

The logo for nctc, featuring a stylized leaf icon to the left of the lowercase letters "nctc".

nctc

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2022

CONNECTION

A photograph of three people in historical attire at a Christmas market. On the left, a man in a top hat and dark coat reads a book. In the center, a woman in a bonnet and plaid dress reads a book. On the right, another woman in a bonnet and dark dress reads a book. A Christmas tree is visible in the background.

**Season's
Greetings!**

Christmas Marketplace
shines

**FEASTING WITH
EARL G. DUMPLINS**

**CHRISTMAS
TREE FARMS**



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Rural broadband thrives in 2022

The commitment and professionalism of rural broadband providers creates lasting and substantive improvements, bringing essential services that bridge the gap in internet performance between rural and metropolitan areas. In many cases, NTCA members offer even more robust services than those available in larger cities.

In recent years, Congress has passed billions in funding for rural broadband. I was fortunate to attend a White House ceremony last year for the signing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which included over \$60 billion for broadband projects.

NTCA has worked to ensure this funding goes to communities that need it most, as well as to providers, such as yours, with a long history of servicing their neighbors with the highest-quality broadband.

While broadband expansion is a priority, we've continued our focus on advocacy, including working with the Federal Communications Commission to ensure the long-term viability of the Universal Service Fund. It's a program that helps Americans in hard-to-serve areas keep pace with services found in more densely populated communities.

We've also expanded our Smart Rural Community program to highlight the great things robust broadband access brings to rural America — it's not just cities that are "smart!" Over 240 providers are part of the program. Visit smartruralcommunity.org for more information.

As we celebrate our wins from this year, we're looking forward to an even better 2023. 📶

TO ALL WHO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Thank you

FOR ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Fast internet access is essential for rural communities to thrive in a fast-changing, highly connected world.



High-Speed Internet



Voice Communications



Videoconferencing



Telehealth



Business-level Data Tools



Online Education



Streaming Video & Music

Professionals in your community make this possible — working daily to help you lead a better life.

Thank you for all you do!

Business is booming

Apps help small business owners thrive

Running a small business is no easy task. There's a long list of things to keep track of, from inventory and sales to payroll and budgeting. It can get overwhelming staying ahead of the curve.

Thankfully, there's a wide array of apps geared toward making the life of a small business owner easier. Listed below are some of the best apps in 2022 for small businesses.

POINT OF SALE SYSTEMS

These systems allow small businesses to complete sales and ring up customers. According to NerdWallet, restaurants require POS systems that provide coordination and table management, while a retail store requires inventory management features.

Square — The POS offered by the financial tech company Square meets all these requirements and much more. Square is easy to use, offering transparent pricing, live support and compatibility with iPhone, iPad and Android devices. The first magnetic stripe credit card reader is free, and there is even a free plan available for small businesses that don't require advanced functions. While many payment processors have hidden monthly fees, Square doesn't charge by the month. Instead, you pay 2.6% + 10 cents for each credit card transaction for unlimited devices.

ACCOUNTING AND BUDGETING

Accounting software helps small businesses that may not be able to hire a full-time, in-house accountant. With these apps, you can track profit margins, revenues, expenses and budgets to understand the health of your business.

Intuit QuickBooks — Intuit QuickBooks is the industry standard and leader for small business accounting software in 2022, according to NerdWallet. It offers a multitude of service tiers, so it can easily be scaled to the size of the business it serves. It is accessible anywhere from QuickBooks online to the cloud-based version. Some of QuickBooks' best features include a full suite of reports, double-entry accounting, ease of accessibility and sharing with outside accountants, live service bookkeeping support and easy mobile access. Pricing is \$25 a month with other monthly payment tiers (\$50, \$80 and \$180 respectively).

PAYROLL

Paying employees on time is essential to operating a business. Extra help tracking hours and payments can allow small businesses owners to give attention to many other daily aspects of running their companies.



Patriot Payroll — While there are lots of payroll apps on the market, a majority of them are so high-priced that the cost outweighs the benefit of extra help for smaller companies. Patriot Payroll has an affordable price point — \$10 a month, plus \$4 an employee — while offering the same services and benefits as its more expensive counterparts. These services include a one-month free trial, HR support and coverage for up to 100 employees.

