

The Mountain Telephone

JULY/AUGUST 2016

CONNECTION

One community....



...connected with Mountain Telephone

COLLECTING CAST IRON

Classic cookware is popular, often valuable and hot with chefs

LONG DISTANCE NO MORE

Mountain Telephone offers free calls to 10 surrounding counties

Inside: **2016 ANNUAL REPORT**

MAKING AN IMPACT WHILE MAKING CONNECTIONS

New study shows that rural broadband adds significant dollars and jobs to nation's overall economy

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

Rural broadband is about more than connecting people to high-speed internet service. A new study reveals that your telco and companies like it, along with the vendors that support the industry, made significant contributions to the U.S. economy in 2015.

The study, "The Economic Impact of Rural Broadband," was published in April by the Hudson Institute, a research organization promoting American leadership, and the Foundation for Rural Service, a non-profit established in 1994 by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association to advance an understanding of rural issues.

The rural broadband industry had a \$24.1 billion impact on America's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) last year. A country's GDP represents the total dollar value of the final goods and services produced by

all industries and is a means of gauging the economic health of a nation.

In addition to its immediate economic impact, broadband is important to rural communities because it connects citizens to educational, shopping and job opportunities. The Hudson/FRS study, however, revealed that rural broadband has a striking impact on urban areas as well.

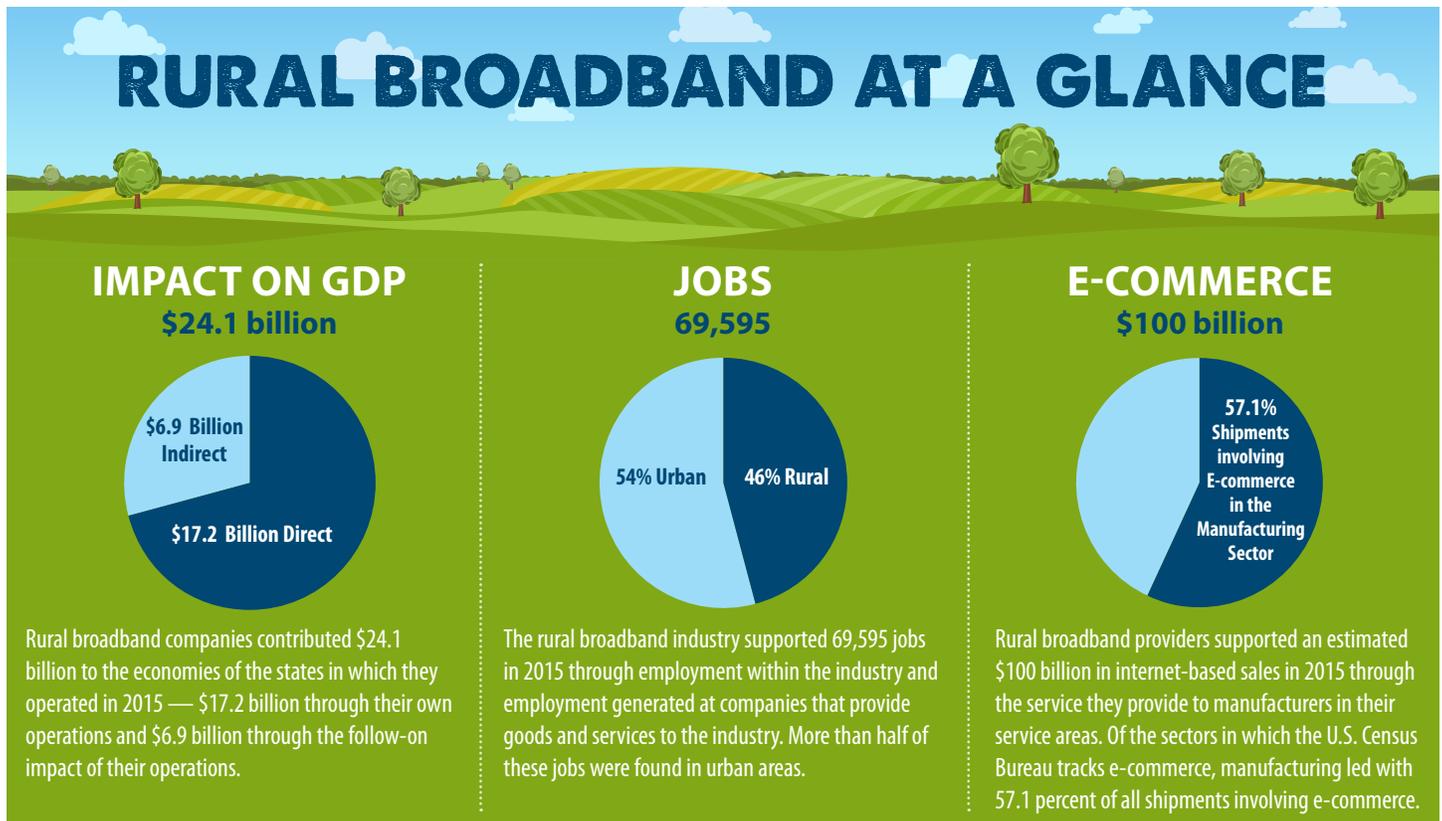
Of the \$24.1 billion that rural broadband contributed to the GDP, some 66 percent, or \$15.9 billion, accrued to urban areas. Further, of the 69,595 jobs supported by rural broadband, through direct employment and employment generated by its purchase of goods and services, some 54 percent were in urban areas. This can be attributed to the fact that many vendors supplying the industry (with equipment, materials, regulatory and other consultant

