

HCTC

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024

CONNECTION



Serene Surroundings

Riverside Nature Center blossoms

BUCKLE UP

GHOST TOURS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

The Most Important Rural Broadband Program You Probably Don't Know

In Washington, D.C., we often talk about the new grant programs that are going to help bridge the digital divide in our country. But I want to highlight what I believe has been the most successful rural broadband initiative, the federal Universal Service Fund.

So, what is the Universal Service Fund? The Communications Act of 1934 included language that said all Americans should have access to “rapid, efficient, nationwide communications service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges.” Today, the USF is the main federal program helping rural consumers connect to services comparable in price and quality to those in urban areas. This makes services more affordable for low-income families and supports critical connections for schools, libraries and health care facilities in rural communities by offsetting the high cost of building and managing rural communications networks.

There is one big difference that sets the USF apart from many of the new grant programs: The USF not only supports the construction and deployment of networks but also the maintenance of those networks. It helps ensure that these networks are maintained and sustained so Americans continue to make use of broadband long after the last shovel is put down.

An NTCA survey found that without the High-Cost USF program all rural consumers will pay at least \$100 more per month for their broadband service. And the viability of some rural broadband networks would be at risk, as the operations costs and repayment of the loans needed to build them cannot be covered.

NTCA is committed to efforts to preserve the USF so that the mission of universal service for all Americans can be fulfilled.

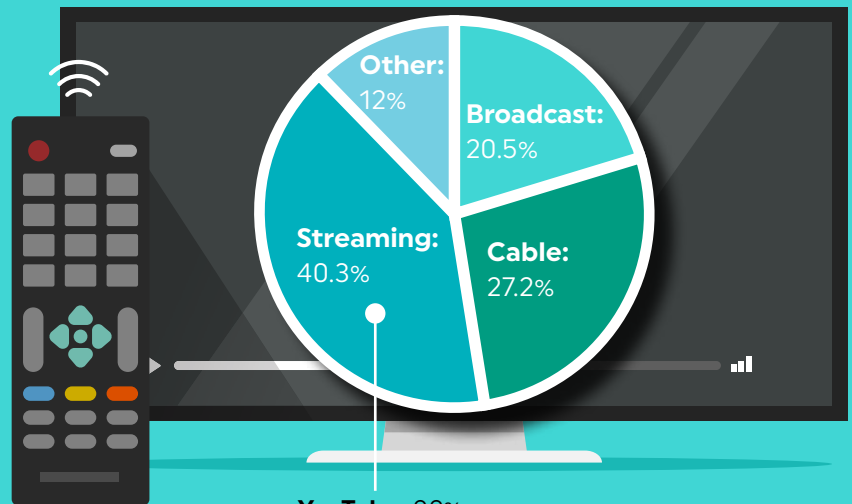
Streaming Remains Strong

Each month Nielsen, a company that has long tracked viewership habits across a range of media, updates The Gauge. The report offers a snapshot of how various forms of media are consumed to create a picture of the media landscape.

Several key trends shaped the streaming results, such as June marking the end of the school year and start of school breaks, which led viewers 17 and younger to drive the largest upticks in TV usage across all ages.

As a result, this June streaming topped the earlier viewership record set by cable for that month in 2021.

A SUMMER STREAMING SNAPSHOT



- YouTube:** 9.9%
- Netflix:** 8.4%
- Other streaming:** 6%
- Prime Video:** 3.1%
- Hulu:** 3%
- Disney+:** 2%
- Tubi:** 2%
- Roku Channel:** 1.5%
- Max:** 1.4%
- Peacock:** 1.2%
- Paramount+:** 1.1%
- Pluto TV:** 0.8%

Source: Nielsen The Gauge



A Web for All

Technology assists those with diminished sight

About two-thirds of Americans rely on some form of contact lenses or glasses to correct nearsightedness, farsightedness and more. Then there are eye injuries and diseases like glaucoma that can diminish sight, and the inevitable process of aging can also cause a slow decline in eyesight.

In an increasingly online world—where vital information is often communicated using text on screens—people with diminished vision can struggle. However, there are resources available to help those with impaired sight, and even blindness, interact online.

