and disclosure of information gathered during the course of providing service.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION?

Customer Proprietary Network Information, or CPNI, are details like the calling features, options and plans to which you subscribe; billing information; and the identity of the long-distance carrier you have chosen. You have the right, and NCTC has the duty under federal law, to preserve the confidentiality of this information.

HOW IS THIS INFORMATION USED?

We only use CPNI to let you know about changes in services you currently buy from us. With your permission, we may use your CPNI to tell you about other services that may interest you. We will never share your CPNI information with third parties unless required by law.

HOW DO I PROTECT MY CPNI?

NCTC has tools in place to protect your CPNI information, including passwords.

NCTC is adamant about protecting the privacy of our members, utilizing password-protected accounts to validate that we are speaking with the person authorized on each account.

If you have not set up a password, please call the business office at 615-666-2151.



Calling all photographers!

Send us your high-quality vacation and staycation pics.

Submit your photos now for the annual NCTC photo contest, and your image could be featured in NCTC's 2025 calendar! NCTC is looking for the very best photos from local shutter-bugs, whether you're a novice or an expert. It's the quality that counts.

This year, we're looking for your best outdoor vacation and staycation photos, whether you've jetted off to an island or stayed home to enjoy our beautiful region. We want to see gorgeous landscapes, wildlife and other great shots for our calendar. The deadline for submission is July 31. Please email your photos to amy.phelps@nctcstaff.com. Be sure to include your name, phone number — or address if you don't have a home phone — and where the photo was taken.

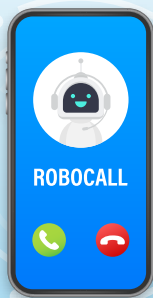
Remember these tips to make your photos shine:

1. Lighting is important! Oftentimes, early mornings and overcast days can make for a great picture.
2. Pick a focal point for best results.
3. Keep the framing of the shot in mind.
4. Make sure the background behind your focal point isn't too cluttered, especially when taking portraits.

Tired of robocalls?

The Do Not Call Registry can help reduce the number of unwanted telemarketing calls you receive.

Learn more at [donotcall.gov](https://www.donotcall.gov), or call **888-382-1222**. You must call from the telephone number you wish to register. For TTY, call 866-290-4236.



Need help paying for services?

You are eligible for Lifeline benefits if you qualify for and receive one of the following benefits:

**SNAP • Medicaid • Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
Federal Public Housing Assistance
The Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension benefit
Meet income requirements**

APPLY TODAY TO SEE IF YOU QUALIFY!

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, please visit lifelinesupport.org or call **800-234-9473**.

TOTALLY AWESOME

APRIL ECLIPSE WILL WOW!

Story by KATHY DENES

The Southeast boasts plenty of beautiful scenery, but the heavens get credit for two of the region's most spectacular sights in a span of less than six months. For three hours on Oct. 14, an annular eclipse created a "ring of fire" visible along its path from Oregon down through Texas. April 8 will bring yet another eclipse, this time plunging all beneath its route from Texas up to Maine and beyond into total darkness.

Except for Southwest Kentucky, very little of the Southeastern U.S. will be in the path of totality. The shadow will barely hit the northwest corner of Tennessee as it cuts through the Kentucky Band region, skims Mayfield and then darkens Paducah and Henderson around 2 p.m. EDT.

For those not in the path of totality, even the partial eclipse will be awesome to behold. Starting around 1:55 p.m. in areas east of totality, the orbiting moon will obscure the sun's bottom-right section and make it look like a crescent by around 3 p.m. By about 4:20 p.m., the sun will again be a complete ball of fire.



