



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2024

CONNECTION



Blue Moon

Scottsville business grows

MEADOR PRINT

RURAL AUTHORS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A Winning Game

Esports brings fun, competition and a future

NTCA members are committed to doing more than providing fast, reliable internet service. They strive to enrich the community, including finding new opportunities to help everyone as technologies and online trends evolve.

For example, a growing high school sport unlocks all the traditional benefits of competition, such as team building, while enhancing skills applicable to modern careers. Known as esports, competitive gaming can make a difference in the lives of students.

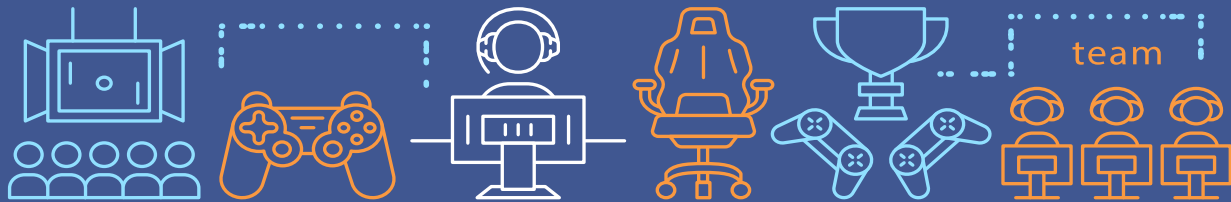
High schools across the nation have embraced esports, and the National Federation of State High School Associations includes esports alongside basketball, football, volleyball and more. Without fast, reliable internet services, however, rural students wouldn't have access. That's the power of providers like yours—they break down barriers and open doors to new opportunities.

Many of the competitions may seem familiar to gamers, ranging from sports games and racing simulations to strategy

and multiplayer battle titles. A growing number of colleges recognize esports and field teams. There's even professional-level competition.

The benefits of esports resemble those found in traditional high school sports. Success relies on teamwork and cooperation. Participants learn life skills and gain a deeper understanding of technology needed for careers ranging from software development to marketing. The broad world of gaming also brings people together, and 61% of gamers say they've met someone they otherwise would not have ever encountered.

Every day broadband uplifts rural America, and we look forward to seeing what innovations and opportunities come next. 🗨️



ESPORTS

ESPORTS STATS

Esports is increasingly popular, turning gaming into team competitions at high schools, colleges and even in professional competitions. Some online streaming services offer live coverage of competitions.

WHO ARE GAMERS?

- 24%** are younger than 18 years old
- 36%** are between the ages of 18-34
- 13%** are between the ages of 35-44
- 12%** are between the ages of 45-54

WHO ARE ESPORTS SPECTATORS?

- 50%** are between the ages of 25-41
- 26%** are between the ages of 16-24
- 20%** are between the ages of 42-56

BUILDING SKILLS

Esports creates skills today's students will find marketable.

- Computer network and hardware proficiency
- Digital literacy
- Broadcasting
- Soft skills
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving
- Team building

Source: NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A Sound Investment



System upgrade takes listening to next level

Whether you're gaming, watching a movie or listening to music, a high-quality sound system can take you from casually listening to feeling like you're part of the action. If you've thought about installing a sound system in your home, 'tis the season, to treat yourself to one that easily meets your needs and budget.

All sound systems have two basic components. First, there's the source providing the audio signal. This can be a TV, gaming device or digital music player, like your phone or computer. The second component is the amplifier, which boosts the audio signal. More than just volume, the amplifier improves the overall sound quality with more detail and clarity.

When it comes to speakers, music formats only require two, but the more speakers you have, the more immersive the sound will be. A soundbar, sometimes called a media bar, has multiple speakers enclosed in a single horizontal unit, usually placed above or below the TV. A surround sound system is much more complex, with speakers strategically placed around the room to deliver the best possible sound.

SOUNDBAR VS. SURROUND SOUND

Soundbars are ready to go right out of the box. They're relatively inexpensive, sleek and easy to install. Soundbars are ideal for smaller spaces because of their minimal visual impact.