INVENTORY

Tracking inventory is a crucial part of staying ahead of the curve for any business. It is no easy task without help, which is why large corporations dedicate entire teams and extensive software programs just for inventory.

Sortly — With built-in barcode scanning that can track stock across multiple warehouses, Sortly has everything you need to manage inventory on the go. It offers both barcode and QR code scanning, giving you the flexibility to use what works best for your business. It even has an offline mode, so a signal interruption won't slow you down. Keep scanning incoming and outgoing items and seamlessly sync up once you're back online. 📱

Annual reflections

Together, we make our community better

As the final days of 2022 unfold and we enter a season of celebration and remembrance, I enjoy the opportunity to reflect on this place we call home and the role of NCTC.



**JOHNNY
MCCLANAHAN**
President/CEO

Many of us lead lives where the accelerator is always pushed to the floor. Between raising families, managing busy careers, volunteering and embracing active pastimes, everyone is flying through life. But the holidays — while busy in their own way — are a chance to enjoy traditions like sharing family memories, great meals and some laughs. We might even find quiet moments, if we're lucky.

During these times of reflection, I appreciate a theme that runs through our community: neighbors helping neighbors. In so many ways, these connections are what make rural places like ours special. We rally together in hard times. We celebrate good times. At NCTC, we also embrace the teamwork needed to make the success of 2022 possible.

For example, we navigated the second year of an uncertain economy and faced pandemic-related staffing issues even as demand for our services increased. We worked hard to limit the effects these shortages had on you and your ability to do business with us.

But that isn't all. We continue to manage rising operational costs with the goal of minimizing how those increased expenses impact rates. One of these ways is to provide a program to offer \$30 monthly discounts for households qualifying under guidelines established by the federal Affordable Connectivity Program. While challenges exist, we never stray from embracing ways to put your needs first.

We also appreciate how vital internet access is to so many people, and we want to help as much as we can. We've had a record number of internet installations this year, and we're making sure there's more room for fun with our new feature-packed streaming TV service.

Our work won't stop anytime soon, either. Construction needed to extend our fiber optic network to the city of Scottsville should wrap by the end of the year. Also, Warren RECC and NCTC teamed up to offer fiber optic internet service in Warren County. This partnership allows us to connect more people to the world with cutting-edge technology. It has grown to include parts of Grayson, Simpson, Edmonson, and Butler counties.

NCTC also continues to emphasize supporting the community in every way possible, including making an investment in the people who may become our future leaders. Each year, we award college scholarships. In 2022, six area students received a \$1,000 award.

We also appreciate that our community is like hundreds of others — rural areas dependent on high-speed internet for health care, education, numerous jobs and so much more. At every opportunity we lobby our governmental leaders to provide critical support for rural broadband.

I must thank everyone who is part of the NCTC family for making all these successes possible. From everyone at NCTC, have a wonderful Thanksgiving and a merry Christmas. 📺

The North Central Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by NCTC, © 2022. 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:



A band of costumed carolers make the mood jolly and bright at A Christmas Marketplace in Red Boiling Springs.
See story Page 12.

Photo submitted by
Meggie Briggs Ellis

NCTC celebrates employees with service awards from 2020 to 2022

Earlier this year, NCTC recognized its employees for their years of service in a ceremony that combined three years' worth of accolades, which the COVID-19 pandemic had delayed.



NCTC President and CEO Johnny McClanahan, far left, presented service awards for 2020 to the following people: Troy Davis, 20 years; Chad Swindle, 20 years; Katrina Brown, 5 years; Shay Tom Clariday, 20 years; Amberia Driver, 5 years; Matt Wyatt, 20 years; Amy Fryman, 10 years; Johnny Young, 20 years; Jeremy Dillehay, 20 years; and Tim Collins, 20 years. Not pictured: Dondi Malone, 10 years; Toddy Clay, 20 years; and Dwayne Colter, 20 years.



Johnny McClanahan, far left, presented service awards for 2021 to the following people: Evan Birdwell, 5 years; Barry Hiatt, 10 years; Natasha Kittrell, 20 years; Daniel Kelley, 5 years; Janna Kirby, 20 years; Troy Wells, 10 years; Dawn Scholl, 20 years; Troy Mungle, 10 years; Richard Wix, 25 years; Nelson White, 25 years; Anthony Reid, 10 years; Chris Carlyle, 10 years; and Jon Blankenship, 25 years. Not pictured: Billy Moran, 5 years; and Jeff Powell, 20 years.



