



MARCH/APRIL 2023

CONNECTION



Radical Rides

Boerne Stage Kustoms crafts classics

STYLISH WAGONS

ADVENTUROUS FUN



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Fresh opportunities

New funding supports rural broadband

Closing the digital divide is an ongoing effort and not a one-time mission. Every month the diligent work of NTCA members helps to bridge these gaps. Even in the most remote areas, telcos are building world-class broadband networks and enabling critical, life-altering technologies and applications.

Our leaders here in Washington, D.C., continue to notice the gains being made in communities like yours. While the 118th Congress is still getting its feet under it, so to speak, we are seeing interest in several broadband-related bills that could help our members and their customers, and federal agencies continue to implement and execute on various broadband funding programs.

As community-based providers with a long history of service and successful performance, telcos are in a good position to vie for critical financial support for broadband deployment, such as the \$42.5 billion Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program. This year, we expect the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to announce allocation of this money to the states and U.S. territories, and, eventually, grants could be given out to providers like yours to serve even more people.

In anticipation of these distributions, we spent much of 2022 on Capitol Hill and with local, state and federal agencies to urge them to work closely with NTCA members. We also brought key decision-makers to NTCA meetings, conferences and webinars, and we provided members-only tools to help position telcos. 📞

Fiber internet

It makes a difference



Fiber internet makes essential tools and services possible: commerce, education, entertainment, personal communication and more.

Here are a few examples, highlighted by the Fiber Broadband Association, offering a detailed look at how fiber networks make a difference:



1 FASTER INTERNET: Creating a network capable of keeping up with growing consumer demand for videos, music streaming and online gaming is no easy task. Fiber, however, consistently outpaces the fastest download and upload speeds of older technologies like cable, DSL and wireless.



2 INCREASED HOME VALUES: Studies have shown that fast, reliable broadband is rated as the single most important amenity for rented or multifamily homes. Access to fiber broadband increased rental and property values by as much as 8%.



3 FIBER NETWORKS HELP LOCAL ECONOMIES: There's growing evidence fiber connectivity not only encourages businesses to stay in their locations but also helps them grow and become more productive. It even attracts new businesses, particularly in high-tech industries.



4 SUSTAINABLE: The glass that makes fiber work so well is made from sand, which is plentiful and requires less energy and creates less pollution to acquire than older technologies.

This could have been an email

How digital literacy is shaping communication in the workplace

Story by DREW WOOLLEY



Clear communication can be a challenge at the best of times. But particularly for remote workers relying on digital chat and email tools, it's never been easier for wires to get crossed, even during simple exchanges.

ALWAYS ONLINE

In some cases, the generation gap can rear its head even before the first word has been typed or spoken. While baby boomers and members of Generation X tend to prefer doing business face-to-face or over the phone, younger generations are much more digitally inclined.

According to research from Purdue University, both millennials and Generation Z or Zoomers — people born between the mid-1990s and about 2010 — tend to prefer communicating by email, instant message, text and social media. Having grown up with access to high-speed internet, Zoomers expect a rapid response to messages, based on a survey by marketing company LeadSquared.

THANKS.

It's no secret periods at the end of lone sentences are falling by the wayside in texts, chats and social media. For some, it's a punctuational pet peeve. But for younger colleagues, the reappearance of that little dot can carry extra meaning.

For example, while some millennials and older generations might put a period after a short message like "Thanks" or "Good job," for Gen Z, that hard stop can imply coldness or sarcasm. Younger professionals are more likely to use exclamation points to express enthusiasm. So don't worry, they aren't yelling at you.

TBH, IDK

For those who came of age texting before phones could predict what you're trying to type, quick abbreviations for common phrases were a must. BTW (by the way), TBH (to be honest), IMO (in my opinion), JK (just kidding) and IDK (I don't know) are just a few examples.

While many of these abbreviations are now part of the internet's vocabulary, they can be a stumbling block for anyone who didn't grow up seeing them daily. When clarity is a priority, consider taking the extra few seconds to spell it out. 🗨️

A picture's worth a thousand words

As platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams become more popular, emoji are rapidly invading work chats. Many are self-explanatory and can help add some extra expression to a message. Others can be confusing or misinterpreted. So be sure you know what message you're sending.