For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires all websites to be accessible to all. While not every website is ADA compliant, those for government agencies, banks and larger organizations are. The basic tools you need are free and as handy as web browsers like Chrome, Edge, Firefox and Safari.

BROWSER BY BROWSER

Microsoft's Edge browser scores well for assistive technologies. It lets users

increase the size of text and get image descriptions for screen readers. Also, a simple keyboard command—Ctrl+Shift+U on PCs and Shift+Command+U on Macs—signals the browser to read the current webpage aloud. Most other browsers require users to go into system preferences or use an extension for screen readers.


Meanwhile, Chrome's TalkBack screen reader adds spoken, audible or vibration feedback to your device. While the browser does not have a way to change the look of text, it does have extensions that allow users to customize their browsers to control visual clutter.

Google, the maker of Chrome and a popular search engine, has an award-winning disability employee resource group and says it is committed to hiring employees with disabilities. That commitment also helps it find ways to make its site more accessible.

Like Chrome, Apple's Safari comes with its own screen reader, VoiceOver. Users can choose the voice they find most pleasing and set the speech speed. It also lets users increase contrast, zoom in and

remove ads and distractions.

Firefox allows users to adjust the settings so every site has the same font, type size and color to enhance the ease of reading. It also has extensions for changing text to speech and making bookmarks larger, among other things.

While users may need a sighted person to set up the assistive features, modern technologies unlock the world to more people than ever. 

Influence That Matters

Connect locally to make a difference

If you venture into the world of social media—and most people do—you'll cross paths with personalities known as influencers. From social media platforms like Facebook and X to video sites such as YouTube and TikTok, online personalities have the power to generate attention. With attention comes income, often six figures or more.



CRAIG COOK
Chief Executive Officer

These people, and they can range wildly in accuracy and professionalism, seem to touch on every possible topic: lifestyle, health, politics, sports, entertainment and just about anything else. They can attract millions of eyeballs, and some of the largest, most visible companies advertise on their channels.

I don't mean to imply this is a new trend. It's not, at all. However, as other types of media fall more into the background, online influencers continue to have greater reach and, well, influence. But in our busy and often highly online lives, we shouldn't lose sight of the other influencers around us. You don't have to look far, either.

One of the things I enjoy about our community, and this is true of many rural places like ours, is that there are individuals who make a tangible positive difference. They lift others up. They provide help where it's needed. You need look no further than the pages of

this magazine to see stories of neighbors helping neighbors, and what's more powerful of an influence than that?


You see, every time you smile at someone you pass in the aisle of a store, volunteer with a community organization, help your child with homework or have any of the other interactions that make up daily life, you're an influencer. This is also something we all can do.

In fact, a commitment to helping others is a core part of our mission at HCTC. Naturally, it begins with the services we provide—we want our community to have the best communications resources anywhere.

We've seen how high-speed internet changes lives, opening doors for local businesses, expanding career options, supporting education and connecting to an exciting world of online resources. We strive to be the people who can answer your questions, solve your communications problems and provide the resources you need today while planning for the future.

But that's only part of the equation. Every year, HCTC gives back. One of our guiding principles is that you benefit not only from the services we provide but also through direct contributions of time and money invested into our community.

So, as you enjoy our industry-leading communications services, if there are online influencers you find informative or entertaining, please do enjoy. But I hope you can also join us in finding opportunities to create beneficial, helpful moments right here at home. It's that spirit of togetherness that makes this place so special.

As always, it's a pleasure serving you, and I hope HCTC remains a positive influence in your life. 

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HCTC

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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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



Susan Sander envisioned the Riverside Nature Center as a place to explore the beauty of nature along the Guadalupe River. See story Page 12.

Photo by Gabe Rene Photography

CYBERSECURITY TIPS

October is National Cybersecurity Month, the perfect time to review ways to protect yourself against phishing attempts.

Phishing is the term for emails, messages and websites that may look authentic but are designed to steal your personal information or money. For example, a phishing message claiming to be from your bank or HCTC may ask for your Social Security number or request you click a link that downloads malware to your computer. Some effective phishers even pose as an employer to convince employees to send client records or wire money to them.