When shopping for a soundbar, pay close attention to the number of speakers hidden inside. A larger soundbar doesn't

necessarily mean better sound quality. Look to manufacturers like Bose, Sonos or Vizio for reliable options.

Surround sound is the choice for high fidelity and full dynamic range of sound—think of your listening area as a movie theater with booming audio. It considers factors like room size, acoustics and listening positions to determine the number of speakers and locations. If you already have a basic speaker system at home, upgrading to surround sound might be as simple as adding an extra speaker or two.

PRICE OF PERFECTION

Very simple sound systems can still deliver a fantastic listening experience, so don't worry if you're starting on a smaller budget. But if you're designing your own setup and need advice on speaker placement or hiding wires behind walls, you'll need an electrician for expert guidance. Installers charge an average of \$50-\$100 an hour, so remember to budget for that.

The most common format for surround sound systems is the 5.1, with six audio channels, five speakers and a subwoofer that delivers the deep, rumbling bass frequencies. A 5.1 setup can cost between \$300 to \$1,700.

A more extensive option is the 7.1 surround, with two additional audio channels and two more speakers. Comparable to the audio setup found in large cinemas, the cost of this configuration runs anywhere from \$400 to \$4,000. [🔗](#)

Honoring Those Who Served

Veterans Day is a holiday for all

I always look forward to the holidays, celebrating the bustle, hustle and joy that come with Thanksgiving and Christmas. For many of us, these are happy weeks, and I'm appreciative of every one of them. But there's also another holiday this season deserving of reflection, gratitude and remembrance.



**JOHNNY
MCCLANAHAN**
President/CEO

Every Nov. 11, Veterans Day honors the men and women who served in the armed forces. It's a day that carries a great deal of weight in rural communities like ours, where many families know intimately about all that our veterans face.

Perhaps there are stories handed down from generation to generation about someone who served decades ago. Or maybe a family member recently served or is currently active in the military. Communities like ours always step up when there's a need.

I see daily examples of how our communications services connect us. Even though they've changed over the years, beginning with telephone service and continuing with our fast and reliable broadband network, the thread is still the same—we help you make connections.

Veterans Day gives another opportunity to make a connection that may have a deeper meaning. Consider taking a few minutes to reach out, listen and learn about those who served.

One of the best ways to honor our veterans is by ensuring their stories are never lost. In today's digital-infused world, we have more communications tools than ever. Many online resources allow you to learn more about the experiences of our veterans and contribute to preserving their stories.

For example, the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project is a great resource. The project collects and preserves personal accounts of American war veterans so future generations can hear them. If you have a veteran in your life, consider recording their story and sending it to the project. It's a powerful way to ensure their legacy endures. Visit loc.gov and search for the Veterans History Project for all the details.

Another valuable resource is the National Archives, archives.gov, which has a wealth of information about military records and veterans' service histories. You can request records, which is particularly useful for those doing genealogy work. Similarly, The Virtual Wall, found at virtualwall.org, collects and displays the names and details of service members who died in Vietnam.

For those looking to take on a more direct role in supporting veterans, organizations like the Wounded Warrior Project and many others work to help members of our armed services.

Thank you for joining me in celebrating these valiant men and women. Have a wonderful holiday season and a merry Christmas. 📧

The North Central Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by NCTC, © 2024. 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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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



Josh Starrett, owner of Blue Moon Sanitation, expanded the portable toilet business into waste management and more.
See story Page 12.

Photo courtesy of
The Decesare Group

NORTH CENTRAL TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE
BALANCE SHEET
 December 31, 2023

ASSETS

Current Assets	77,428,818
Other Assets	
Investments in Affiliated Companies	14,029,295
Nonregulated Investments	310,764
Total Current/Other Assets	14,340,059
Telecommunications Plant	228,915,046
Less Accumulated Depreciation	143,096,525
Net Telecommunications Plant	85,818,521
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 177,587,398
LIABILITIES and MEMBERS' EQUITIES	
Current Liabilities	10,899,174
Long-Term Debt	15,820,950
Other Liabilities	8,669,021
Members' Equities	142,198,253
TOTAL LIABILITIES and MEMBERS' EQUITIES	\$ 177,587,398

FREE MOVIES IN DECEMBER

Hoping to enjoy the season by watching the top movies and shows? NCTC is offering FREE premium channels every weekend in December. Check your local listings for a channel lineup.