While many people use the **smile emoji** to denote, well, a smile, some younger professionals interpret it more ironically. That may seem confusing, but just ask yourself if there's any warmth in that smile's cold, dead eyes.



By and large, the **thumbs up** should be saved as a response to a clear yes or no question, or to acknowledge that you've seen a comment that doesn't require a longer reply. Offering a thumbs up in conversations that are any more nuanced could cause confusion about whether any follow-up is needed or suggest you aren't giving the exchange your full attention.



This one is just a public service announcement. Despite — or maybe because — the **crying laughing emoji** is the world's most popular, according to Adobe, Gen Z has officially dubbed it cliché and uncool. If you're looking to stay up on the trends, consider changing things up with the skull emoji to let them know their joke really killed.

Working hard

Fast internet connects rural communities to new opportunities

One thing I very much appreciate about leading HCTC is that we're here to support the communities we serve as powerfully and in as many ways as we can. One of the best examples of this is our fast and reliable internet network, which opens opportunities for individuals, businesses, government and just about anyone who uses it.



CRAIG COOK
Chief Executive Officer

This potential to help others is particularly on my mind after seeing a report that there were about 10 million job openings late last year across the nation. Now, those numbers do fluctuate, but I think it's fair to say we're in a time when opportunity exists — and you must be able to take advantage.

Fortunately, our fast internet service can be the key needed to unlock the world of work-from-home jobs, which can range from positions with call centers and medical records companies to careers in technology or marketing. Really, that's just scratching the surface. No matter the industry, the innovative communications services provided by HCTC give you the opportunity to pursue these jobs.

Internet networks like ours can tie small towns and remote areas to national employers and well-paying professions. But having the resources and skills needed to do these jobs is just the beginning. After all, you still must land that new job.

The world of employment has changed rapidly in recent years, and tapping into all the opportunities requires fast internet and some new perspective. It's a fascinating landscape.

Consider that many companies and job recruitment sites now use artificial intelligence to weed through resumes, screening them so a person only sees those who make the cut. It's something that changes how you think about applying for a job. For instance, a CNBC article suggested listing job titles in reverse-chronological order, because the machine-based screening systems appreciate clearly structured information. Similarly, when writing a bulleted list of work experience, the first one should tie into a specific job requirement.

Also, internet-based companies like Indeed, Glassdoor and Monster connect job seekers with employers. For job seekers, these companies can provide not only daily updates of potential jobs but also offer tips for succeeding in a competitive job market.

Simply, the rules of the employment game have changed and, fortunately, you have the resources to change with them. Our communications services can help sites like Indeed come to life. These companies provide daily updates on new jobs, email blasts, tips and more.

Then, when you make a connection with a potential new employer, fast internet service can add even more of a polish. When remote jobs are on the table, videoconference interviews are common. Thankfully, fast, reliable internet can create lag-free, professional connections that put you and your abilities in the best possible light.

If all of this seems like a challenge to navigate, this same internet network can help with that, too. YouTube and Instagram have plenty of examples of experts offering advice. Meanwhile, professional social media sites like LinkedIn can help you boost your profile with potential employers.

All the resources and opportunities are made possible by fast internet service by HCTC, and we're committed to always providing you with the services needed to succeed. 📶

The HCTC Connection is a bimonthly magazine published by Hill Country Telephone Cooperative © 2023. It is distributed without charge to all member/owners of the cooperative.



HCTC is more than a provider of state-of-the-art telecommunications products and services. We are a member-owned cooperative with an elected board of directors who govern our organization using our bylaws, member input and business and industry conditions to guide their decisions. We are proud residents of the communities we serve, and we're dedicated to not only providing the best services possible, but doing so in a way that is ethical, safe and productive for our friends and neighbors. This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Mission Statement: To be the premier provider of modern telecommunications and broadband services throughout our region.

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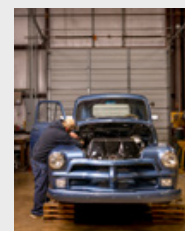
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On the Cover:



Over 15 years, owner Chris Shuler has built Boerne Stage Kustoms into an industry leader for custom automobiles. See story Page 9.

Photo by Gabe Rene Photos

CONNECT WITH US!