How can you protect yourself? Look for warning signs and take the following actions:

- **Look out for urgent language**—If the message says you must act immediately or your services will be canceled or you will be fired, that's a sign someone is trying to get you to panic and act without thinking.
- **Don't click on unsolicited attachments or links**—You could end up infecting your computer with malware or a virus.
- **If the sender asks for personal or financial information, be wary**—Legitimate institutions won't ask for your password, Social Security number or financial details in an email.
- **Spelling and grammar errors are another sign of phishing**—Legitimate companies carefully craft their emails and edit them extensively.
- **Don't think scammers have given up on phone calls**—Be aware of anyone asking for financial or personal information over the phone or via text.
- **Check the email address**—Scammers often use email addresses that mimic legitimate ones, only spelled slightly differently or with .net instead of .com.



In observance of the holiday, HCTC's offices will be closed on **Monday, Sept. 2.** Have a safe, happy and relaxing weekend!

Our community. Your co-op.

Building a better future — together



ESports
TOURNAMENTS.
GAME NIGHTS.
GIVEAWAYS.

NEW FROM HCTC

JOIN THE FUN AT
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Logos for SUPER MASH BROS., FORTNITE, ETHAL COMPANY, ROCKET LEAGUE, APEX LEGENDS, MINECRAFT.

SPIRITS OF THE SEASON

Ghost Tours Scare Up Connections to the Past

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS



Photo courtesy of American Ghost Walks

Allison Jornlin, depicted here in an illustration, researches and writes scripts for ghost tours.

For many, October isn't complete without spine-tingling ghost stories, and chances are your hometown has a few of its own. Allison Jornlin, co-founder and tour developer with American Ghost Walks, conducts research and writes ghost tour scripts in towns across the United States. Allison is also a paranormal investigator and speaker, and

she's been featured on the CW Network's "Mysteries Decoded."

Ghost tours are immensely popular, and Allison says they can be found in almost every large city and even in many small towns across the country. "I think people have lost their connection with history and with their ancestors, and this is a way to reconnect," she says.

Unlike haunted house attractions that have terrifying special effects, ghost tours offer authentic history in locations that give guests the chance to literally step into the paranormal. They allow people to connect to the haunted past through walking tours, bus/trolley tours, investigation-style tours and even pub crawls. Some guests report experiencing



Ghost tour guides are well-versed in local history and are usually gifted storytellers.



Photos courtesy of Houston Ghost Tour

A Houston ghost tour pauses in front of the Sam Houston Monument, the gateway to the city's spooky Hermann Park.



Photo by Ryo Hamasaki

Ghost tours can include exploring the paranormal by bus or trolley, as well as on foot.

paranormal phenomena, like feeling unexplained cold spots or photographing disembodied faces and shadowy figures.

Allison pores through old newspapers and historical archives and interviews local people to give her tours as much local flavor as possible. “I’m looking for stories that are unique to the community that they come out of,” she says. While many stories across the country have common themes, Allison says, every place is a little bit different.

“You don’t have to believe in ghosts to enjoy the tour,” she says. Skeptics can have fun learning spooky stories. Tour guides often encourage guests to share their personal paranormal experiences to relate to one another. Ghost tours can’t guarantee guests will have

an otherworldly encounter, but there is always a possibility.

If you’re ready to test your luck, consider joining these popular local tours, if you dare:

- Considered the most haunted town in Texas, the Historic Jefferson Ghost Walk in Jefferson explores all the myths and legends. jeffersonghostwalk.com
- Haunted ATX offers rolling ghost tours of Austin with public van tours and both private and public tours by hearse. hauntedatx.com
- Learn about the ghosts that haunt the Houston Zoo, the hospital and museum district, as well as tours of historic Old Town Spring. houstonghosttour.com 📱

FUN FACTS

- Most ghost tours in the U.S. run year-round.
- Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, claims to have America's oldest ghost tour. It began in 1970 and is still running. In 1973, historian Richard Crowe started Chicago's first ghost tour. He told ghost stories on the radio around Halloween, which inspired Allison Jornlin and her brother to establish American Ghost Walks.
- Many ghost stories have common themes. Allison notes the prevalence of stories about women who met unfortunate ends. Guides across the nation tell local stories of jilted lovers, forlorn widows and vanishing hitchhikers.