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS *

From all of us at NCTC, we wish you and your family the happiest Thanksgiving and the merriest Christmas. Our offices will be closed in honor of the holidays on the following dates:

Thanksgiving Day—Thursday, Nov. 28

Christmas—Tuesday, Dec. 24, and Wednesday, Dec. 25

New Year's Day—Wednesday, Jan. 1 *

Our help desk is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year by calling 270-622-2056.



BOWMAN RETIRES

Longtime NCTC employee Charlie Bowman recently retired after more than two decades of service. Charlie got his start as a satellite installer in 1998, when NCTC offered DirectTV. Over the years, he moved to other positions within the company before ending his career as a technician in the central office. Charlie says he plans to spend time with his grandchildren and enjoy not having a schedule. NCTC's board and staff wish him well in this next chapter!



CEO Johnny McClanahan, right, thanks Charlie Bowman for his more than 25 years of service with NCTC.

NCTC & WARREN RECC AWARDED \$9.1M

NCTC will be able to provide access to fiber for 1,767 more households in Butler, Edmonson, Grayson and Warren counties in Kentucky thanks to the recent award of \$9.1 million. NCTC is thankful to the Commonwealth of Kentucky and to the Office of Broadband Development, along with our team of amazing employees, who work diligently to make this service possible. We're also thankful to our board of directors for its support and leadership. Combined with \$3.93 million in matching funds, this fiber broadband project represents a \$13 million investment in rural Kentucky. This brings the total number of homes and businesses NCTC serves to approximately 30,000.

NCTC CEO Johnny McClanahan, far left, joins Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, second from left, and others during a recent check presentation.



Blast Off

Go on a holiday adventure at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Looking for an out-of-this-world family experience this holiday season? The U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, will capture everyone's imagination, from kids to adults.

The center was first conceived as Wernher von Braun and his team of rocket scientists were in the final months of refining the Saturn V rocket that would send Apollo astronauts to the moon. As director of the nearby Marshall Space Flight Center, von Braun saw the need for a permanent exhibit to showcase the hardware of the space program.

He petitioned the Alabama Legislature to create a museum with the help of the U.S. Army Missile Command and NASA. The U.S. Army donated land for the museum, and the U.S. Space & Rocket Center opened its doors in 1970, the year after Apollo 11 successfully carried astronauts to the moon and back.

Since then, the center has hosted more than 650,000 visitors each year from as many as 64 different countries. Visitors can get an up-close look at an authentic Saturn V rocket, one of only three in the world, as well as Pathfinder, the world's only fully stacked space shuttle display.

A HELPING HAND

While the holidays often bring hope and happiness, for many people achieving those peaceful goals are elusive. That's particularly true this year, as communities throughout the Southeast strive to recover from damaging winds and devastating floods.

Dolly Parton, Walmart and countless others have contributed to organizations supporting these rural areas in need. If you wish to contribute, consider these options:

American Red Cross: [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org)

The Salvation Army: [salvationarmyusa.org](https://www.salvationarmyusa.org)

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE TO EXPLORE

Not only is the USSRC an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, but it is also the official NASA Visitor Center for Marshall Space Flight Center. The museum offers regular bus tours highlighting the facility where the Space Launch System is in development to carry astronauts to Mars, asteroids and even deeper into space.

In addition to exhibits detailing the most complete chronology of launch vehicles in the country, the center's Apollo 16 command module, real Apollo 12 moon rock and daily STEM on Stage performances let visitors interact with artifacts and exhibits.