Did you know that **MARCH 10** is National Landline Telephone Day?

On March 10, 1876, Alexander Graham Bell made the first telephone call. From his Boston laboratory, the inventor used a prototype telephone to communicate with his assistant, Thomas Watson, who was in the next room. Bell's message? "Mr. Watson, come here. I want to see you."

Now, 147 years later, the landline technology Bell pioneered is far from obsolete. HCTC's crystal-clear voice service offers a host of benefits, including:

- Streamlined, multiline systems for businesses
- Reliable access to emergency services
- No dropped calls
- Unlimited local calls



LET'S GET SOCIAL!

Keep up to date on the latest developments from HCTC and the communities we serve. By following HCTC's social media channels you can learn about:

- Scholarship opportunities
- Local businesses
- The latest broadband trends
- The cooperative spirit at work

Give us a follow and stay in the know!



Facebook:
@HCTCTexas



Twitter:
@HCTC



Instagram:
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TIRED OF ROBOCALLS?

The Do Not Call Registry can help reduce the number of unwanted telemarketing calls you receive. Learn more at **donotcall.gov**, or call **888-382-1222**.

You must call from the telephone number you wish to register. For TTY, call **866-290-4236**.

**ALWAYS CALL
BEFORE YOU DIG**



**Know what's below.
Call before you dig.**

Common Ground Alliance

HIGH-ADRENALINE ADVENTURES

Story by ANNE BRALY

Texas is a must-see destination for outdoor thrill-seekers

As the saying goes, everything's bigger in Texas, and that includes the adrenaline-pumping excitement the state delivers. From the Gulf of Mexico to the Panhandle, the Lone Star State is a playground for thrilling adventures.

"From world-class rock climbing at Hueco Tanks State Park and Historic Site to heart-racing mountain climbing at Big Bend Ranch State Park to 50 miles of hiking at San Angelo State Park, Texas State Parks have exciting adventures for everyone," says Tara Humphreys, director of interpretation for Texas State Parks.

So if you're looking for some Texas-size fun, here are a few places to get your heart racing and satisfy your need for speed and adventure.

PEDAL POWER

Texas' geography and topography make it a top choice for off-road biking. Cyclists can find any kind of terrain and level of difficulty they're looking for. Here are some trails that top the list of favorites:

Palo Duro Canyon in the Texas Panhandle is the second-largest canyon in the United States and home to several trails ideal for mountain biking. Among them is the Lighthouse Trail — 8 miles that are relatively challenging, but if you're up to the task, you'll be rewarded with some of the most stunning sights in the park, including the Lighthouse, a sandstone rock formation that gave the trail its name. For information, visit palodurocanyon.com.

San Angelo State Park offers a wide variety of mountain bike trails, but perhaps the most interesting is its Dinosaur Trail. Not only will you see ancient dinosaur tracks and informational markers identifying them, but you'll bike through terrain typical of West Texas. Think cacti and low-lying bushes. Word to the wise: bring water and wear a hat. There's little shade to be found. The Dinosaur Trail is just 3 miles long — a quick ride that's good for beginners. For more information, go to tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/san-angelo.

Mountain biking is a popular activity at Palo Duro Canyon State Park.

Photos courtesy of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department



▲ The Dinosaur Trail draws many mountain bikers to San Angelo State Park.

◀ Rock climbers of all skill levels can test their mettle at Enchanted Rock.

ROCK-SOLID ADVENTURES

There are a number of great rock climbing spots in Texas, from cliff faces close to popular cities to other spots in more remote regions. It's not hard to find an indoor climbing gym, but there's nothing like getting outside. Find your next favorite climbing destination among these popular outdoor spots in Texas:

Lake Mineral Wells State Park, about an hour outside of Fort Worth, has a strict policy when it comes to climbers. Participants must be at least 17 years old, sign a liability waiver and wear a park-issued wristband while climbing. But once you've cleared those hurdles, you can experience some of the best climbs in North Texas.

There are several routes that are good for beginners and challenging for intermediate-level climbers. They don't call the area Penitentiary Hollow for nothing. For more information, check out tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/lake-mineral-wells.

Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, near Fredericksburg, is widely known for outdoor recreation, with a great campground and trails ideal for hiking, particularly up the granite dome known as Enchanted Rock. But it's also a magical place for experienced climbers to navigate routes such as Enchanted Rock Fissure.

There are other climbs better suited for beginners and there are guides in the area to teach you the ropes. For more information, go to tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/enchanted-rock.

HANG TIME

Take to the skies at Cowboy Up, a fabulous place to hang glide and see Texas in a way you may have never before. There are no mountains in this part of Texas, about an hour southeast of Houston, but don't let that stop you. At Cowboy Up, a light aircraft tows a hang glider into the air before setting you free to fly with the birds.

Beginners attend ground school to learn the basics of hang gliding before taking off with a certified pilot. These are tandem flights, so the pilot conducts takeoffs and landings. There are several available packages starting at a short, 15-minute spin around the Texas skies.

Want to try your hand at hang gliding? Choose the Adventure ride, and the pilot will put the controls in your hands. If you decide hang gliding is for you, become a student of the sport and sign up for one of Cowboy Up's training packages and receive your United States Hang Gliding & Paragliding Association Hang 1 Beginner Rating. Details are online at cuhanggliding.com.

Fly Texas in the heart of the Hill Country offers a different kind of hang gliding experience. Trike flying marries hang gliding with a powered tricycle — an aircraft that can take off from a runway or a field, making it perfect for Texas terrain. Just be sure to wear shoes that won't fall off.

There are two packages available: a 30-minute flight for beginners and another one that takes riders up a mile high before the motor turns off and participants glide back down while taking in the views over Lake LBJ and other lakes along the chain of dams on the Colorado River. Learn more at flytexas.com.

RUN THE RAPIDS

Big Bend National Park is home to some of the most exciting outdoor activities in the state, including rafting or kayaking the Rio Grande. It's a calm river in some places but also has fast-moving currents flowing through deep-river canyons. Bring your own gear, rent equipment from local outfitters or take a fully equipped guided trip from two hours to 10 days.

Big Bend is a diverse region with endless possibilities for adventure and discovery with lodging possibilities that run the gamut from camping to luxury resorts. Learn more at nps.gov. 📱

Eye of the storm

Protect your devices before the thunder rolls

Spring rain can be a welcome change from the ice and snow of winter. But it doesn't take much for those warm showers to become thunderstorms or even tornadoes. Smart preparation before the clouds gather can be the key to waiting out the storm comfortably, so be sure to take the following precautions to make sure you and your devices weather the storm intact.



Hi! I'm Kerry Sutton. Want to hear more from the folks you read about in Connection? Then head over to htc.net/resources/ podcast for "Inside the Connection" and "10 Minute Tech Tips," our podcasts hosted by Kerry Sutton.

BEFORE THE STORM

Document everything — No one wants to get stuck trying to remember the details of everything they owned in the wake of storm damage. Take photos of any valuables in case you need to file a claim later, and make sure your internet-connected devices are backed up to the cloud in the event you lose them.

Charge up — If you have enough warning before a storm, be sure to charge your phone, tablet, laptop and any other devices you may want to use if the electricity fails. That way, even if the power goes out, you'll still be able to keep up with the latest developments.

Get a surge protector — While a power strip can help protect any devices plugged directly into it, consider installing a surge protector at your electric service panel. By protecting the point where electricity enters your home you can safeguard all your devices at once.

Back everything up — Keeping regular backups is always a good idea. But doing so for any important files on your computers or mobile devices before a storm rolls in is especially important. Preferably, those backups should be saved in the cloud or on a separate device. That way, if an electrical surge does damage your devices, all that information will be safe and sound.

DURING THE STORM

Unplug — When in doubt, simply unplug any devices you don't want to get fried. Even with a surge protector, a lightning strike during a storm can damage electrical equipment that is still plugged in.

Stay up to date — The advantage of a fully-charged smartphone is that, as long as you have a signal, you can get the latest updates on weather in your area and the impact it might have. Apps like Emergency: Alerts from the American Red Cross, WeatherBug and Storm Shield can give you targeted alerts for your specific location, instead of your whole county.

Protect yourself first — Follow any guidance for your area and be sure to take cover when advised. While protecting your devices is worthwhile, you should never risk harm to yourself or someone else because of a piece of technology.