Photo by Aditi/Adobe Stock

Illustration by James Threw/Adobe Stock

*“And the moon
in haste eclipsed
her, and the sun in
anger swore.”*

— Aristophanes, Greek writer, 450-385 B.C.,
after observing an eclipse

ECLIPSE 101

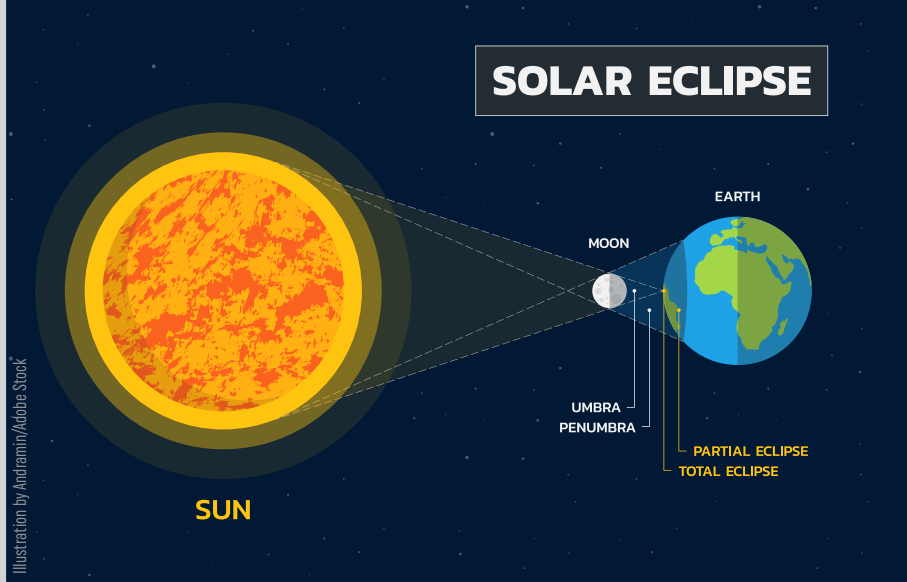
TOTAL ECLIPSE: When the moon passes between the Earth and the sun and briefly covers the sun’s disk completely, areas within the narrow path of the moon’s shadow will experience total darkness. Those outside the path of totality will see a partial eclipse. Go to greatamericaneclipse.com or eclipse2024.org to see how the eclipse will look in your area and to find loads of other information.

VIEWING AN ECLIPSE: The only time it is safe to look at the sun with the naked eye is during the brief totality phase of a total solar eclipse, so that only applies to those directly in its path. At all other times, eclipse phases and locations, direct viewing of the sun is only safe through special solar filters and viewers. Look for the ISO 12312-2 standard, and make sure they are free of scratches or flaws. No. 13 or 14 welder’s glass also provides protection.

EVENTFUL OPTIONS

Events for seeing and celebrating the eclipse include Paducah’s two-day downtown street fair and a viewing party at its National Quilt Museum. Louisville’s Kentucky Science Center is chartering buses to take eclipse fans to Evansville for a riverfront view of totality.

U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, home to the INTUITIVE planetarium, is setting up solar telescopes. Many educational activities are planned, including NASA’s livestream of the eclipse which will be shown throughout the center.



Of the 350-plus permanent planetariums in the U.S., six are in Alabama, eight in Kentucky, four in South Carolina and five call Tennessee home. Find one near you at go-astronomy.com/planetariums.htm.



CASON'S CAUSE

5K event in Lafayette helps change lives

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Cason Russell was diagnosed with a severe form of autism in 2015 at 2 years old, his mother went directly to the experts. But the experts weren't cheap. They weren't local at the time, either.

"For him to get the therapy he needed, Cason and I had to go to Nashville — an hour-and-half drive each way — four days a week," says Jessica Russell, the

Lafayette mother who co-founded Cason's Cause 5K Run/Walk. "They told me the therapy was the best chance for him."

Some of the same therapists also told her Cason would never speak, at least not in a way that anyone could understand, and that he'd never be able to write. "To be told that," Jessica says, pausing for a breath before continuing. "To be told that, well, it crushed any hope I had for my child."

about a kind of stem cell therapy, but it wasn't cheap," she says.

The treatment is not approved for use in the United States, so the \$20,000 therapy was performed in Panama by an American doctor. With the help of Jessica's parents, the Russell family was able to afford it.

"It was like a light switch," Jessica says. "We went in June of 2018, and we saw significant gains in Cason's ability to interact with this world. He realized he had brothers. He would respond to his name. Before that, he completely lived in Cason's world. It's like it woke him up."

FINDING A WAY

Jessica refused to give up. She threw herself into research, and she relied on what she likes to call her "village" of supportive parents, family and friends, who were just as determined as she was to give Cason the life he deserved. "I found out

GOING THE DISTANCE

But Cason still had a way to go. Jessica tried to get Cason into a Duke University clinical trial she hoped could help him even more. He wasn't accepted. "My mama heart was shattered," she says. "I'd really hoped for this for him, because I'd read so many successful stories of kids who'd been involved with it."