Children under 8 can explore an International Space Station-themed playground at Kids Cosmos, and every Saturday kids 12 and up are invited to the Maker Lab for hands-on projects that incorporate lessons on topics like solar energy and robotics. Adrenaline junkies can ride the G-Force Accelerator to experience three times the force of gravity or take the Moon Shot to see what a rocket launch feels like as you fly 140 feet straight up in 2.5 seconds.

"The Space & Rocket Center is really an amazing feast for the eyes. It's a place to learn about the past, the present and the future of space exploration."

—Pat Ammons, senior director of public and media relations

AN ASTRONOMICAL CHRISTMAS

One of the USSRC's most popular attractions is the INTUITIVE Planetarium, which features a state-of-the-art digital dome theater. Each screening is unique as a team of live astrophysicists takes visitors on a tour of the solar system.

"It is truly an extraordinary, absolutely world-class planetarium," says Senior Director of Public and Media Relations Pat Ammons. "It's all live and interactive. They take you on a personal tour, you can ask questions and it's highly interactive."

Throughout the holidays, the planetarium also screens a special feature called "The Star of Bethlehem," which explores both the science and religion behind the famous celestial phenomenon. 📺

Photos courtesy of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center

Center is
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media relations

LEFT: The U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, is a holiday destination for the family.



Photo courtesy of Neil Ardrey



ABOVE: Finn Cushing, 2, tries an astronaut's suit on for size.

LEFT: See a piece of the moon, a rock brought home by astronauts.





5-Star Service

Meador Enterprises continues to grow

Meador Enterprises uses embroidery machines to complete work orders. The shop can embroider or heat transfer logos on everything from T-shirts and uniforms to coolers, cups, shotgun cases and more.

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Donald Meador's long-time apparel industry job left for Mexico more than 20 years ago, he didn't spend time moping. He got to work.

In 2001, the engineer-turned-entrepreneur was approached to take over the embroidery needs of a large client. Would Donald want to take a crack at it?

Soon after, he sat down at his dining room table alongside his daughter and son-in-law, Larissa and Harvey Kirby. With little more than a pen and a legal pad, they sketched out the idea for Meador Enterprises.

Today, the Lafayette company has grown into a thriving printing business capable of customizing everything from company uniforms to promotional items using silkscreen printing, embroidery,

laser etching and heat transfer services. Meador also offers warehousing services for its clients, such as order fulfillment, picking, packing and shipping.

WORK HARD AND TREAT PEOPLE WELL

Today, Meador remains strong by keeping its quality high, its customer service excellent and moving quickly to accommodate the needs of the marketplace.

"Yes, we're growing," says Larissa, the company's general manager. "Meador has seen several slow and tough economies over the years. We've survived by changing and growing our services and our business."

While the company's mass production capability was a superpower when it came to large orders, it was a weakness when tackling smaller projects. They realized quickly their system was not meant for nonbulk batches of items, like

uniforms for local sports teams or T-shirts for family reunions.

"We had a storefront at one time to sell custom-printed items," says Harvey, former operations manager. "But we had to close it down. The problem was we were trying to meet local needs, and it was a different situation. People were wanting orders of 12, and we weren't set up to do that."

But that could change soon, says Tim Key, who oversees sales. "We now have some new tech that is opening up that door for us," Tim says. "One of our goals this year was to tap into the local market. We're offering small orders, but I don't think we've done anything less than 12 pieces. We're starting to gain some momentum."

The Meador team also tries to maintain a friendly, understanding work environment for employees. Harvey says offering

LEFT: Employee Latisha Shultz works at a heat press machine.

RIGHT: Meador Enterprises is a family-owned business. Family members involved in the operation include, from left, Amber Kirby, Aaron Kirby, Gail Meador, Donald Meador and Larissa Kirby.

BOTTOM: Logoed hats, visors and chairs are a few of the items Meador offers. The company can brand most materials, including wood, leather, glass and metal.



flexibility is one of the ways they're able to attract quality workers in what has been a difficult job market for businesses. "We don't penalize people if they need to take care of personal business sometime," he says. "We treat people like they're people here."