AFTER THE STORM

Checkup — Once the danger has passed, take a look at your surge protector to see if it was tripped. A tripped surge protector will need to be replaced, but at least all of your devices will still be in working order. ☑

Metal masterpieces

Crafting a new spin on old classics

Story by LAZ DENES

As the saying goes among hot rod and custom car enthusiasts, the working professionals who are the rock stars of the industry are far more than trained technicians. They're artists whose canvases are made of metal.

Perhaps nowhere in the Hill Country is this idea more evident than in the masterpieces that have rolled off the shop floors at Boerne Stage Kustoms since 2001. Owner Chris Shuler has seen his company evolve from a one-man show operating out of a rented two-car garage on Boerne Stage Road in unincorporated Leon Springs. It now occupies a 6,500-square-foot facility on Highway 480 in Center Point, where he and his six-man team have regularly turned out stunning works of automotive beauty since 2008.

NATIONAL ACCLAIM

Many of Boerne Stage Kustoms' creations adorned the covers and center spreads of major car magazines, and



The Boerne Stage Kustoms team includes, from left, Randy Rankin, Rich Hinton, Cody Blake, Aaron Matcek, Trent Hensley and Chris Shuler.

numerous others have merited awards at car shows from coast to coast. There's the sleek 1970 Mach 1 Mustang that started it all for Chris and one of his original employees, Trent Hensley. Then there's the 1932 Ford 5 Window Coupe treasured by Chris' dad, Jim. And who could forget the ominous-looking 1961 Ford Falcon Wagon that took first place in the station wagon category at the 2010 Showcase of Kustoms in Long Beach, California?


"I always wanted to do something I was passionate about, that I loved to do every day, and it kind of morphed into this really cool business," Chris says. He spent a great deal of his free time as a child poring through the very magazines his company's creations appear in today.

In 1997, Chris headed to the Wyoming Technical Institute in Laramie, where he completed its 36-week collision and refinishing technology program. He

then spent three years gaining practical experience at San Antonio's Alamo Body & Paint, working for just \$7 an hour. He supplemented his modest income doing paint and bodywork out of his parents' garage in the evenings, setting the stage for Boerne Stage Kustoms.

IT'S A TEAM EFFORT

Today, Chris never misses a chance to credit the efforts of his team for his company's success. "If it wasn't for the guys who work for me, I wouldn't be anywhere near where I'm at now," he says. "They're the talented ones, and I just run the business."

Chris is also quick to sing the praises of the speed and reliability of HCTC's fiber internet service, which helps keep the business purring like a kitten. "We do all our accounting and billing online," he says. "I'm also constantly scouring the internet trying to find parts for all our projects, and sourcing cars for customers from time to time. Some of those are often hard to find. During projects, we're always taking pictures and keeping customers updated on our builds. So, internet speed is huge here." 



Ford Coupes are often brought to Boerne Stage Kustoms, including a black model from 1936 and a blue one from 1946.

Family TV night

Great family binges for all ages

With the wealth of streaming services available today, there have never been so many viewing options available at the tap of a few buttons. But the constant barrage of new TV shows and movies can make it difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff, especially if you're looking for something the whole family can enjoy.

While services like Disney+ come ready with a huge catalog of family classics, other major streamers are still building up their libraries of kid-friendly content. Here are a few suggestions to help your family start exploring the latest offerings.





AGES 4+

“Bluey,” Disney+ — Inexhaustible Blue Heeler dog Bluey turns everyday life into amazing adventures that stimulate her imagination and emotional resilience. Broken up into short, nine-minute episodes, the Australian animated show has garnered praise for providing constructive messages while remaining engaging for adults.

“Motown Magic,” Netflix — This feel-good series celebrates music, has colorful, eye-catching visuals and instills positive messages about self-confidence. For lovers of oldies, the soundtrack is also a great introduction to Motown and soul classics.

“Sesame Street,” HBO Max — Starting with the show’s 51st season in 2020, HBO Max became the official home of “Sesame Street.” Get access to new episodes immediately so your kids can experience the fun and entertaining brand of education that “Sesame Street” has offered for decades.