services, etc.) are centered in urban areas.

"This illustrates that rural broadband is not just a rural issue," says Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA. "A healthy U.S. economy actually needs rural broadband, and a healthy U.S. job market actually needs rural broadband."

Rural broadband also contributed to the economy by supporting e-commerce activity. The U.S. Census Bureau tracks economic transactions that occur over the internet, and, according to the report, rural broadband providers supported some \$100 billion in e-commerce through the service they provide to manufacturers (the sector where e-commerce was the strongest).

The report provides additional details, including a state-by-state breakdown of financial impact and number of jobs. To view the report, visit www.frs.org.

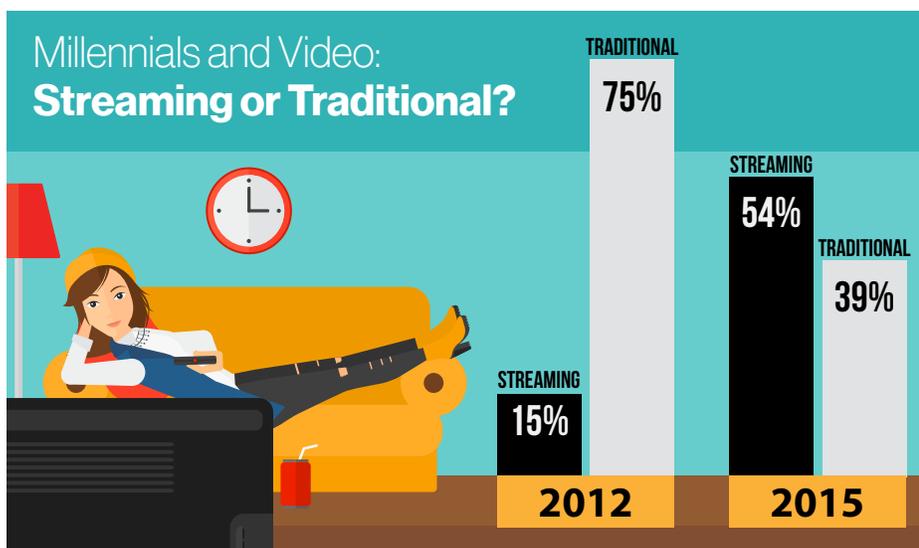


Millennials now prefer streaming over live TV

According to the “State of Cable & Digital Media 2016” report by Horowitz Research, millennials (those aged 18 to 34) are far more likely to stream video than to watch traditional, live television.

Streaming video is content delivered over an internet connection to smart TVs, tablets, smartphones, computers or streaming players such as Roku, Amazon Fire TV and Apple TV.

The numbers show a dramatic turnaround from 2012 and further underscore millennials’ need for high-quality, high-speed broadband connections.



Source: Horowitz Research

Call completion What can you do?

Rural call completion continues to be a challenge, as people experience failed connections and poor call quality when making long-distance or wireless calls to rural landlines. Following are some steps to take if someone has trouble completing a call to you from a long-distance or wireless telephone service provider:

1 Encourage them to report the issue to their provider. They will need the date and time the call was attempted, plus the calling and called telephone numbers.