Johnny McClanahan, far left, presented service awards for January through July 2022 to the following people: Kim Button, 25 years; Anita Holland, 25 years; Malita Brawner, 20 years; and Stacey Sutton, 20 years.

Service and sacrifice

NCTC would like to extend a warm thank you to all our veterans for their dedication to our country. On Nov. 11 and every day, please make sure to honor those who served.



Leaving the country?

Make sure to adjust your email settings

NCTC's email system keeps you secure from identity thieves and hackers with its default settings. However, if you're leaving the country, you might need to adjust your settings to make sure you get the notifications you need. Here's how:

To access your email when you're out of the country, follow these steps:

- Under Settings, click on Security Options. The Security and Authentications Settings page will pop up.
- From there, scroll down to **Countries I Can Access My Email From**. You'll see two menus: one for **Allowed Countries** and one for **Blocked Countries**.
- From there, choose the countries from which you want to be able to access your email, and feel free to block any other countries.



CONTACT SANTA!

NCTC's Santa Line gives you a direct connection to St. Nick!

Santa Claus is coming to town. Are you ready? NCTC offers easy access to the big guy by phone or email. Call 615-67-SANTA (615-677-2682) or email him at santa@nctc.com.

Free movies in December!

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



Don't get your tinsel in a tangle

Story by ANNE BRALY

Decorating the Christmas tree is a beloved holiday tradition, but before you can hang the ornaments, take photos of the grandkids beneath its boughs or open presents beside it, you've got to find one.

Visiting a Christmas tree farm can put you in the spirit of the season as you make family memories while supporting a local business. And you'll bring home the absolute freshest trees, wreaths and greenery possible, so everything will last much longer.

"The whole idea of starting a family tradition is about creating a fun environment that the whole family can participate in," says Greg Shell, who, along with his wife, Weeta, established Shell's Christmas Tree Farm in 1988 on their property in Tuscumbia, Alabama. "It gives people a chance to slow down and spend time together creating special memories."

It's a family business for Greg and Weeta, whose two sons, Aaron and Chad, have helped out on the farm since they were 8 years old. Now grown men, they bring their own families to help when the Christmas tree season is in full swing. With more than 3,000 trees growing on the 44-acre farm, would-be buyers have plenty of options. Available species include Virginia pine, Leyland cypress, variegated Leylands, Carolina sapphires and blue ice cypress. Also, the Shells bring in freshly cut Fraser firs from the Blue Ridge Mountains and sell them starting Thanksgiving Day.

Shoppers receive tags with their names, and the Shells provide bow saws for those looking to cut their own trees. Or participants can simply tie their tags to trees, which staff will cut and then measure and shake before drilling holes in their bottoms and netting them for transport. Prices start at \$8 per foot.

But don't stop with the tree. Enjoy a warm cup of apple cider, visit with Santa, let the kids play in their own area, and enjoy the bonfire. There are also food trucks and a huge room filled with holiday greenery. "We're all about offering something for families to do together," Greg says. "And we're now seeing fourth-generation families visit our farm. It's pretty cool to see families want to continue to the next generation."

For more information, visit shellschristmastreefarm.com.