FIBER VS. PAPER

Today's printing business requires a technological edge in everything from computers and software to internet connection. Businesses like Meador depend on NCTC's ultra-high-speed internet connection to send, receive and open large digital files full of graphics and instructions.

"We've been paperless now for about a decade," Larissa says. "All of my files are stored on the cloud through the internet."

Tim adds, "We definitely use the internet more and more as the core of our business. We just rolled out a new web-based manufacturing software system, which is an online-only software. We've also started accounts on all social media platforms, and we opened an Etsy store."

In addition, the company recently added Microsoft Teams software to its system, which is used to interact with some of its larger customers. "NCTC has been consistent to accommodate

everything we've needed," Larissa says. "Even now, with everything we're doing online, most of us sit at our desk and stream music on top of that. I don't think we've ever had a problem. NCTC has been amazing about making sure that we've got everything we need and that we don't sit and stall."

Tim agrees. He remembers years ago when NCTC was installing fiber optic broadband lines throughout the region, when places like Nashville were still waiting for the national, for-profit telecommunications corporations to bring it to their homes and businesses. "NCTC was ahead of the game," Tim says. 🗨️



AMERICAN OWNED, AMERICAN OPERATED

Meador Enterprises is a family-owned-and-operated company in Lafayette that offers print, embroidery and engraving services. Whether clients need logos on uniforms and hats, T-shirts and sweatshirts or company-personalized blankets, coolers and folding chairs, Meador can make it happen.

Meador also offers warehouse service capabilities like pick-and-pack labor and blind shipping services that look like they came directly from your business. For more information, call Meador at 615-666-6215, email info@meadorent.com, or visit the website at meadorent.com. The company also maintains social media sites across the board and recently opened an Etsy shop. The handle for all social media and the online shop is @meadorent.

THE ART OF SELF- RELIANCE

Rural writers get a boost from the internet

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Shawna Holly was researching how to publish her first novel when she ran into a type of writer’s block she’d never experienced. This particular block had nothing to do with plot holes or mental tangles. Instead, it centered around the relatively slow-moving churn of books through the nation’s traditional publishing houses.

“The industry—from my perspective—is very busy, like so many other businesses right now,” Shawna says. “There are very few literary agents and acquisitions editors compared to how many debut authors are seeking representation, and they’re all overworked. As a result, the path to traditional publishing is slow. For authors seeking a faster solution, self-publishing is the answer.”

So, that’s what she did. In June 2023, the Boerne, Texas-based writer published her first novel, “The Stories We Keep,” via a self-publishing platform that distributes paperbacks and e-books all over the world. Her second book, “When We’re Broken,” came out earlier this fall. Both books are in the genre of women’s literary fiction.

TAKING CHARGE

Shawna is among a growing number of writers embracing self-publishing

platforms to bypass traditional gatekeepers and speed up the book publishing process. This is especially true for writers from small or rural towns who may have a harder time finding an agent or fostering connections to publishing houses in larger cities.

“Agents receive thousands of queries a year, and they’re only taking on maybe two or three new authors in addition to the clients they already have to manage,” Shawna says. “It just makes it darn near impossible to find that magic match. I just thought, ‘I’m in my 40s and have more stories to write. I don’t want to wait.’”

Best-selling authors who famously self-published before landing big book deals and film adaptations include Amanda Brown, who wrote “Legally Blonde,” and Andy Weir, who wrote “The Martian.” Colleen Hoover, the East Texas author of the blockbuster “It Ends with Us,” also self-published her first book, “Slammed,” in 2012. She increased her audience by giving away free books and by posting regularly on social media.

Even those self-published writers who don’t reach traditional literary heights have profited in the world of self-publishing. The Alliance of Independent Authors published a survey in 2023 reporting that

self-published authors earned a median income of \$12,749—more than double that of traditionally published authors. They also made up more than 50% of Kindle’s Top 400 books of 2023, the survey found.

UNTANGLING THE WEB

Self-publishing isn’t the only internet tool that sparks creativity, however. Connie Clyburn is an East Tennessee-based writer of several books, including “Wisdom from the Doublewide” and the devotional “Aging Fabulously.” Connie found fellowship online through video calls with other writers from as far away as Ireland.