2 Encourage them to report the problem to the FCC by calling 888-225-5322 or visiting consumercomplaints.fcc.gov. They will need the date

and time the call was attempted, the calling and called telephone numbers and the name of their long-distance or wireless telephone service provider.

3 Call your local phone company and provide the same information so they may work with the long distance or wireless provider to isolate the problem.

NTCA THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION RURAL CONNECTIONS

BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

Progress on call completion issue

While the issue of call completion into rural areas continues to be a problem, we saw some progress a few weeks ago when a Utah-based long-distance carrier and call-center service provider agreed to pay \$100,000 to settle an FCC investigation.

Rural residents and business owners have long reported that some long-distance and wireless callers are not able to get through to their landline telephone, and that some calls that do come through have poor call quality. A leading cause of these call completion issues is substandard service from third-party companies, known as “least-cost routers,” that long-distance and wireless companies use to route their calls into rural areas.

The FCC investigation and ultimate settlement took place in part thanks to a consumer in rural Minnesota who complained repeatedly to the FCC. This is not an easy step for a consumer to take, and it puts the burden in the wrong place.

While we certainly appreciate the FCC’s actions, such efforts have so far not been able to stop this practice. This calls for the need for legislation like that introduced by Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Rep. David Young (R-IA) to shine the light on these least-cost routers and put an end to the call completion problem once and for all. NTCA is eager to work with members of Congress and the FCC to ensure that all carriers and intermediate providers finally understand that practices contributing to dropped and uncompleted calls are simply unacceptable. ☑

Building for the future

Many of us use broadband when we first wake up, at the last moment before we go to sleep and during much of the time in between. For something that barely existed 15 years ago, it's remarkably embedded in our lives.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

In the morning, before we even get dressed, we check the weather. That's right; broadband helps us decide what clothes to wear every day. When we get in our cars, many of us listen to podcasts, stream internet radio stations or use our phone's GPS for directions if we're going somewhere new. These services may exist on our mobile phones, but it's important to remember that it's often broadband providers like Mountain Telephone that have built the network to connect cell towers to servers.

At work, more and more of our jobs rely on broadband. We email customers and co-workers. We order parts. We download new curricula, training videos or manuals. We upload our documents, diagrams and data to far-flung vendors, partners and clients. More and more of us are using videoconferencing to

interact face-to-face with people around the country or even around the world.

Toward the end of our day, some of us search recipes or restaurant menus to decide on dinner. After we eat, many of us shop online, share photos with family members or browse social media. Then, as our evening comes to an end, we stream TV shows, catch up on news articles or read an e-book we've downloaded on our tablets.

To be sure, the internet has made so many day-to-day tasks more convenient and has allowed us to work more efficiently.

It's easy to say no one could have predicted how big the internet has become in our daily lives, but as your local broadband provider, it's our job to predict these types of advances and prepare for them. We've worked hard over the past several decades to be sure we invested in the network our customers would need, before they would need it. For our area to keep up with the business trends, quality of life and educational opportunities in other areas, it's been paramount that our network be able to handle future demands.

Looking forward, I don't see these advances slowing down. On the contrary, I believe changes in telemedicine, streaming entertainment, cloud-based computing, home automation and long-distance learning will rapidly increase the importance of a reliable broadband connection.

I'm excited to see the new ways technology will improve our lives over the next 10 or 15 years, and I'm excited to be part of the team that's delivering this technology to the customers of Mountain Telephone. ☺

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JULY/AUGUST 2016

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Mountain Telephone

Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc., is a member-owned cooperative dedicated to providing communications technology to the people of Elliott, Menifee, Morgan, Wolfe and a section of Bath counties. The company covers 1,048 square miles and supplies service to nearly 12,000 members.

Send address corrections to:
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West Liberty, KY 41472
Telephone: 606-743-3121

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Produced for MRTC by:



On the Cover:



Mountain Telephone provides quality services at great prices. Review the cooperative's annual report and meet our 2016 team. See story Page 8.

TEN COUNTIES — NO LONG-DISTANCE CHARGES

WITH MOUNTAIN, CALL YOUR NEIGHBORS FOR FREE!

Effective now!