“Madagascar: A Little Wild,” Hulu — Drawing on the humor and animation that made the Madagascar movies popular, this musical comedy series follows four young animals in a rescue habitat in Central Park. The show celebrates being yourself and pursuing your dreams, no matter how wild.

“Shaun the Sheep,” Netflix — Adults and young kids alike can enjoy a laugh in this clay-mation series from the makers of “Wallace and Gromit.” Shaun’s barnyard misadventures with his cousin Timmy, sheepdog Bitzer, cat Pidsley and fellow sheep Shirley have even spun off into several movies available exclusively on Netflix.

AGES 7+

“Just Add Magic,” Amazon Prime Video — When Kelly discovers her grandmother’s mysterious cookbook in the attic, she and her best friends, Darbie and Hannah, find out there’s more magic to the recipes than just a secret ingredient. Loosely based on Cindy Callaghan’s popular book by the same name, the show offers magical fun for the whole family.

“Pokemon Journeys,” Netflix — This Netflix series is action-packed enough to grab the attention of new viewers and based on the anime series some parents may have watched when they were kids. Follow young trainer Ash as he travels the world learning about new Pokemon.

“Gravity Falls,” Disney+ — If your little

ones aren’t quite ready for shows like “Stranger Things” or sci-fi classics like “The X-Files,” “Gravity Falls” might be just the ticket. This show offers Pacific Northwest weirdness for the whole family as twins Mabel and Dipper Pines spend the summer with their great-uncle Stan investigating strange mysteries in Oregon.

“Star Wars: The Clone Wars,” Disney+ — Before there was a Disney series for every character in the Star Wars universe, “The Clone Wars” was filling in the gaps between the canonical Star Wars movies. The continuing adventures of Obi Wan, Anakin and young Palawan Ahsoka Tano feature enough surprisingly deep storytelling that parents might be as eager as their kids to hit play on the next episode.

“TrollsTopia,” Hulu — Picking up after the movie “Trolls: World Tour,” “TrollsTopia” follows Poppy as she attempts to unite delegates from the Country Western, Classical, Funk, Techno and Hard Rock tribes in one harmonious city. Watch as they learn to celebrate their differences with a variety of catchy tunes.

AGES 11+

“Raising Dion,” Netflix — Second grader Dion learns to balance super powers and villain battles with the everyday challenges of growing up. The mild violence and portrayals of bullying might be a little much for younger viewers, but tween audiences will find plenty to enjoy.

“The Hardy Boys,” Hulu — Based on the popular book series, this show follows Frank and Joe Hardy when they move from the city to their parents’ hometown of Bridgeport. When their dad takes on a secret investigation, it doesn’t take long for the Hardy boys to get drawn into the mystery.

“The Quest,” Disney+ — A new take on the reality competition series from the team behind “The Amazing Race,” “The Quest” drops eight teens into an immersive fantasy world where it’s their job to save the kingdom. Find out which contestant is The One while scratching that old “Legends of the Hidden Temple” itch.

“The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance,” Netflix — This prequel to the 1982 dark fantasy movie from Jim Henson follows a group of Gelflings as they seek to stop power-hungry overlords from draining the life from their world. Parents who enjoyed the original will enjoy the shot of nostalgia, while younger viewers marvel at the stunning visuals. 📺

Driving demand



Interest for a stylish classic revives

Story by LAZ DENES

The world's original luxury sport utility vehicle might have been born some 1,500 miles from the heart of Texas Hill Country, but it's safe to say Jeep's iconic Grand Wagoneer — circa 1963 to 1991 — lives on to this day thanks to Kerrville's Leon Miller and his son, Chip.

Leon was smitten when he laid eyes on the first Grand Wagoneer Limited, which hit the market in 1978. Its stately shape, signature woodgrain trim, leather interior and power conveniences drew him in. A farmer and rancher at the time, he laid out \$22,000 for what became his new company car. In 1991, nearing his intended retirement time, he was looking to buy another new Grand Wagoneer but was incensed to learn Chrysler had decided to discontinue its production.

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

Phone call after phone call to the manufacturer's Detroit headquarters led Leon to the original Wagoneer's designer, Brooks Stevens, who assured him the model was not coming back. As a matter of encouragement, Stevens suggested Leon look into restoring an old Wagoneer himself.