SCARING UP A GREAT TOUR

Are you spending the spooky season exploring a new town—or your own hometown? A ghost tour is a fun way to learn about the history of a place and its people. Before you book one, follow these tips:

CHOOSE A TOUR THAT SUITS YOUR GROUP

While each tour is unique, they typically fall into these categories: walking tours, bus tours, investigation tours and pub crawls. Investigation tours allow guests to become paranormal researchers for one night, and they typically focus on one building or property. A haunted pub crawl offers spirits of both the alcoholic and ethereal kinds.

CHECK THE WEBSITE

Tour companies list important information on their websites, including an overview, length of the tour, walking distance, accessibility, age-appropriateness and cancellation/refund policies. Many tours encourage guests to purchase tickets in advance.

READ THE REVIEWS

Check Google reviews and websites like Yelp or Tripadvisor for reviews. Search for detailed reviews that weigh the pros and cons of the tour. If you find positive reviews of a specific guide, you may be able to book a tour on a night when that person is working.

If you still have questions after your research, don't be afraid to give the tour company a call.



Safeguard your business networks with 24/7 malware, virus, and threat defense with HCTC's SmartBiz.

BE WARY OF PUBLIC WI-FI PITFALLS

5 tips to keep your information safe

Look around in any coffee shop or waiting room and you'll see nearly everyone looking at a phone, tablet or laptop. Some are texting, but many are online checking in on social media, reading the news or even shopping. Some daring souls may even be doing their banking—and this may not be wise.

Public Wi-Fi is useful, because it can offer much faster speeds than those offered through mobile data plans through a phone. When you're using public Wi-Fi, however, privacy is a concern and added wariness can keep you out of trouble. These five tips offer a few of the strategies to ensure you're safe and secure while out and about:

VERIFY THE NETWORK

Double-check the network name. Some cybercriminals create fake networks that closely resemble real ones. For example, if you see two similar networks, coffee_shop and cofee_shop, take care to choose the correct one. If the business provides a QR code to access its Wi-Fi connection, use that, after making

sure that code is also legitimate. If in doubt, verify with a staff member that the network is correct.

SAFEGUARD SENSITIVE INFORMATION

Limit the sensitive details you share on public Wi-Fi, including personal information like Social Security numbers, credit card details or bank account information. A good rule of thumb is to avoid transmitting personal information over public Wi-Fi that you wouldn't say aloud in a public space. Instead, save these tasks for when you're on a private network.

USE A VPN

Secure the data you transmit. A Virtual Private Network, or VPN, creates an added layer of security and anonymity that make it harder to identify and surreptitiously access your device. Consider using a trusted VPN when connecting to public networks, and there are a range of software options. Some employers even provide VPN tools to employees. It's good to look at the

policies to verify how secure the VPN is and how much information the company keeps about your device.

STICK TO HTTPS WEBSITES

Look for the padlock icon. When browsing the internet, make sure the website's URL starts with https:// instead of http://. It's a tiny distinction, but it makes a big difference. That "s" means the website is secure, which is why it comes with a padlock. The padlock icon indicates a safe connection.

ADJUST YOUR CONNECTION SETTINGS

Disable file sharing and printer sharing to keep any unauthorized person from accessing your computer.

Also, on a computer running Windows, set your network profile to "public" mode to limit visibility to other devices on the same network. It sounds counterintuitive, right? Think of it this way: Public mode is more secure because you're in public.

Stay cautious, and with a little care you can enjoy a safe Wi-Fi experience. ☑



LANDING ZONE

GRAVITY CHECK FEATURES HIGH-ENERGY FUN

Story by JOHN CLAYTON



The grilled chicken sandwich includes a heap of veggies.



Young riders learn bull riding at Gravity Check Saloon and Arena.