From her home in Telford, Tennessee—which she describes as “a little wide place in the road between Jonesborough and Greeneville”—she also uses the internet to connect with others through her online magazine. Called *ah law, y’all*, the quarterly publication highlights the Southern Appalachian area.

“You don’t always think about how vital the internet is as a writer,” says Connie, who infuses her writing with scripture and ways to apply it to everyday life. “But, as a rural writer, it has opened up a big world. Anything that I come up with



Photo courtesy of Shawna Holly



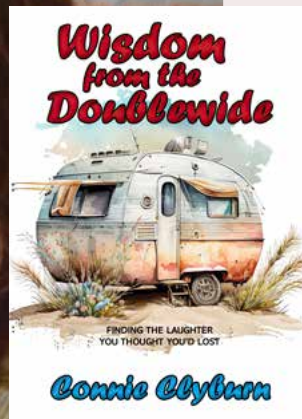
Photo courtesy of Connie Clyburn

that I want to read about or research or just connect with is right there at your fingertips.” 📱

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information on Connie Clyburn, look up her blog, “Wisdom from the Doublewide,” and the online magazine *ah law*, y’all.

Find out more about Shawna Holly and her books at shawnaholly.com.



LEFT: Connie Clyburn got her start as a journalist, and now she writes books, a blog and a newsletter from her home in East Tennessee near Jonesborough. Connie turned her blog into the book “Wisdom from the Doublewide.”

OPPOSITE PAGE: Shawna Holly lives outside of San Antonio, in a town of about 15,000 people. An Air Force veteran, Shawna self-published her book, “The Stories We Keep,” to avoid the sometimes long and tedious process of finding an agent and a publisher.

GET A START WITH SELF-PUBLISHING

Most writers learn quickly that finding a publisher is often harder than writing the book itself. Books are meant to be read, but the steps involved with finding an agent and publisher can waste valuable time and resources. As a result, many writers self-publish. The comprehensive book and writers' blog “What We Reading” lists several self-publishing platforms. We've listed a few resources here for e-books. Visit whatwewereading.com for more information on self-publishing print books.

Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, also known as KDP

- Highest market share and sales in the self-publishing industry.
- Writers earn royalties of between 35% and 70% depending on the price of the book.
- It's important to note there's another option called KDP Select, which is different than KDP. KDP Select users get certain marketing perks that can help sell their books. In exchange, they can't publish their work with any other self-publishing company.

Apple Books

- Writers earn royalties of 70% on all e-books.
- Second-biggest player in the industry after Amazon's KDP.
- No upfront fees for authors once they have an iTunes account.

Barnes & Noble Press, also known as B&N

- Writers earn 70% on e-books above 99 cents.
- B&N is considered one of the easiest platforms to use.
- Completely free to use, and it does not require exclusivity.

Other platforms include Kobo Writing Life, Draft2Digital, StreetLib, IngramSpark and PublishDrive, some of which have different pricing models and royalty distributions. Each of these platforms generally offers distribution to all the major e-book retailers, so it's important to research all options.

Source: “15 Best Self-Publishing Platforms for Your Book” from the blog “What We Reading.”



Blue Moon of Kentucky

Scottsville business keeps on shining

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Josh Starrett and his wife, Mechelle Knight, were selling concessions at events to supplement their income when they started to notice something. “Everywhere we went was a portable toilet,” Josh says. “I thought, ‘Maybe there’s something to this.’”

It was a lightbulb-over-the-head moment for Josh, who already ran a business that made tarps and covers for dump trucks and farm equipment. It was a reboot of a business his parents had owned in Indiana before selling it and moving to Scottsville to retire. “It’s kind of a seasonal business,” Josh says. “When the farmers are working, so are we. But when they’re watching their crops grow, there’s not a whole lot to do.”

In the meantime, he and Mechelle sold concessions. Or they did, until they saw the portable toilets. “I started doing some research and talking to people, and I learned the largest provider in Bowling Green was ready to retire after about 25 years,” Josh says. “So, I had a conversation with him, and we purchased it. That was about 13 years ago now.”