Leon promptly found a mid-1980s edition and had it refurbished to his specifications at a Kerrville auto



Chrome bumpers and a rugged style make the Jeep Wagoneer a classic.

Photography by Gabe Rene Photo



In 2022, singer-songwriter Robert Earl Keen, left, took delivery of highly restored 1969 Jeepster Commando from Chip Miller, right, and his wife Kathleen.



Wagonmaster owner Chip Miller has found dedicated fans across the globe seeking Jeep Wagoneers.

shop. When the job was complete, he encountered a local real estate agent who fell in love with it and offered to buy it. Leon sold it to him and then found another Wagoneer to refurbish. That's when he realized he might be on to something.

Leon was soon repeating the process of buying, refurbishing and selling America's original luxury SUV under the banner of his new business venture, Wagonmaster. In 1993, the company's first full year, he sold 12 Grand Wagoneers, eight of which went to customers in nearby Fredericksburg. As word of Wagonmaster's top-of-the-line restoration efforts spread well beyond the heart of Texas, so did annual sales. In 2017, Wagonmaster's 25th year, the usual eight or so Wagoneers sold in Texas, but 42 others went to customers from all corners of the United States, as well as Canada, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany.

THE ARRIVAL OF WAGONMASTER.COM

Since its humble beginnings in 1993, when Wagonmaster's average restoration project sold for under \$40,000, the company has surpassed the 2,000-vehicle mark in worldwide sales. And while prices have made a gradual climb over the last three decades, a recent boom in customer interest has seen the average price for a refurbished Wagoneer exceed \$100,000.

The company's sales growth and popularity among Grand Wagoneer enthusiasts around the world received

a huge boost when Leon agreed to the creation of the wagonmaster.com website in 1998. It was an idea Chip first introduced, but it was years later that his father accepted it and found the site appealed to would-be buyers. "It was very well-received," Leon says. "It got to where you couldn't find Wagoneers anymore, but they found us through the website. Most of our customers were coming to us online. The website was really a blessing."

PASSING THE TORCH

In 2010, while working as a chef in Las Vegas, Chip got the call from his dad saying he was ready to start turning over the reins of the company, prompting Chip's return to Kerrville, where he spent the next four years learning the ins and outs of the family business. Leon officially stepped aside in 2014, and Chip saw to it that the transition was seamless.

"From the beginning, I was always looking over Dad's shoulder," Chip says. "It was obvious to me the things that made us successful in the past were what would enable our future success. I couldn't see anyone other than a family member who could continue that success — Dad's name had to be involved in this business."

The company's facility on Memorial Boulevard, along with its satellite shops in nearby Center Point, rely heavily on HCTC's high-speed fiber internet to market the business and to communicate

with customers. Wagonmaster ships its products around the world to locations like Nantucket Island in Massachusetts, Memphis, Nashville, the Carolinas, Florida, California and overseas locations in Europe, the Middle East and Japan. Country artists Alan Jackson and Hank Williams Jr. are notable Wagonmaster owners, as are clothing designer Tommy Hilfiger and architect Phillipe Starck. The King of Morocco once bought three Wagonmasters and, unwilling to wait 90 days for ocean shipping, had them delivered via the cargo hold of an Air France 747.

THAT VINTAGE TOUCH

With the return of the Grand Wagoneer to the Jeep lineup beginning with the 2022 model year, Wagonmaster has realized a new opportunity — offering woodgrain trim packages for dealers and customers looking to revive one of its original styling cues.

"Conspicuously absent on the 2022 model is the woodgrain and molding," Chip says. "We developed a package that enhances the modern design and have used social media to get people's input. Here we are a year later, and we've been shipping kits to dealers and individuals every week. The 2022s have been selling well, and we're providing woodgrain and molding for them from here in little Kerrville, Texas." 📞

MEALS

that will make you

SQUEAL



Ham-bitious ways to use your leftovers

While much of the rest of the world celebrates the arrival of spring with lamb, in the U.S. pink, salty-sweet slices of cured pork, slathered in a sugary glaze, will fill many tables.

The problem, however, is that unless you buy a boneless ham by the pound or one of those small canned hams, you'll probably bring home a large bone-in ham from the market or treat yourself to one from the honey ham store. And more likely than not, after you serve dinner with a couple of side dishes, you're going to have a lot of leftovers.