7-Digit Dialing

- Don't dial the "1"
- Don't dial the area code

10-Digit Dialing

- Don't dial the "1"
- Do dial the area code (859)

7-Digit Dialing

- Don't dial the "1"
- Don't dial the area code

10-Digit Dialing

- Don't dial the "1"
- Do dial the area code (859)

Mountain ends long-distance charges for calls to 10 surrounding counties

Before, long-distance charges applied when most Mountain Telephone customers called nearby counties. In fact, those calls represented most of a typical telephone subscriber's long-distance bill. Mountain has arranged to bring surrounding counties into its local calling area: Bath, Breathitt, Carter, Johnson, Lawrence, Lee, Magoffin, Montgomery, Powell and Rowan. That's right — starting now you can call cities like Morehead, Paintsville, Mount Sterling, Jackson, Salyersville and more for free!

Here's how it works:

— 7-Digit Dialing —

DON'T dial the "1." DON'T dial the area code when calling:

- | | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|
| ▪ Bath | ▪ Johnson | ▪ Magoffin |
| ▪ Breathitt | ▪ Lawrence | ▪ Powell |
| ▪ Carter | ▪ Lee | ▪ Rowan |

— 10-Digit Dialing —

DON'T dial the "1." DO dial the area code (859) when calling:

- Montgomery

Go ahead and call your neighbors in surrounding counties — it's not long distance anymore!



Mountain Telephone

ASTRONOMICAL ATTRACTIONS

*Explore the galaxy from
these heavenly hotspots*

BY ANNE BRALY

City lights cast a blanket over the night sky, effectively covering the brilliance of the stars. But step out into the country and the universe presents itself with a light show like none other. Here are some of the best places for stargazing in the South — wonders to behold by simply looking up.

TAMKE-ALLAN OBSERVATORY Rockwood, Tennessee

Though many parts of the Cumberland Plateau have seen extensive growth resulting in light pollution, Tamke-Allan is in an isolated location ideal for stargazing, says Dr. David Fields, astronomy professor at Roane State Community College. The observatory was opened by the college in 1998.

“Only by experiencing astronomy and discussing the implications of an infinite universe does one begin to appreciate the challenges and adventures that astronomy offers,” Fields says.

And what newcomers to Tamke-Allan will experience includes observing the skies through one of several telescopes: a 13.1-inch Dobsonian; a computer-controlled 12-inch Meade; and a large 6-foot-long, 8-inch telescope. In addition, there are several smaller telescopes used for teaching, but visitors are encouraged to bring their own.

- ▶ **Hours:** The first and third Saturdays of every month, beginning at 7:30 p.m., weather permitting.
- ▶ **Admission:** Free, but bring food to share with astronomers.
- ▶ **Information:** www.roanestate.edu/obs



TECH-SAVVY TRAVELER:

Good news! If you don't have time to make it to an observatory or planetarium — the night sky puts on a show every night from dusk to dawn and technology can help you know what's going on. Websites like seasky.org provide calendars to know when eclipses, meteor showers and other phenomena will occur and darksitefinder.com can help you find areas away from city lights where you can see the sky best. For more advanced astronomers, mobile apps like **Star Chart**, **Sky Guide** and **The Night Sky** can help you identify stars, planets and constellations.

LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES

Golden Pond, Kentucky

Visitors to the Golden Pond Planetarium and Observatory can stand beneath a 40-foot domed ceiling and learn about the constellations on a simulated night sky. Then, they can see the real thing through two state-of-the-art telescopes, one that will track anything in its view, and another that allows viewers a safe look at the sun, a sight unlike any you've ever seen. But if you're looking for a setting in the wilds of nature, take your tent and binoculars and set out for an overnight in the backcountry, where, on beautiful nights, blackened skies are backlit with nature's laser show. And if you're lucky, you'll catch a falling star.

- ▶ **Hours:** Open all year, except Thanksgiving Day, December 24-26, December 30-31, and January 1.
- ▶ **Admission:** Daytime shows are \$5 (ages 13 and up) and \$3 (ages 5-12). Evening shows are \$7 (all ages).
- ▶ **Information:** www.explorekentuckylake.com or www.landbetweentheakes.us.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Summer is one of the best times for stargazing. "It's the time of year that gets the brightest inner parts of the Milky Way and its star clusters and nebulae," says Dr. William Keel, a professor of physics and astronomy at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

While most university programs are student-only events, the astronomy department opens its doors to all on select evenings for both viewings on campus, from the observatory high atop Gallalee Hall, and off campus, from beneath the dark skies of Moundville Archeological Park.