Instead, the family decided to do another round of stem cell therapy. This time, however, they knew they'd have to find another way to finance it. In 2019, Jessica's aunt, Erica Woodard, and her cousin, Cidney Woodard, came up with the idea for Cason's Cause, a 5K run/walk fundraising event.



ABOVE: Cason Russell, center, celebrates with, from left, his brothers Camden and Caden and cousins Weston and Eli.

RIGHT: Cason smiles with his grandmother, Anita Woodard.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Cason's Cause volunteers help create an event for the entire community.

Jessica and Dustin Russell, in back, take a family photo with their sons, from left, Cason, Caden and Cameron.



Photos contributed by Jessica Russell

The response was so positive that Cason was able to get a second round of stem cell therapy. His life continued to improve. Now, at the age of 11, he's surpassed the negative outlooks his early therapists warned Jessica about. He can talk, he can write and he can attend school.

KEEPING A GOOD THING GOING

After seeing how much the 5K helped Cason, the Russell family wanted to give back. They decided to make it an annual event to help other children diagnosed with autism. On Saturday, April 6, Cason's Cause will hold its fifth event, which includes a silent auction and vendors selling arts and crafts and food. Last year, the race welcomed more than 100 runners and walkers. All proceeds benefit families of children with autism in the area, by providing sensory items, communications devices, therapy co-pays and more. Families can apply for help through the organization. "That first year, in 2019, the event went to help Cason," Jessica says. "But since 2020, we give back to individuals in our community and surrounding counties."



Best of all, the event morphed into a support network for children with autism and their families. Because of community support, Cason's Cause was able to help 25 families and donate over \$16,800 to individuals affected by autism in 2023 alone.

"If you have autism, or if you have autism in your family, you can feel excluded sometimes," Jessica says. "It can be hard to find your people. I wanted to create a place where people could find their people." 🗨️

GET INVOLVED

Join Cason and his family for Cason's Cause at Macon County Junior High School on Saturday, April 6. The event includes a 5K run/walk, a silent auction and vendors selling food, arts, crafts and more. It's also a great place to meet friendly faces and other families living with autism spectrum disorder. Friends, family and co-workers can create fundraiser teams to multiply the fun and the giving opportunities.

To register, or to learn more, visit Cason's Cause Facebook page. The page has a link to race registration at raceentry.com. If you can't attend the event, it also provides a button to donate. Proceeds from the event go to serve children in Macon and surrounding counties diagnosed with autism by providing sensory items, communications devices, therapy co-pays, hygiene supplies and much more. To find out more about receiving help from Cason's Cause, message the organization at casonscase@gmail.com.

FUNKY CHICKENS

Ornamental poultry are not your basic backyard birds



Light Brahma bantams are Turner's favorite chickens to breed and show.

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON



Joe, Meagan, Turner and Kaiser Holland have found a home in the world of exhibition poultry.

Seven-year-old Turner Holland wanted to keep busy outside of school, but he knew he wasn't athletic and couldn't stand sports. That's when his dad, Joe, brought home a half-dozen baby chickens from Tractor Supply.

Those first six chicks led to hundreds more as Turner and his family jumped into the world of backyard poultry at their home in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Now known as Chicken Hill Farm, they are a go-to source of the rare blue Araucana, as well as several other breeds of ornamental chickens.

Their clientele is a growing group that finds joy in raising chickens. More than 12 million people — about twice the population of Arizona — share their yards with a flock, according to The American Pet Products Association's most recent national pet owner survey. The number of households with chickens rose from 8% in 2008 to 13% in 2020.

Many people choose to keep them as pets or as a steady source of fresh eggs.

But exhibition chickens like the Hollands' are often inconsistent layers. Instead, these flashy fowls have a different job — strutting their stuff.


The Hollands' signature Araucana chickens are recognizable by their poof of feathers — known as tufts — that grow at their ears instead of at their “rumpless” tail ends. While the “hilarious, friendly girls,” known for their pastel blue eggs, are Chicken Hill Farm's stars, they share the spotlight with many other funky chickens. There's the Muppet-like jet black Polish with their explosion of fluffy, white head feathers that often obscure their eyes. The Brahmas have abundant, soft feathers that cover their legs and feet. And then there are the small silkies, the most unique of all. Lacking the barbicels that hold a feather's shape, they look — and feel — like they're covered with fur rather than feathers.