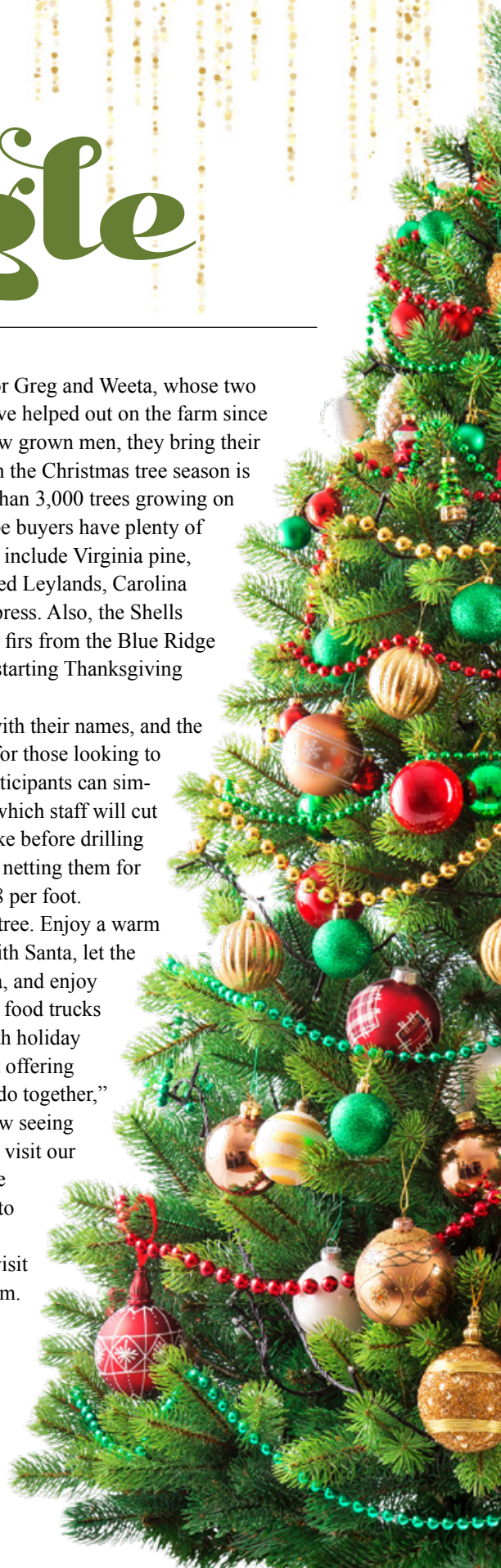
Get in the holiday spirit — visit a Christmas tree farm. You'll have a chance to make family memories, possibly sample tasty treats and return home with a fresh, beautiful tree.



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TREE FARMS ACROSS THE SOUTH

Sycamore Springs Christmas Tree Farm, Jamestown, Tennessee — White and Scotch pines, Norway spruce and Leyland cypress. Search the Gingerbread Trail through the forest for the runaway gingerbread men, explore the Tree Treasure Maze to find the real treasure of Christmas. Browse in The Treehouse gift shop and enjoy homemade cookies, hot chocolate and apple cider. Full details are online at sycamorespringsfarmtn.com.

Roberts Family Farm, Guston, Kentucky — White pine, Fraser fir and balsam fir, plus local crafts and Momma Rob's Bakery. Learn more at robertsfamilyfarmky.com.

Lebanon Christmas Tree Farm, Ridgeville, South Carolina — Leyland cypress, Carolina sapphire, spruce pine and Virginia pine. Also, hayrides, a barrel train ride for the kiddies and more. There's also an on-site restaurant, The Farmer's Daughter. Learn more at lebanonchristmastree.com.

Thornhill Farm Christmas Trees, Pisgah, Alabama — Leyland cypress and white pines. Enjoy hot chocolate or warm cider while they cut, shake and bag your chosen tree for you. Online: thornhillchristmastrees.com.

Green Cedar Tree Farm, Nicholasville, Kentucky — Freshly cut Fraser firs and blue spruce trees from the Blue Ridge Mountains available on Saturday, Nov. 26, for the farm's annual Green Cedar Christmas, a festival with free hot cocoa, lessons in making holiday wreaths, farm animal encounters and live Christmas music. Also, find the perfect spot to get your family picture taken for your photo Christmas cards. Any trees left over will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. Details online at greencedarfarm.com.

Turkey Creek Christmas Tree Farm, McCormick, South Carolina — White pine, Virginia pine, Leyland cypress, Eastern red cedar, blue ice cypress and Carolina sapphire. Play area for the kids. Check out the farm's Facebook page for the latest offerings. Learn more at turkeycreekchristmastreefarm.com. 📱

Tips for a fresh tree

Naturally, a newly cut tree is going to be fresher than one that's been on a lot for a while, but it still needs some TLC. Here are some tips to help your tree last the season:

- 🌲 Start with a healthy, vibrant tree. You're going to get that from a tree farm, but be sure to trim any lower or dead branches.
- 🌲 Make a clean, straight cut across the bottom. Most tree farms will do this for you and drill a hole in the bottom if you have the kind of tree stand that needs one.
- 🌲 Water, water, water. Get the tree in water as soon as you come home and continue to water every day.
- 🌲 Keep the tree cool and away from any heat source that will dry it out.
- 🌲 Use LED lights. They don't get as hot, though they won't give the traditional light you may desire.
- 🌲 After Christmas, recycle your Christmas tree. Many towns offer a free service that turns them into mulch.