When the observatory's copper-topped dome opens, a large telescope mounted on a giant arm swings into position, its lens searching for the mysteries of the universe that light the night sky.

Sometimes as many as 200, or as few as 10, delight in night-time field trips to Moundville, where portable telescopes bring into focus planets and other celestial

spectacles not seen by the naked eye.

- ▶ **Hours:** See website for schedule
- ▶ **Admission:** Free
- ▶ **Information:** astronomy.ua.edu/Public.html
- ▶ **Elsewhere in Alabama:** The dome of the planetarium at the Von Braun Astronomical Society on Monte Sano Mountain near Huntsville started life as the shipping cover for a Saturn V fuel tank. Public planetarium shows begin at 7:30 p.m. every Saturday. Admission is \$5 (adults), \$3 (students) and free for children under 6. For more information, visit www.vbas.org.

RAFES URBAN ASTRONOMY CENTER

Denton, Texas

Ever look up and ask yourself, "Hmm. Wonder if that's a star or a planet? Oh, could that be Orion's belt?" Party with the stars at one of Rafes' popular star parties and you'll have the answer delivered on the spot by knowledgeable astronomers. "Most people really just want to know what they're looking at," says Randall Peters, planetarium manager. And for the best view, the party is in an amphitheater adjacent to the observatory, complete with a dozen telescopes of all sizes and configurations.

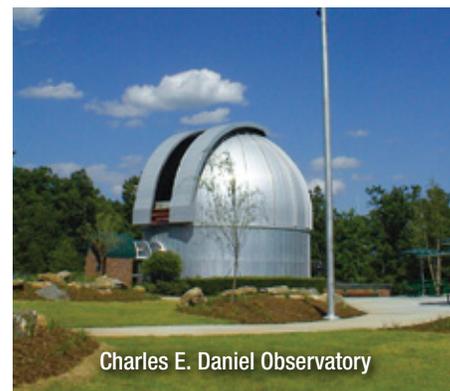
Rafes also features four telescope huts, each housing Celestron C8 telescopes, and two large domes that house Celestron C14's.

Rafes is operated by the University of North Texas, less than 10 miles east, making it a short drive to the campus to experience Sky Theater, a planetarium inside the Environmental Sciences Building. It's open every Saturday and takes guests on a ride through the cosmos via a high-definition projection system beamed onto a 40-foot domed ceiling.

- ▶ **Hours:** Star parties are every Saturday beginning 30 minutes after sundown. The Sky Theater offers a children's matinee at noon and public shows at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. every Saturday.
- ▶ **Admission:** \$5 (star parties), or star party/Sky Theater combo tickets may be purchased for \$7 (children under 12

and students with ID), \$8 (senior citizens) and \$9 (adults). Sky Theater-only tickets are \$3 (children under 12 and students with ID), \$4 (senior citizens) and \$5 (adults). Credit/debit cards not accepted.

- ▶ **Information:** www.astronomy.unt.edu.



Charles E. Daniel Observatory

CHARLES E. DANIEL OBSERVATORY

Greenville, South Carolina

Greenville's Daniel Observatory at Roper Mountain Science Center boasts the eighth-largest telescope in the nation. The 23-inch refractor telescope was completed in 1882 for Princeton University. It was rebuilt in 1933 and housed at the U.S. Naval Observatory before being moved to the science center's observatory in 1978.

"Our telescope is a window to the universe, enabling the observer to see everything from the moons of Jupiter to distant galaxies," says Greg Cornwell, planetarium and public program specialist.

In addition to Friday's Starry Nights planetarium show beneath its 50-foot domed ceiling and public viewings at the observatory, the center's Roper Mountain astronomers offer astronomy classes for students, special events and other organized activities. All this happens high atop the mountain, bringing guests just a bit closer to the stars.