Departure, a Journey tribute band, takes the stage.

Photos courtesy of Gravity Check Saloon and Arena

Slim Bethune succinctly sums up his inspiration for creating one of Texas' most unique entertainment venues: "Boredom."

Real retirement just wasn't an option for the rancher and former fishing guide. Instead, he went to work on an idea to take a property in Kerrville and turn it into Gravity Check Saloon and Arena, an indoor-outdoor facility that has a little—or a lot—of everything.

"I would say there's nothing like it anywhere in this area," says Gravity Check General Manager Kris McMillian-Heimann, who, like around 70% of her staff, has been with Gravity Check since its beginning in 2014.

There are other venues nearby, some of which host concerts or maybe even sporting events. Some serve food and drinks and host open-mic nights. Gravity Check combines all of the above.

NEVER A DULL DAY

The venue is open seven days a week, closing only for Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving. It has undergone exponential growth over the years.

The 28,800-square-foot arena is routinely home to equine and rodeo events. The indoor saloon-restaurant area can hold around 200 people, and there's room for another 50-100 on the patio. The arena can hold around 1,500, with bleacher seating for about 500.

This past April, Gravity Check was home to the Bull Battle, featuring youth bull riders

from around the world. The Bull Battle was one of several youth events Gravity Check is hosting as the venue supports youth rodeo sports locally and internationally.

"The reception was outstanding," Kris says. "It was not a beautiful day, it was rather chilly, and it started raining, but they kept going until about 9 o'clock at night, and we stayed packed the entire day."

Kris adds that Gravity Check will stay involved with the regional youth circuit with more rodeo competitions. "These youngsters growing up on the rodeo circuit are the future for our business," she says.

The saloon features a full menu and full bar. Regional musical artists such as Covenants Creek, the Heartbreak Outlaws and Bobby Dunn & the Texas Whiskey Band take the stage each weekend.

Kris and her staff use social media, primarily Facebook and Instagram, to announce Gravity Check's entertainment and sports schedules to the public, making HCTC's high-speed internet service vital to the venue's operation.

"HCTC contacted me recently to tell us that we were eligible for an upgrade," Kris says, noting the saloon's point-of-sale system competes for bandwidth with seven hand-held devices used by waitstaff. "We have those handhelds and all the computers being used at the same time, so it can be very taxing on our internet, so they were working to get us up to par, and they did that." 🗨️



RUNNING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Rural Athletes Must Overcome Hurdles to Win Scholarships

For much of her life, Olivia Murphy focused on becoming a collegiate swimmer. The biggest obstacle she faced didn't come in the pool—it was catching the eye of college coaches.

Each year thousands of student-athletes pursue college athletic scholarships. Ultimately, only about one out of every 50 succeeds, according to a 2021 study by Next College Student Athlete. That bar can be even tougher to clear for athletes like Olivia, who live in rural areas, where it's often difficult to get the attention of major programs.

For those students, earning a spot on a college roster takes more than just the talent and commitment to be a high-level athlete—it also takes a “second job” as a communicator and organizer, working just to be seen.

“I didn't start the actual recruitment process until summer of my junior year, which is a little late for some people,” says Olivia, a Tennessee resident and 2024 Tullahoma High School graduate.

MAKING A SPLASH

Olivia's path was more straightforward than that of many other athletes: Swim fast, win races. A key member of the Wildcats' school-record-setting relay team, she recorded plenty of fast times while helping the team win its first division title.

She knew she had the speed, she just needed the coaches to know it, too. “When you first reach out to a coach, whether it's through a questionnaire or an email, you put your best events and your best times in there,” Olivia says.

When prospective recruits submit statistics, coaches compare their times to those of their current swimmers, as well as the

ones winning division and national titles. Athletes from almost every sport send out these cold-call emails to coaches across the country. In sports like football and basketball, where skills can't be boiled down to a set of times or statistics, athletes will create their own highlight videos and send those to coaches.