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NORTH CENTRAL TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE

BALANCE SHEET

Dec. 31, 2021

ASSETS

Current Assets	\$ 60,498,420
Other Assets	
Investments in Affiliated Companies	11,807,627
Nonregulated Investments	307,925
Total Current/Other Assets	12,115,552
Telecommunications Plant	216,502,835
Less Accumulated Depreciation	129,741,708
Net Telecommunications Plant	86,761,127
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 159,375,099

LIABILITIES and MEMBERS' EQUITIES

Current Liabilities	\$ 13,932,105
Long-Term Debt	18,459,038
Other Liabilities	11,671,859
Members' Equities	115,312,097
TOTAL LIABILITIES and MEMBERS' EQUITIES	\$ 159,375,099



Eat at Earl's

Earl G. Dumplin's elevates the everyday

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Earl G. Dumplin's, one of Scottsville's most popular eateries and catering services, sprang to life after little more than a chance phone call. It was 2006, and Mike Wood and Brent Ramsy were managing a popular chain of restaurants in northern Kentucky and Ohio when a man reached out to Mike with a proposition.

"He represented a group of gentlemen who owned an old Long John Silver's building," Mike says. "He told me they were willing to finance it for us."

Mike, a Scottsville native, had been living out of town at the time. Still, the offer intrigued him. "I'd never really thought about coming back, but that got the wheels turning," he says. "That was the birth of it."

SOUTHERN CUISINE AND MORE

A year later, Mike joined forces with his then-co-worker, Brent, to open Earl G. Dumplin's. "The name Earl Dumplin's came to me while I was driving from Cincinnati to Lexington," Mike says. "Someone else offered up the 'G' because, they said, 'It's going to be good.' I like to tell people the name fell out of the sky — almost literally."

But it's the food that makes a restaurant, and longtime restaurant veterans know it. They wanted great food that's straightforward enough for the everyday, but special enough to make a visit an event. Mike knew what people liked, and he found the side dishes lacking at most restaurants.



TOP: Earl G. Dumplin's in Scottsville serves up country cooking with a twist.

LEFT: Chicken tenders are one of the most popular items on the menu.

BELOW: Mike Wood, left, and Brent Ramsy, owners of Earl G. Dumplin's, pride themselves on the restaurant's popularity as a gathering spot and catering service.

"I describe our food as hillbilly with a leg up," he says. "On weekends, you can get prime rib with turnip greens, or some people will order grilled salmon with a baked potato and pinto beans. I want people to have great food but still get all the sides you'd get at your grandmother's house."

GROWING WITH THE TIMES

Mike and Brent were long-time customers of NCTC, but they switched to try out the competition thinking the grass might be greener on the other side. It wasn't. After enduring poor service, they returned to NCTC, and they were able to start online ordering with NCTC's high-speed fiber internet.

Today, the restaurant employs nearly 60 people, does a brisk catering business and sees dozens of regulars multiple times a week. "We have some people who eat two of their meals here in a day," Brent says. "Our regulars are really loyal." 📞



Check out Earl G.'s

Earl G. Dumplin's offers breakfast, lunch, dinner, catering and event space at 1707 Old Gallatin Road in Scottsville, Kentucky. Online ordering is available at earlgdumplins.com and the Earl G. Dumplin's Facebook page. To book space or catering, call the restaurant at 270-239-3275. Gift cards are available through the website.

Your *connected* gift guide

6 gift ideas that make the most of your high-speed internet

The holiday shopping season is here, and there has never been a better time to find the perfect gadget that takes advantage of your high-speed internet connection. From tools that make working from home look good to devices to unwind with, high-speed service will help these gifts shine for the techie in your life.

1. Google Nest Hub, \$50

Give the gift of better mornings with the Google

Nest Hub. Designed for the bedside, it can track sleep quality, update you on the weather and your calendar, stream music and video and control any smart home appliances you might have. It even has a built-in light sensor to make sure the screen is never too bright. Let's see an alarm clock do that.