GROWTH BUSINESS

Since then, Blue Moon Sanitation has grown from servicing about 100 portable toilets to about 1,000. Josh and Mechelle also expanded into offering roll-off dumpsters, residential and commercial garbage collection service, temporary fencing for job sites and 20-foot and 40-foot containers for temporary storage.

Josh attributes much of the increase in business to “a timing thing”—noting that the country was in a recession and construction was at its slowest when they bought the business. But it wasn’t long before the economy bounced back.

But good timing wasn’t the only factor. “My philosophy was just don’t tell a customer no,” he says. “Also, I think a lot of my competition just got to the size they wanted to be, and they didn’t want to be any bigger. So, we never told the customer no and figured out how to do what they needed.”

Currently, Blue Moon employs anywhere from 18-20 people, but that can fluctuate. “We’ve been growing, so it changes fast,” Josh says.

FAR LEFT: Blue Moon Sanitation's coverage areas include Allen, Warren, Barren, Logan, Edmonson, Butler and Simpson counties in Kentucky, and Robertson, Sumner and Wilson counties in Tennessee.

TOP: Josh Starrett rides a Blue Moon Sanitation truck.

BELOW: Josh guides a residential waste bin on the garbage truck. Waste collection is one of the services Blue Moon Sanitation provides.

the toilets were called units," he says. "Come to find out, a lot of people liked that slogan. So, we brought it back and started using it more."

BUSINESSES NEED BROADBAND

Bringing Blue Moon headquarters to Josh's hometown of Scottsville turned out to be a smart move, too. Today, the business runs on cloud-based software and applications, which are helped along by NCTC's fast and reliable fiber broadband service.

"It's very important for us with all our billing and tracking and routing," Josh says. "It's just nice that our small town has fiber, and then you can go to these bigger cities, and they don't—or they're just starting to get it."

One time, he says, Mechelle called one of their software suppliers to fix a glitch. "The software creator kept saying, 'Well, it's your internet speed—you don't have enough speed,'" Josh says, chuckling as he remembers the call. "Then Mechelle ran the speed test and sent him a screenshot, and he was blown away by how fast our NCTC internet service was and started backtracking. He said, 'Well, obviously it's not the speed. Let's find out what's going on.'"

NCTC's commitment and dedication to its customers is something Josh can appreciate as a business owner. "I'm always trying to push that kind of thing to the people I'm around," he says. "Let's spend some of this money on the internet. The pandemic showed us how important it is."

On a business and progress level, he compares it to when TVA brought electricity to rural areas of the South in the 1930s. "I feel like it's the same with the internet," he says. "Let's get this infrastructure to rural areas. Now is the time." 📶

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Blue Moon Sanitation is a family-owned, Scottsville-based company offering portable toilets, residential and commercial garbage collection and roll-off dumpsters for large and small job sites. It also offers temporary fencing for job sites and 20-foot and 40-foot containers for temporary storage. The coverage areas include Allen, Warren, Barren, Logan, Edmonson, Butler and Simpson counties in Kentucky, and Robertson, Sumner and Wilson counties in Tennessee. For more information, visit bluemoonsoky.com, email sales@bluemoonportapot.com or call 270-843-2224. You can also find the business on Facebook, Instagram and X.



Photos courtesy of The Decease Group

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When Josh bought the business, he wanted to tone down the play on words in Blue Moon's name. "The slogan on all his stickers and things was, 'We want your stinkin' business,'" Josh says. "I wanted to take the stigma away from it."

"The first thing I wanted to do was clean all that up, be very professional, put the employees in uniform and make sure all

Holiday Simplicity

Breakfast casseroles are a gift for busy hosts

Make-ahead casseroles can make the difference between holiday stress and satisfaction. From sweet to savory, there are many choices. Here are several to try this season.