This can be especially valuable for rural athletes. Coaches can't visit every town to scout athletes, but there's no travel time in opening an email. Olivia says coaches especially want to see the swimmers' videos. “They love videos,” she says. “Most coaches like to see video because they want to see your technique or where your weaknesses might be.”

SHOWCASING SKILLS

Sometimes, rather than sending videos, recruits travel to camps and showcases so coaches can watch them in action and compare their skills to athletes at a similar level. These are often sport-specific camps run by college programs where potential recruits get hands-on practice time with

Photo illustration by Mark Gilliland



Photo courtesy of Olivia Murphy

Olivia Murphy's best swimming events are the 100-meter freestyle, butterfly, backstroke and the 50-meter freestyle.

coaches. At regional showcases or tournaments, thousands of athletes can test their skills while scores of coaches look for diamonds in the rough.

Landyn Cox, a 2024 high school graduate from McKee, Kentucky, competes in archery and found success at these large events since most high schools don't have archery teams. He was offered a scholarship to be an archer at the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, Kentucky. He competed on the USA Archery U18 Compound National Team, the World Archery 3D Championships and other USA Archery Team events. He says the USAT events are a solid way to draw attention. "If you win like one of the USATs or certain big events, that gets your name out there pretty fast," he says.

MAKING A DECISION

Once coaches begin recruiting, the challenge comes in settling on a school. Olivia narrowed down her list to three. "I wanted to limit myself to three visits because I'm really bad at decisions," she says.

Part of the process was deciding what size school she wanted to attend. Many athletes feel the need to compete at a prestigious NCAA Division 1 school, but they



Photo courtesy of USA Archery

Landyn Cox first competed in archery through the National Archery in the Schools program.

SCORING AN OFFER

1. Know your skill level and learn the NCAA or NAIA eligibility requirements.
2. Compile an athletic resume with:
 - Skills video
 - Athletic stats
 - Academic transcripts, ACT/SAT scores
 - Extracurricular activities
3. Email coaches.
 - Include your athletic resume.
 - Subject line: Name, position, current grade level and key stat. "Jane Doe, High School Sophomore, Pitcher, 90 mph fastball"
 - Individually craft each email, clearly stating why you're interested in that program.
4. Make campus visits and meet coaches. Keep sending updated stats.
5. Lock down your offer and negotiate your amount. Don't discount merit-based, academic or other scholarships.




could find a home—and potentially more playing time or better financial aid—at a smaller school. "Division 1 isn't everything," Olivia says. "It's not live or die."

No matter the size or program, a visit is the critical component. After a successful recruiting visit where she got along great with her future teammates, Olivia chose Delta State University, a Division II school in Cleveland, Mississippi.

"They need to go where they feel like they best fit," she says. "I was like,

'There's no way that I'm not going to go Division 1,' and then I found a school that matches up with Division 1 schools and I got better scholarship offers and felt like I fit with the team better. And so, I was like, 'Oh, that's not the end of the world.'"

But it will be a whole new world for Olivia, Landyn and other rural athletes as they aim to parlay their hometown successes and hard work to the next level. 

A Vision Blossoms

Riverside Nature Center is a hub for learning, community

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

One woman's vision more than 30 years ago blossomed into today's Riverside Nature Center in Kerrville—a place where all ages can come together to learn about, and connect with, nature and each other.

Sitting on 5 acres where the Guadalupe River and Town Creek meet, the nature center offers everything from displays to a resource library, a 2-acre garden and beyond. “We pack a lot of nature into 5 acres,” Riverside Nature Center Executive Director Becky Etzler says.

RESOURCE FOR ALL

The nature center was founded in 1989 by Susan Sander. She has since retired to Wisconsin, but her legacy remains in Kerrville. “It’s just a really wonderful resource,” Becky says. “We’re here for anybody, all ages, with a desire to just get close to nature in a relaxing, peaceful way.”

Learning opportunities abound. In addition to educating visitors about plants in the nature center's arboretum and gardens, the center runs programming for everyone from preschoolers to residents of assisted living and retirement communities.

When Becky first moved to Central Texas, she sought more knowledge about land management and environmental care

through the Texas Master Naturalist program, which was how she found the nature center as a volunteer opportunity. Nine years ago, the executive director position became available, and she's been with the center since.