2. Sonos Roam, \$180

The Roam is the perfect portable speaker for anyone on the move. Stream music, podcasts and more with great audio quality and take them from one room to the next with ease. Roam's Wi-Fi support automatically joins any other Sonos speakers around the house and also works as a smart speaker, connecting to Amazon's Alexa or Google Assistant.



3. Kindle Paperwhite, \$140

For the bookworm in the family, the Kindle Paperwhite is still the best e-reader around. The glare-free display is just like reading on real paper, while the 2021 model adds a warm light option to make reading at night easier on the eyes. Purchase new books or download old favorites in seconds without ever leaving your



favorite reading chair.

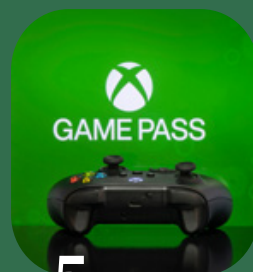
4. Logitech C920S Webcam, \$74

More people are working from home than ever before, so help the remote workers in your life look good while being productive. This Logitech webcam will offer a big upgrade over any built-in camera. It's also ideal for the livestreamers, offering great video quality at an affordable price.



5. Xbox Game Pass, \$9.99/month

If you're giving or receiving an Xbox Series X, Game Pass is a no-brainer. Essentially Netflix for games, the service offers hundreds of games on demand, from the biggest Xbox exclusives available on launch day to creative indies from your favorite developers. Download games in minutes with a fiber connection and discover something new.



6. Apple AirTag, \$30

Know someone who's always losing their keys? These tiny Bluetooth trackers are here to help. Attach them to your keys or anything else you're prone to misplacing, and the AirTag will leverage the network of nearby Apple devices to locate it — in some cases, within inches. For the Android user, the Tile Mate is just as handy. ☑



Tasty app-etizers

6 digital tools to level up your kitchen skills

Even the most experienced home cooks can use a little inspiration now and then. Fortunately, it's never been easier to find. The wide variety of cooking apps and websites available today make it easy to plan meals and even eat healthier. Whether you're looking to ditch the stacks of faded recipes, make something new or find video instructions to walk you through every step, these tools will bring a little extra flavor to your kitchen.



SideChef — If you're just starting out in the kitchen, SideChef is great for learning the basics. A cooking novice created the app for beginners, and it does away with fancy culinary terminology and instead offers dynamic guidance through recipes, providing step-by-step photos, hands-free voice commands and built-in timers. There are over 18,000 interactive smart recipes to try out, so pick your favorite and get cooking.



Food Network Kitchen — Craving something you just saw on the Food Network? The Food Network Kitchen features recipes from fan-favorite personalities and food writers, along with prep time, cook time and difficulty level. Any fan of the network will feel right at home in the app, which lets you search more than 80,000 recipes for categories like grilling, baking, kid-friendly and dairy-free.



Cookpad — For those looking for a more social cooking experience, Cookpad offers a community of home chefs around the world. Discover new ideas, share photos, ask questions and exchange advice. You can even take part in cooking challenges or online cooking classes. And since Cookpad's user base is global, there are plenty of international recipes to satisfy an adventurous palate.



Forks — From vegan lifestyle site Forks Over Knives, the Forks app offers over 600 recipes for anyone sticking to a plant-based diet. What the app lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality, convenience and ease of use. There are new recipes each week, and you can export your favorites to have a ready-made shopping list for your next grocery trip.



Mealime — Meal planning can be a headache, but Mealime makes it easy. The app curates recipe suggestions based on your preferences to help you find healthy new favorites. They're all guaranteed to take 30 minutes or less to cook, but you can also import recipes from the web to add more options.



Cook with Amber — Teenage cook Amber Kelley has been encouraging kids to get in the kitchen since 2012. Today, college keeps her pretty busy. But her YouTube channel, Cook with Amber, still features years' worth of videos that walk kids through their own healthy and delicious kitchen adventures so you can make dinner and memories together. 📺



From mule barn to A CHRISTMAS MARKETPLACE

THE STORY BEHIND ONE OF RED BOILING SPRINGS' MOST POPULAR VENUES AND EVENTS

Story by JEN CALHOUN

April Patterson used to look at her late grandpa's barn and sigh. A telephone pole was just about the only thing keeping the decades-old structure in Red Boiling Springs from total collapse.