Maintaining the chickens' genetics is fascinating, says Turner's mom, Meagan.

At first, she and Turner focused on breeding, but then they discovered the exhibition part of fancy poultry. They took a few of their favorites to a local county show in June 2022 and then to another one a week later. Turner is now 11 and a rising star on the exhibition poultry circuit.

“After that, it just snowballed, and he’s all in,” Meagan says. “He just fell into it and is obsessed. This is such a great activity for him and for us to do as a family.”

The family now spends most weekends in the summer and fall traveling to exhibitions where Turner is making a name for himself. Meagan handles the birds. Joe, an Army veteran, drives. And younger son, Kaiser, is beginning to join his brother in the show ring.

“I don’t know if my husband was as excited about our new lifestyle,” Meagan says with a laugh. “He’s not into the breeding like Turner and I are. But he enjoys the birds and the time we spend together as a family.” 



ABOVE: Turner’s light Brahma bantam cockerel won champion of the Feather Legged Class in the junior show at the Ohio National Poultry Show.

LEFT: As more people become involved with raising fancy chickens at home, the number of exhibition poultry shows and entrants continues to grow.



Photo by Sara D. Patterson

Are you ready for backyard chickens?

Saving money and healthier eggs are the intent of many people who raise chickens, but those goals are often difficult to reach, says Gregory Archer, associate professor and extension specialist for Texas A&M Department of Poultry Science.

“I tell people it should be more about self-satisfaction and the desire to know exactly how and where your eggs came from. Chickens are also fun, and kids love them.”

Possible challenges include bird medical care, waste management or strategies for excess eggs. Similarly, predators can quickly be an issue.

Also, there are geographic-specific considerations. “Often, people don’t manage heat or get the correct breeds for Texas heat,” he says. “You need to make sure you have fresh water, shade and maybe some fans.”

A little research will help identify birds suitable for heat, cold or any environment.

CHICKEN CONSIDERATIONS



If you’re contemplating backyard chickens, consider these points before adopting the chicken lifestyle.

LOCAL LAWS AND NEIGHBORHOOD REGULATIONS

- Check for the latest rules on chicken ownership in your town and county. Many cities limit the number of chickens allowed per household and prohibit roosters entirely.
- Often, cities require chickens to be kept enclosed and that the coop is well maintained and cleaned frequently.
- If you decide to sell your eggs, ensure it’s legal where you live.

EXPENSES

Even small-scale chicken farming requires ongoing expenses after buying or building a coop and fencing.

- A 40-pound bag of feed can cost \$25 or more, depending on the brand, nutritional value and other factors.
- Dietary supplements are typically needed, so budget for extra proteins and treats, like dried insects — a 5-pound bag can cost at least \$50.
- Chickens require fresh bedding, like pine shavings or chopped straw, every time the coop is cleaned.

CARE

While caring for chickens isn’t a full-time job, do expect to invest time.

- Most people adopt a daily or twice-daily routine for feeding and watering.
- Many times, chickens need to be let out of a small coop in the morning and herded back in at night for safety.
- Remember, chickens can fly. Some people prefer to clip their wings regularly, while others choose a run with fencing or netting overhead.

Source: Osceola County Extension Agent Jessica Sullivan

THE FULL PICTURE

Eller Sisters keep framing business all in the family

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Sisters Kim Winsett and Lisa King never planned to open a business. But when Kim learned the family’s favorite frame shop in Scottsville, Kentucky, was planning to close, something shifted.

“We had been going to see Arnold Copas at Copas Frame Shop for many years,” Kim says. “We’d built up a real friendship with him.”

When Arnold told Kim he was shutting his doors, she immediately asked, “Would you consider selling?”

The next thing Kim knew she was on the phone with Lisa with the kind of cryptic pronouncement only the closest of family members can understand. “I told her I saw Arnold, and I said, ‘He’s selling.’ That’s pretty much all I said. Then I basically hung up.”

By the following day — Dec. 1, 2015 — the sisters owned their very own frame shop. “We had no plans,” Kim says. “It wasn’t like we’d ever said, ‘Why don’t we open a frame shop?’ It was nothing like that.”