- ▶ **Hours:** Starry Nights, 7-10 p.m. every Friday.
- ▶ **Admission** (includes planetarium show and observatory viewing): \$5 (adults) and \$4 (children 5-12 and seniors 60-plus).
- ▶ **Information:** www.RoperMountain.org. ☏

20
16

Annual Report

Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative

BALANCE SHEET

December 31, 2015

ASSETS

Current Assets\$11,766,071

Other Assets

Investments in Affiliated Companies.....27,854,708

(including Cellular)

Miscellaneous Physical Property.....2,729,778

Other Investments.....18,933,325

Total Current/Other Assets61,283,882

Telecommunications Plant.....119,792,053

Less Accumulated Depreciation (60,678,665)

Net Telecommunications Plant.....59,113,388

TOTAL ASSETS \$120,397,270**LIABILITIES and MEMBERS' EQUITIES**

Current Liabilities.....\$6,403,334

Long-Term Debt to U.S. Government.....18,850,140

Long-Term Liability (4,160,225)

Members' Equities:

Membership.....130,661

Patronage Capital.....97,849,592

Retired Capital Credit Gain1,323,768

TOTAL LIABILITIES and MEMBERS' EQUITIES \$120,397,270

Annual Report

20
16

*Thank you for letting us serve your
communications needs!*



Mountain Telephone's 2016 team



Board of Directors

- Jimmie Jones • 743 exchange • President
- Katie Ison • 738 exchange • Vice-President
- Jodi Lawson • 768 exchange • Secretary
- Susan Cable • 668 exchange • Treasurer
- Jack Howard • 725 exchange • Director
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- Chris Dickerson • 738 exchange • Director
- Mike Helton • 768 exchange • Director
- Betty Nickell • 662 exchange • Director
- D. Joleen Frederick • Attorney

Sue Rodman

MOM *on the* MOVE

A Q&A with Sue Rodman, a blogger from Atlanta who writes about her travels with her husband and sons, Nicholas, 18; Sam, 16; and Jake, 11.

Check out her blog, at
FIELDTRIPSWITHSUE.COM

Q: What will readers find at your blog?

SR: Readers will find fun things to do in Atlanta, as well as great places to go that are easily accessible from Atlanta. I try to give folks the information they'll need before they go, as well as tips to have the best experience possible. Having the right expectations going into an experience can be the difference between a great trip and one that's not so great.

Q: When did you begin blogging and how has it changed your life?

SR: I began blogging in late 2008. The blog has afforded opportunities for me and my family that I never would have dreamed of before. I've also met some incredible people. It's been fun to feel like I know folks around the entire country.

Q: Has there been a point when you questioned bringing the children along on a trip?

SR: Never. There are no bad field trips, only better stories. However, I will say that my husband has commented that the kids don't need to come every time, and as they have gotten older we are trying to do some trips without children. They don't like to be left home, but we remind them that we didn't go to places like the Turks and Caicos until we were middle-age.

They have plenty of time. They don't need to see the entire world right now.

Q: Do you often set out for a day hike, or do you enjoy making your hikes a multi-day escape?

SR: When I was younger, I would occasionally combine hiking with camping, but never more than a few days at a time. Despite my love of the outdoors, "roughing it" has never really been my thing. A year ago I purchased a Subaru Outback. I can now sleep overnight in my car, enabling me to go farther afield in search of trails.

Q: What's the most memorable trip you've taken with your kids?

SR: We spent a month in Breckenridge, Colorado, one summer. It was an amazing experience. If you have a job that allows you to work virtually, I highly suggest looking into getting away for an extended period like that. We really got to know and explore the area without being rushed. It was good for the kids to see a different lifestyle from our hectic city life and realize there is more out there than our bubble; you just have to go look for it.

Q: How does traveling with children benefit them and you?



OTHER BLOGS YOU MIGHT LIKE:

► **GONewiththefamily.com**

A blog written by a mother of two young children that includes a collection of travel advice and trip reports, as well as tips, tricks and resources for traveling with little ones.