The center is open to the public and is free to visit. As a nonprofit, it's supported by donations and its members. Various membership levels are offered, and in addition to discounts on programs and gift-shop purchases, members also enjoy reciprocal benefits at more than 150 nature centers in the U.S. and Canada that are part of the American Nature Center Association.

Two annual events are big fundraisers for the Riverside Nature Center—a native plant sale and a 5K run.

Sitting alongside the Guadalupe River, much of the nature center's property is

The visitor's center at Riverside Nature Center features exhibits, classrooms and a gift shop.

Photos by Gabe Rene Photography

a wild landscape, though there is a high fence to keep deer out, Becky says. It provides food, water and shelter for native birds, reptiles and small animals. There are areas dedicated to pollinators, butterflies and a bird blind. The center also harvests rainwater and has a composting area.

Tara Bushnoe is a past president of the center's board, as well as the general manager of the Upper Guadalupe River Authority, which works with the center as an education partner. "I think that as all of our communities grow in Texas, we have to acknowledge that, but not assume that we'll always have the healthy ecosystem surrounding it," Tara says. "We need to really work to make that happen."

That's part of the role of the Riverside Nature Center, teaching water conservation, maintaining healthy soils, reducing runoff and more. "All of those little things really add up and make a difference and can help all of us to ensure this environment that we love remains healthy," Tara says. "The nature center is a great place to learn about those things."

VOLUNTEERS

Riverside Nature Center's staff is only five employees—just two of them full time—so the center relies on its volunteers. They act as everything from docents and greeters, to gardeners, trail maintainers and educators.

Larry Altman is one of those volunteers. Like Becky, he found the center through the Texas Master Naturalist program. Becoming a master naturalist was a retirement project for Larry, who spent 43 years as a Methodist pastor.

Larry greets visitors entering the nature center, works at the gift shop and will even guide visitors around. He's been doing it for 10 years and enjoys meeting new people from all around the world.

"We have visitors that come to Kerrville from everywhere, and they come to the nature center, and we get to meet people," Larry says. "And then we just have interesting things happen. People have all kinds of interesting questions. We have a wonderful nature library here they can utilize."

The center's board members are also volunteers. "They're often overlooked, but they're key," Becky says. "They're responsible for the fiduciary function of the organization. They have a great role to play on a volunteer basis."

Tara takes every opportunity to share the nature center's story with community members, whether it's at an official event or even in the grocery store when she has her name badge on.

"One thing that people don't realize is that it's free to come to the nature center," Tara says. "The door is always open during the hours that the nature center is open for people to walk in and enjoy. And then, we want them to stay and hopefully contribute when they participate in some of our focused programs."

As nature constantly evolves, so does the Riverside Nature Center, Becky says. It's growing and would benefit from more room.

"I think we're on a precipice now, where some big changes are due in the future," she says. "Whether that's expansion in some way—it's an exciting time to be part of the nature center." 🗨️

RIVERSIDE NATURE CENTER

150 Francisco Lemos St., Kerrville
830-257-4837

FOR MORE INFORMATION

riversidenaturecenter.org

Follow the Riverside Nature Center on Facebook and Instagram



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Visitors to the Riverside Nature Center may meet volunteer Becky Etzer or Executive Director Larry Altman.

The entrance overlooks a xeriscape garden landscaping that requires little or no irrigation.

An exhibit highlights facts about a variety of Hill Country critters.

Kick Off THE SEASON



50

Healthy Eats for Your Tailgate

It's time to think about tailgating. Even if you aren't a football fan, you can enjoy the food that goes along with the big game, from pots of chili to tater skins and Buffalo wings.

But these tailgating treats may not agree with your waistline. There are healthy alternatives to consider for lightening up your football spread without sacrificing taste. You'll score some touchdowns yourself.