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

BLUEBERRY PANCAKE CASSEROLE

Crumb Topping:

- 1/2 cup flour
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Pancakes:

- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 tablespoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups whole buttermilk
- 1/2 cup milk
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1-2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest
- 2 cups blueberries
- Maple syrup, for serving

Crumb topping: The day before, in a medium bowl, combine flour, sugars, cinnamon and salt. Add melted butter and stir until fully incorporated. Cover and refrigerate.

Pancakes: Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish and set aside.

In a large bowl, combine flour, sugar, salt, baking powder and baking soda.

In a separate bowl, combine eggs, buttermilk, milk, melted butter, lemon zest and vanilla extract. Whisk wet ingredients until well combined. Add wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and stir until just combined. The batter will be lumpy. Do not overmix.

Pour the batter into the greased baking dish. Sprinkle the blueberries over the top. Remove the crumb topping from the fridge and crumble over the top of the blueberries and batter. Bake for 35-45 minutes, until puffed and light golden brown. Use a toothpick to check the center for doneness. Serve warm with maple syrup.

SCRAMBLED EGG BAKE

- 4 slices bacon
- 8 ounces dried beef
- 2 4-ounce cans mushrooms, drained
- 1/2 cup butter, divided
- 1/2 cup flour
- 4 cups whole milk
- 16 eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk

Saute the bacon until almost done. Add dried beef, mushrooms and 1/4 cup butter. While hot, add flour and stir in whole milk. Simmer sauce until thickened and smooth, stirring constantly.

Beat eggs with evaporated milk and salt. Scramble in remaining 1/4 cup butter.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Ladle a layer of sauce into the dish followed by a layer of scrambled eggs. Repeat layers, ending with a layer of sauce. Garnish with mushrooms and bacon. Cover with foil and bake at 275 F for 1 hour.

To make ahead: Make casserole, cover and refrigerate. Bake as directed.



FRENCH TOAST CASSEROLE

- 1 12- to 14-ounce loaf French or sour-dough bread. Stale bread works great.
- 1 8-ounce package full-fat cream cheese, softened
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 3 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided
- 8 eggs
- 2/3 cup packed brown sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 1/4 cups whole milk

Topping:

- 1/3 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cold and cubed
- Maple syrup and/or powdered sugar for topping

Grease a 9-by-13-inch casserole with nonstick spray. Either cut the bread into 1-inch cubes or tear it into preferred size. Spread half of the cubes into prepared baking pan.

Using a hand-held or stand mixer with a whisk attachment, beat the cream cheese

on medium-high speed until completely smooth. Beat in the powdered sugar and 1/4 teaspoon vanilla until combined. Drop random spoonfuls of cream cheese mixture on top of the bread. Layer the remaining bread cubes on top of cream cheese. Make sure some cream cheese is still exposed on top. Set aside.

Whisk the eggs, milk, cinnamon, brown sugar and remaining vanilla together until no brown sugar lumps remain. Pour evenly over the bread. Cover the pan tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 3-4 hours or up to 24 hours. Overnight is best.

When ready to bake, remove from the refrigerator and uncover while you make the topping.

Mix the brown sugar, flour and cinnamon. Then, use a pastry cutter or your hands to cut the cold butter into the topping mixture until crumbly.

Bake at 350 F for 45-60 minutes. You can use a knife to check the French toast—it should come out mostly clean when the dish is ready. Avoid putting the knife into the cream cheese dollop, which could give a false reading.

SAVORY RICE CEREAL CASSEROLE

- 2 pounds pork sausage
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 3 cups Rice Krispies
- 3 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 6 eggs
- 2 cans cream of celery soup
- 1/2 cup milk



In a skillet, cook sausage with onion until meat is no longer pink and onions are tender; drain. Transfer mixture to a lightly greased 9-by-13-inch casserole. Top with layers of rice, cereal and cheese. In a bowl beat the eggs with the soup and milk. Spread mixture on top. Cover with foil and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Remove foil and bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean. Let stand for 5-10 minutes before serving.

Note: Making this a day ahead helps to soften the cereal. It can be baked right away, but the cereal may still be crispy. 📺



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