Tearing it down was not an option, however. Her grandfather, Lemuel Smith, loved that barn. It's where he kept the mules he prized and where he housed the dairy cows that helped his family survive during the lean years. It felt like the heartbeat of the farm. So, when it came time to make a decision, April chose to build it up instead of tear it down. "Seeing Pa's barn with just that telephone pole holding it up made me sad," she says. "It's part of our family's story, and I wanted to make sure it lived on."

GOING TO MARKET

Today, the Barn at Acres of Grace Farms serves as a way to bring people together while also helping small businesses and the community thrive — three things April is passionate about.

Not only does the barn serve as a wedding and special events venue, but it also hosts a farm-to-table dinner in the fall. A few times a year, April hosts A Southern Marketplace and A Christmas Marketplace, which are two-day barn sales full of shopping, food and festivities.

During the events, dozens of vendors and food trucks from all over the region

gather in and around the barn to sell everything from jewelry to home decor and much more. The events help small businesses and cottage industries reach a larger customer base while also letting them be part of something big and growing.

"I love entrepreneurs," says April, whose late father, Doug Smith, started a sawmill and Honest Abe Log Homes. Her husband, Nick Patterson, is a cattle farmer who practices sustainability and land stewardship. "I respect their drive and spirit. This is one way to show them some love and support."

The bustling festival atmosphere isn't the only thing April brings to the table. Portions of the proceeds go to building up the community, she says. The events have raised enough money to purchase clothing, school supplies, hygiene products and other items for children in the foster care system, as well as toys, food and necessities for families in need. They also support the local volunteer fire department.

"We believe in giving back," April says. "Showing love and support and giving — that's kind of what it's all about."

TENNESSEE CHRISTMAS

While A Southern Marketplace events take place in the spring and fall, A Christmas Marketplace fills the holiday season with joy and excitement. This year, the event will start on Thursday, Dec. 1, and run through Saturday, Dec. 3.



A Christmas Marketplace happens Dec. 1-3 at Acres of Grace Farms in Red Boiling Springs.



Carolers dress in Victorian costumes at A Christmas Marketplace.

Molly Cooper, event coordinator for the marketplaces, adorns the farm and its buildings with millions of twinkling lights, decorated live trees and a magical air that feels more like a movie set than a cattle farm. Carolers dressed in Victorian costumes sing as they stroll the grounds, and food trucks offer everything from



Santa always visits A Christmas Marketplace in Red Boiling Springs.

Photography contributed by Meggie Briggs-Ellis

ACRES OF GRACE, A MARKETPLACE AND MORE!

A Christmas Marketplace is an indoor-outdoor market that features 80 to 90 retail and food vendors from all over the region from Thursday, Dec. 1, to Saturday, Dec. 3.

Check off your Christmas list while enjoying twinkling lights, food trucks and a holiday atmosphere full of decorations and strolling carolers in Victorian costumes. The market is at Acres of Grace Farms, 2258 Henson Road in Red Boiling Springs.

Acres of Grace also hosts A Southern Marketplace in the spring and fall, as well as an annual farm-to-table dinner. The barn is available to rent for weddings and other special events. In addition, Acres of Grace will soon offer overnight farm stays in a beautifully converted grain bin.

For hours and additional information on all the marketplace events, visit asouthernmarketplace.com, or find it on Facebook and Instagram. You can also visit acresofgracefarms.com to find out more about the event venue and the farm.

Shoppers come for the holiday atmosphere, unique gifts and great food at A Christmas Marketplace.



hamburgers and barbecue to a full array of desserts. “We bring in anywhere from 80 to 90 vendors, and they set up to sell their jewelry, baskets, boutique items, home decor and so many other things,” April says. “Customers have access to all these small businesses in one place, and it’s decorated so beautifully. The spirit of Christmas is giving, so to see people shopping for their loved ones makes it even more special.”

In the coming months, the family plans to unveil farm-stay accommodations built out of a giant grain bin, as well as a commercial kitchen for entrepreneurs looking to grow their businesses without the expense of building commercial kitchens on their own. “We are all about supporting one another, encouraging one another,” says April, who has made it her mission to do just that. “People need that, especially these days.” 📩

A tasty tradition

Celebrate the season with sweet holiday treats

Baking is a time-honored tradition in so many households this time of year. Kids love sprinkles, and holiday hosts appreciate having sweets on hand for unexpected guests and tasty gifts for neighbors and friends.