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

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

WHITE CHICKEN CHILI

- 4 boneless chicken breasts (2 to 2 1/2 pounds)
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 3/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 2 cans whole green chilies, chopped (see tip)
- 3-4 cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed (see note)
- 2-3 teaspoons cumin
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2-1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/2-1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- Additional chicken broth, if needed

In large pot, add chicken breasts and completely cover with water (4-6 cups). Simmer chicken breasts with basil, salt, onion powder, garlic powder, thyme and parsley until completely cooked.

Remove chicken from broth and let cool. Reserve the seasoned broth for the chili. Once chicken is cool, chop and set aside.

In a large stock pot, add butter and olive oil, and saute onion, celery and bell pepper until vegetables are translucent. Add chopped chilies and two cans cannellini beans. When mixture is warm, mash beans with a potato masher.

Add 2-3 cups of the reserved broth, chopped chicken, cumin and 1-2 more cans cannellini beans. Let simmer 30 minutes to an hour. If mixture becomes too thick, add more broth. Add sour cream, heavy cream and fresh cilantro, and stir well. Taste and adjust seasonings, such as salt and cumin. Just before serving, stir in grated Monterey Jack cheese and ladle into serving bowls.

Tip: You will get better quality if you buy the whole chilies rather than chopped chilies.

Note: Progresso brand provides a better-quality bean that holds up well as the chili simmers, and you should only need three cans. If you use another brand and find that it is disintegrating as the chili simmers, add a fourth can of beans.



PARMESAN CHICKEN WINGS

These delicious wings are oven-baked.

- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons ground pepper
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- 1 1/2 cups panko breadcrumbs
- 1 1/4 cups grated parmesan cheese
- 2 pounds chicken wings, cut at joints, wing tips discarded
- 3 tablespoons balsamic glaze (store-bought or made from scratch)
- Lemon wedges
- Ranch dressing
- Celery and carrot sticks

Preheat oven to 450 F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Coat with cooking spray. Combine flour, garlic powder and pepper in a shallow dish.

Place eggs in a second shallow dish. Combine panko and cheese in a third shallow dish. Working in batches, dredge chicken pieces in the flour mixture, then the eggs and finally in the panko mixture, shaking off excess after each dredging. Place on the prepared baking sheet. Coat the chicken lightly with cooking spray.

Bake, turning the chicken halfway through, until the chicken is golden brown, and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest portion registers 165 F, 20-25 minutes.

Arrange the chicken on a platter. Drizzle with balsamic glaze and serve with lemon wedges and ranch dressing for dipping with celery and carrots.

DOUBLE DIP HUMMUS

This recipe from Eating Well could be the creamiest hummus you've ever tasted. It's best made a day in advance.

- 8 ounces dried chickpeas (about 1 cup)
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 7 large cloves garlic, divided
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1/2 cup tahini, divided
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice plus 1 tablespoon, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin, plus more for garnish
- Paprika for garnish
- 1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons of the prettiest chickpeas for garnish.

Rinse the remaining chickpeas and garlic and set the colander over a bowl. Refrigerate the chickpea mixture, reserved cooking water and pretty chickpeas separately overnight.

The next day, combine the chickpeas, 6 of the garlic cloves and 1/2 cup of the reserved cooking water in a food processor (or blender) with 1/4 cup each oil, tahini and lemon juice. Add salt and cumin. Process until creamy. Transfer to a serving bowl. Puree the remaining 1/4 cup each oil and tahini with the remaining garlic clove, 2 tablespoons of the cooking water and 1 tablespoon lemon juice until smooth.

Make an indentation in the center of the hummus and spoon in the tahini-lemon mixture. Sprinkle the hummus with cumin and paprika, if desired. Garnish with the reserved whole chickpeas and parsley. Serve with fresh carrots, celery and other colorful vegetables and/or pita chips. 📺

Place chickpeas in a medium saucepan and cover with 2 inches of water. Stir in baking soda. Soak overnight. Drain the chickpeas and rinse well. Rinse out the pan. Return the chickpeas to the pan and cover with 2 inches of fresh water. Add garlic. Bring to a boil. Keep at a rolling boil until the chickpeas are tender and almost falling apart, 25-40 minutes.

Reserve about 3/4 cup of the cooking water, then drain the chickpeas. Set aside



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