BUILDING A BUSINESS

Within months, the sisters learned the trade from Arnold, changed the name to reflect their maiden name — Eller Sisters Frames & Things — and first moved the contents of the shop to a rented building on Highway 52 in their hometown of Lafayette. “We make custom picture frames and mats, shadow boxes, and we sell prints,” Kim says. “We can frame just about anything, and we try to keep our costs reasonable.”

The first building was small, however, and they couldn’t grow like they wanted. A while later, Lisa found a potential spot in the old Clifton Shrum Dairy Dip at 801 Red Boiling Springs Road. When Kim took a look inside, “I thought she had lost her ever-lovin’ mind!” Kim says.

The building had sat empty for years, and a gaping hole in the ceiling



Sisters Lisa King, left, and Kim Winsett bought Copas Frame Shop in Scottsville, Kentucky, from the late Arnold Copas in 2015. Shortly after, they moved the operation to Lafayette.

Photos contributed by Chris Lewis



ABOVE: The sisters both work other jobs but meet up at night and on weekends to fill orders.

LEFT: Lisa works on a custom frame.



WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Arnold taught Kim and Lisa the skills to build well-designed frames, and his help was invaluable. “He was a very kind man,” Lisa says of the late frame shop owner.

He wanted to sell to someone he could trust — someone who would run the business like he did, Kim says. “He tried to keep prices reasonable for his customers. He didn’t want to gouge anybody or upcharge.”

The Eller sisters try to do the same thing. They know their prices are usually better than the big-box craft stores that contract out their framing jobs to faraway places. They also love the role they get to play in other families’ lives. They frame pictures and art and also create shadow boxes.

“One time a man came in with his grandfather’s Army jacket and cap from the Korean War,” Kim says. “Lisa designed this great shadow box for it. We also make shadow boxes for graduates’ diplomas and tassels, and ones for babies’ clothes.”

It also allows them to offer a personal touch that’s usually only reserved for locally owned businesses. “Making

the right frame and matting and look isn’t something you can easily do online,” Kim says. “It’s something you really have to come in and talk to someone about to get it right.”

STRONG ROOTS

The sisters say their children and grandchildren could take an interest in the shop one day. If that happens, they’ll be happy to show them the ropes. Family has always been important to the Ellers.

“Our parents were Bill and Doris Eller,” Kim says. “We were raised on a family farm, and my grandfather farmed. I guess you could say that tobacco raised us. Like most Ellers around here, my family raised tobacco and had cattle, too.”

Today, Kim and Lisa still live near each other and spend time together outside the shop. “We’ve had our little spats, of course,” Kim says, and the two of them laugh. “We’re sisters. What do you expect?”

A second later Lisa adds, “Yes, but I think we’re closer than ever now.”



Lisa, left, and Kim offer custom framing and shadow box creations for every occasion.

emptied rainwater into a trash can below. The walls were destroyed, and black tar from the roof was scattered everywhere. “There were lizards in there,” Kim recalls.

Lisa laughs at her sister’s shock. “Kim just had no vision,” she says.

The sisters worked nights to get the building in shape. They had the roof removed and ripped out walls. Neighbors, eager to have the eyesore of a building revamped, offered them drinks, use of their bathrooms and encouragement. They reopened at the new building in early 2017. “We’ve got a building we can be proud of now,” Kim says.

Eight years later, the shop is still going strong on Red Boiling Springs Road, and so is their sisterhood. Kim and Lisa both still work other jobs and keep up with their obligations to their husbands, children and grandchildren. But they always meet up on weeknights and weekends to work on orders and wait on customers.

FRAME IT

Visit Eller Sisters Frames & Things at 801 Red Boiling Springs Road in Lafayette. On weekdays, the shop is open from 5-7 p.m., and Saturdays from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. You can also call the shop at 615-666-4150, or like its Facebook page.



Regional Accents

Local favorites are
key ingredient of
America's melting pot

Every local dish has a story behind it, history heaped with flavor. One of the best ways to discover these is by stirring the nation's culinary pot to see what's cooking.

Certain dishes are common to us Americans across the board. We'll fry just about anything. From Twinkies to turkeys, they all go in the deep fryer. But, when it comes to comfort-food classics, states and regions have their own distinct accents. U.S. culinary traditions form a giant melting pot with regional flavors blended in for extra deliciousness.