There are a few important tips that can make your holiday baking a stress-free experience and perhaps a little more rewarding for those who will be enjoying the results of your efforts. Many of us have had baking disasters that weren't funny at the time but made for entertaining stories later. That doesn't need to be the case, though, if you:

▶ **Organize** — Make lists of all the things

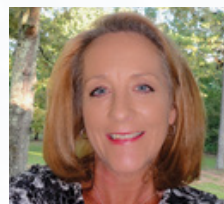
you want to bake and the ingredients you'll need. Do this a couple of days ahead of time so you can decide what will need to be frozen and used in coming weeks, such as cookie dough.

▶ **Check your pantry for the essentials** — Make sure you have plenty of sugar, flour, butter, eggs and the all-important extracts of the holiday season: vanilla, almond and, oh, yes, peppermint. There's nothing more aggravating than getting halfway through a recipe only to open the sugar bag and discover it's nearly empty. Don't forget cooking spray and parchment paper, too. You'll be needing them.

▶ **Make sure you have plenty of room in your refrigerator** — Some baked goods need to be chilled. This is a good time to throw out what's been in the fridge a little too long or to use up any leftovers.

▶ **Ponder presentation** — Check your closets and cabinets for decorative cookie tins. You'll need them for more than just cookies, they're also great for caramel corn, fudge, brownies and bars. A colorful holiday tin is so much more festive than a zip-top bag with a stick-on bow.

Now, get baking. It's almost Christmas!



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Photography by MARK GILLILAND | Food Styling by RHONDA GILLILAND





HOLIDAY CARAMEL CORN

One word of caution: be sure to weed out all of the unpopped kernels so there are no unexpectedly hard bites in this delicious, sweet-salty snack.

- 3 quarts popped popcorn (about 2 bags microwave popcorn, popped)
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter (no substitute)
- 1 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1/4 cup dark corn syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups mixed nuts

Heat oven to 250 F.

Place popped popcorn into a large, 4-inch-deep buttered baking pan, and place it in the oven to keep warm. In a large saucepan, melt the butter over

low heat. Stir in brown sugar, corn syrup and salt. Bring to a soft boil, stirring constantly. Boil without stirring for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and quickly stir in the baking soda and vanilla.

Remove popcorn from the oven. Slowly pour syrup mixture over popcorn, and add nuts, mixing well. This may prove a bit difficult at first, as the caramel mixture hardens quickly once removed from the heat. But as you stir it while it's baking in the oven, it will soften and get much easier to stir.

Butter a large cookie sheet, and turn the popcorn mixture into the pan. Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. You don't want the popcorn to get overly browned. Remove from the oven and cool completely. Break apart. Store in tightly covered tins.



CRANBERRY ORANGE HOLIDAY NUT BREAD

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 cup butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel
- 3/4 cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- 6 ounces chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease the bottom of a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan and set aside.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Stir in the butter until the mixture is crumbly. Stir

in the orange peel, orange juice, vanilla and eggs, just until the batter comes together. Be careful not to overmix. Fold in the fresh cranberries and nuts.

Transfer the batter to the prepared baking pan. Bake until a wooden toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean: about 50 minutes to 1 hour. Cool in the pan for 5 minutes before loosening the sides of the loaf from the pan. Transfer the loaf to a rack to cool completely before slicing. Let cool completely and wrap with plastic wrap.



PEANUT BUTTER STARS

A classic holiday cookie. These freeze well, so make plenty to enjoy throughout the season.

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup peanut butter
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar

- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- Chocolate kisses or stars

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

In a large mixing bowl, beat shortening and peanut butter with an electric mixer on medium-high speed for 30 seconds. Add 1/2 cup of the granulated sugar, along with the brown sugar, baking powder and baking soda. Beat until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in egg, milk and vanilla until combined. Beat in as much of the flour as you can with the mixer. Stir in any remaining flour.

Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll balls in 1/4 cup granulated sugar. Place 2 inches apart on an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake for 10-12 minutes or until edges are firm and bottoms are lightly browned.

Immediately press a chocolate star or kiss into the center of each cookie. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool. Store in airtight containers. Makes 54 cookies. 📄



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