There are so many ways to use up that ham that go beyond deviling or as a salad topper.

Here are three ideas to make the most of your leftover ham. They're wonderful by themselves, or just make a day of it and make them all, using up most, if not all, of that leftover ham. There's nothing better than a bowl of creamy ham soup with cheesy ham-studded biscuits and a delicious ham sandwich — with a twist.



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Photography by MARK GILLILAND | Food Styling by RHONDA GILLILAND

CREAMY POTATO HAM SOUP

- 4 strips of bacon
- 1/2 cup onion, finely chopped
- 3-4 medium potatoes, peeled and diced (2-3 cups)
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 4 cups chicken broth, preferably homemade (see note)
- 1 1/2 cups cooked ham, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 cup corn, canned (drained) or frozen (no need to thaw)
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- Salt (to taste)
- 1 teaspoon fresh parsley, finely chopped

Saute bacon in a large stockpot over medium-high heat until crisp. Chop the bacon and set it aside on a plate, reserving bacon drippings in the pot. Add onion and potatoes to the pot and saute for 1-2 minutes until fragrant. Stir in flour and mix well until the flour is fully incorporated. Stir in chicken broth and mix until the soup is smooth and uniform. Bring the soup to a boil over medium-high heat. Cover and let it continue to boil for 10-15 minutes until the potatoes are fork tender.

Mash half of the potatoes in the



pot with a potato masher to help thicken the soup.

Stir in ham, corn, heavy cream and black pepper. Let the soup simmer over medium heat and whisk occasionally until thickened to a desired consistency, 5-10 minutes. If the chowder gets too thick, add a little water to dilute it. Add salt to taste. Serve topped with reserved crispy bacon and fresh parsley. Makes about 4 servings.

Note: To make homemade chicken stock, boil a whole chicken in water to cover with some chunks of onion and celery added. Simmer the chicken until tender. You can tell if it's tender by pulling on the leg. If the leg comes out easily, the chicken is ready. Save the chicken for chicken salad or a chicken casserole. But save the stock, too. Salt it, to taste, and use it right away for this soup, or let it cool, pour it into a gallon-size freezer bag and freeze it.



CHEESY HAM BISCUITS

These biscuits pull double duty as a side to soup or cut them in half, add a fried egg and make a breakfast biscuit.

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 cup salted butter (1 stick)
- 1 1/4 cups buttermilk
- 1/2 cup chopped ham
- 1 cup shredded extra sharp cheddar cheese

Preheat the oven to 450 F.
Mix dry ingredients. Cut butter into thin slices and then cut it into the flour

until pieces of butter are small. Add in the buttermilk slowly and incorporate with the flour mixture. Don't overmix.

Sprinkle a small amount of flour on a work surface and place dough on top of it. Press down to make flat and then add the ham and cheddar cheese to the top. Knead dough a few times to incorporate the ham and cheese.

Press or roll out into 1/2-inch thickness. Use a biscuit cutter or rim of a glass to cut out biscuits.

Place biscuits on a baking sheet and bake for 10-12 minutes. Makes about a dozen biscuits.



BAKED HAM SANDWICHES

This is a favorite vintage recipe from Encore! Nashville, a Junior League of Nashville publication from the 1970s. Prepare ahead: These sandwiches are best made early in the morning or the day before to give time for the "custard" to soak into the bread.

- 8 slices bread
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 4 slices ham
- 4 slices sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 3 eggs, slightly beaten
- 2 cups evaporated milk or whole milk
- 1 teaspoon grated onion
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- Dash of Worcestershire sauce
- Dash of cayenne pepper

Trim crusts from bread and butter both sides well. Place 4 slices of bread

in a buttered baking dish. Place a piece of ham on each piece and cover with cheese, then top with remaining bread slices.

Combine remaining ingredients and pour over bread. Refrigerate all day or overnight. When ready to bake, spoon sauce over bread again and bake at 300 F, uncovered, until sandwiches are bubbly and golden brown on top, about 1 hour. Makes 4 servings.

Note: For a heartier sandwich, slices of tomato, avocado or bacon may be layered between the ham and cheese. 🍷





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