Regional foods are some of the most fascinating bites one can experience. Here's a look at some of the ones that are favorites across our nation.



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

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SMOKED GOUDA MAC AND CHEESE

You'd be hard-pressed to walk into a diner around the South and not see mac and cheese on the menu. This recipe just takes it up a notch.

- 1 pound short pasta, such as elbow macaroni or shells
- 1 pound smoked gouda cheese, grated
- 8 ounces extra-sharp white cheddar cheese, grated
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mustard
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- Salt, to taste
- 4 slices of bacon, crumbled (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Cook pasta according to package directions to al dente stage, then set aside.

In a large Dutch oven or other deep pot, heat butter over medium-low heat. Once butter has melted, add in flour and whisk until all flour disappears, then slowly add in heavy cream and whole milk. Stir and let mixture come to a slight boil. Add in all spices and stir again. Lastly, add in 8 ounces of smoked gouda cheese and white cheddar cheese. Whisk until all cheese has melted.

Add in pasta and mix everything together to fully incorporate, making sure all pasta is coated with sauce. Add salt, to taste.

Transfer mixture to a large, lightly greased baking dish, then top dish with remaining smoked gouda. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until mixture is golden and bubbly.

Let cool for 15 minutes and serve warm topped with crumbled bacon, if desired. Makes 8 servings.



WILD RICE CHICKEN CASSEROLE

Wild rice is found throughout the Midwest, where this recipe originates.

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) chicken broth
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 4 cups cubed, cooked chicken
- 4 cups cooked wild rice
- 2 jars (4 1/2 ounces each) sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1 jar (4 ounces) diced pimentos, drained
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
- 1/3 cup slivered almonds

In a large saucepan, saute onion in butter until tender. Stir in the flour, salt and pepper until blended. Gradually stir in broth. Bring to a boil. Boil and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Stir in the half-and-half, chicken, rice, mushrooms, pimentos and parsley. Heat through.

Transfer mixture to a greased 2 1/2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with almonds. Bake, uncovered, at 350 F for 30-35 minutes or until bubbly. Makes 6-8 servings.

SALMON PICCATA

This is a popular recipe in the Northwest where fresh salmon is easy to find. In other states, try to get your hands on the freshest fish possible to bring out the flavors in this dish.

- 4 salmon steaks, 1 inch thick
- All-purpose flour (for dredging)
- 1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 3 tablespoons onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 heaping tablespoon capers, drained
- 1/8 teaspoon dried Italian seasonings, crushed
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons beef broth

Preheat oven to 400 F. Rinse salmon steaks under cool water, pat dry and roll in flour.

In a large ovenproof frying pan or saute pan, heat 1/4 cup butter until it melts. Briefly saute the salmon steaks, browning them lightly on both sides.

Bake, covered, 10 to 15 minutes until a meat thermometer registers an internal temperature of 140 F, or until salmon is slightly opaque in the thickest part. You may need to cut to test. During this time the meat continues to cook because the meat temperature will rise 5 to 10 degrees after it is removed from the oven and the juices will redistribute. Remove from oven. Reserve liquid in the pan, and transfer salmon onto a warm serving platter.

Using the same pan over medium heat, stir into the reserved liquid the onion, garlic, capers and Italian seasonings. Simmer for 5 minutes. Add white wine, lemon juice and beef broth. Stir until well blended. Turn off the heat, whisk in the remaining 3 tablespoons butter until blended. Remove from heat, pour sauce over salmon and serve immediately. Makes 4 servings. 🍴

SALSA ROJAS

Salsa is the condiment of choice throughout Texas and many of the Western states.

- 1 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes with garlic and onion, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) stewed tomatoes (with Mexican seasonings, if you can find them), drained
- 1 can (10 ounces) diced tomatoes and green chilies, drained
- 1 medium onion, quartered
- 2 banana peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 cup minced fresh cilantro
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 2 ripe avocados, peeled and cubed
- Tortilla chips



Place the first 10 ingredients in a food processor; cover and process until chopped. Add cilantro and lime juice; cover and pulse until combined.

Transfer to a bowl; stir in avocados. Serve with tortilla chips or use as a condiment for your favorite Tex-Mex dishes.



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