► **currentlywandering.com**

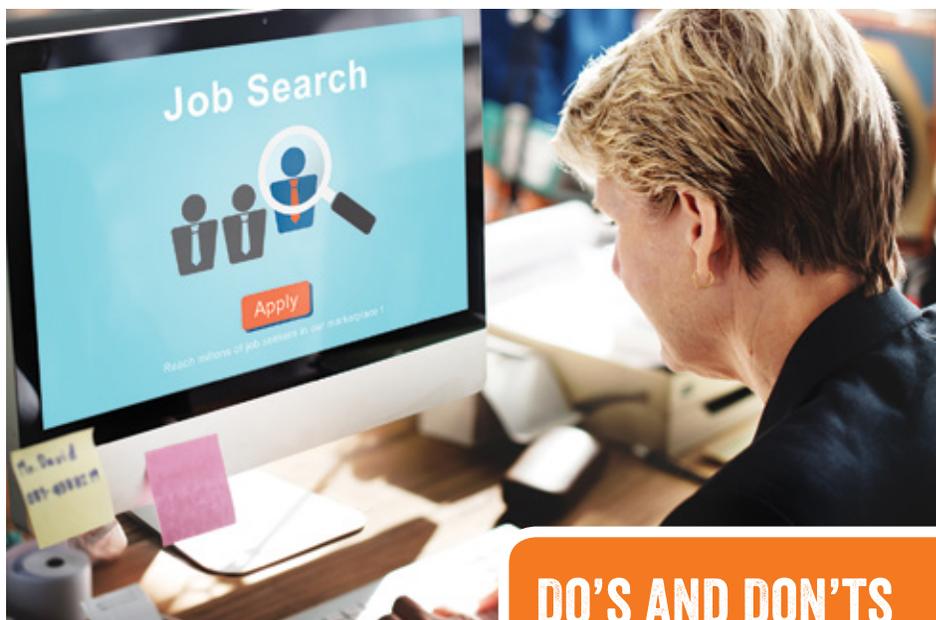
Ever thought about selling your home and hitting the road in an RV or trailer? Read about the adventures of a family of five living in a 188-square-foot Airstream.

SR: Where do I start? My boys have pulled out history books and pointed to photos of things we've seen every year. Travel brings education alive. It makes kids curious. It also helps them visualize the boring stuff in school and makes it relevant. Travel gives our family shared experiences and many laughs from our adventures. 📷

Looking for work in the digital age

Broadband helps job seekers expand their search

BY PATRICK SMITH



When it comes to job hunting in the digital age, an employer's first impression comes long before the first face-to-face meeting. Web searches, social media, email and online applications may have already painted a picture long before you step through the door.

And without some coaching, it's easy for that first impression to be something an applicant wouldn't want. Job seekers should be aware of everything from resume typos to questionable social media posts.

But regardless of the added scrutiny, searching for work online benefits both job seekers and employers. And anyone looking for work who isn't searching online greatly limits their ability to find a job.

LOOKING ONLINE

Applicants can start their online job search in a variety of ways. CareerBuilder.com, Indeed.com and Monster.com are three of the biggest online job-posting websites.

Additionally, don't overlook the importance of networking — both in person and online. Many experts encourage people to start a LinkedIn.com social media account. LinkedIn allows users in similar fields to network and connect.

When you're ready to apply, don't

send the same resume to 100 different job openings. Tailor your resume and cover letter to each specific job. And make sure the materials have been checked for misspellings or incorrect information. Even your email address can make an impression on employers. Make sure it's straightforward and professional.

Also, be aware of what you're sharing on social media. According to a 2013 survey by CareerBuilder.com, 37 percent of employers use social media sites like Facebook to screen job candidates — and one-third of those employers say they have found information on someone's social media site that has caused them not to hire that person.

Finally, before the interview, be sure to research the company online. Look into exactly what the company does and read recent news releases so you're up-to-date with the latest information. Being informed about the company also allows job seekers to ask smart questions during the interview. [🔗](#)

DO'S AND DON'TS

- **DO** create multiple resumes and cover letters tailored to the specific jobs.
- **DO** make sure everything on your resume is accurate and true.
- **DO** find out as much as possible about the company and job you have targeted.
- **DO** make it easy for employers to open your resume. PDF files of your cover letter and resume usually work best.
- **DO** network with people in similar positions, both in person and online.
- **DO** stay in touch. Follow up on your application with an email a few days later to show your interest in the job.
- **DO** drive to the location where you will be interviewing a day or two early so you don't get lost on the day of the meeting.
- **DON'T** send an email or letter without rereading it to check for attachments, grammar and spelling.
- **DON'T** apply for something you aren't qualified to do.
- **DON'T** be afraid of being rejected.
- **DON'T** be late for your interview.



From chefs to collectors, cast iron cookware is hot

BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

Cast iron skillets, for many Southerners, are a connection to the past, memories of childhoods spent eating fried chicken, gravy and cornbread.

But cast iron is more than a cook's tool. It comes with traditions and, usually, much discussion. Maybe it's a strategy to properly season the cooking surface, turning it into a chef's nonstick dream. Or, possibly someone sets aside a skillet for a specific use, such as one for cooking eggs and another for cornbread, with never a mix between the two.

Skillets also often come with history, both personal and regional. In fact, there's such a market for classic, high-quality skillets that some people try to pass off replicas as the real thing.

It's the usefulness, history and growing collectors' market surrounding cast iron cookware that captures the imaginations of people such as Gary Robinson, who has 350 pieces of cast iron in his own collection.

While he has many items that might interest a fan of cast iron, the pieces he

most cherishes represent touchstones to his family and past.

"I have one of my mother's skillets and one of my grandmother's," he says. "They hang on a wall, and they are family hand-me-downs. I've also tried to get pieces from my aunts and uncles so I could put their name on them. Then, one day my children or grandchildren, who never met that person, will be able to see something that was theirs."

But for Robinson, a Mountain Telephone installer, the collection does not end with family cast iron.

Now, many contemporary chefs are rediscovering the functionality of the cooking tools. "Demand has just skyrocketed over the last two or three years," Robinson says. "We can credit a lot of it to TV, and a lot of your professional cooks are starting to use it."

The reasons for cast iron's renewed



Gary Robinson's collection includes skillets from his mother and grandmother.



Gary Robinson displays part of his 350-piece cast iron collection.

popularity will not surprise those whose family keep an iron skillet, or two or three, handy.

Cast iron retains an even heat for a long time, which means it can handle a range of cooking chores, from perfect pork chops to crusty cornbread.

And while some cast iron pots have been in use since the 1600s, according to Robinson's research, they fit in fine with a modern kitchen, which not everyone realizes. "You can use it on any type of stove, whether you've got gas or electric," he says. "It works on slick-top ovens or even open flames outside."

A COLLECTORS' MARKET

About 10 years ago, Robinson, 51, got serious about learning the history behind the skillets that were part of his family's kitchen. Books cataloging entire lines of cookware were a start, and he relied on Facebook groups devoted to the subject. "I did lots and lots of research," he says.

He learned about brands such as Favorite, Wagner Ware and Wapak, but there is also Griswold, which holds a special place for collectors. Founded in 1865, the Erie, Pennsylvania, company operated until 1957, when it was

acquired after bankruptcy by the Randall Corporation.

Rare cast iron brings a higher price, which means the Griswolds are prime targets for collectors. Some skillets bear an "Erie" logo, while others have the Griswold mark. And rare items can bring a good price, commonly as much as \$500.

"Then, there is the Griswold spider skillet," Robinson says. "One of the workers apparently came up with the logo, and it looks like there's a spider in the center of it. Those can sell for more than \$2,000."

Also, the size of a cast iron skillet is identified by a number. For example, a number 8 skillet, one of the most common, has a diameter of just less than 11 inches. A savvy collector can use that skillet number to spot a good deal. "The harder it is to find, the more collectible it is," Robinson says. "In the olden days, people were superstitious, and they didn't want anything that had the number 13 on it in the house, so they're hard to find. They'd throw those skillets out," he says. "Some of the number 13 skillets will bring you \$2,000."

Robinson says there is also a replica market, newer skillets being sold as classics. "They're trying to pass them off as the real thing, but the lettering on the back doesn't look as good, and the casting is not as good," he says.

The surface of an older, classic skillet will appear smooth compared to newer skillets, which have a course surface, and that's a key to gauging a skillet's age, Robinson says.

Also, anyone considering entering the world of collecting cast iron should start slowly, making sure they understand how to spot a deal, versus a skillet that might have a value-reducing crack.

But, cast iron is not just for collectors because the cookware simply does a great job in the kitchen, says Robinson, who often makes skillet gravy for his Mountain co-workers at holiday gatherings. "Rather than go out and buy a new Teflon skillet, I'd much rather buy a used cast iron one for \$15 or \$18," he says. ☑



Seasoning: *The secret to cast iron cooking*

Cast iron cookware can last for generations, which contributes to its popularity. "Unless it's just rusty and pitted so bad that it is not worth fooling with, an average home cook can usually bring one home and have a good skillet," says Gary Robinson.

A Mountain Telephone installer, he also collects cast iron cookware, and there's a secret to getting the most out of the kitchen classics — seasoning, the process that keeps food from sticking to the metal surface.

Even a rusty, gunky skillet can be saved. "Start with putting it upside down in a self-cleaning oven, and then clean the oven, Robinson says. "Once that's done and it's cooled off, wash the skillet good."

Then, the seasoning begins. Put the lightest possible coat of oil — Robinson uses Crisco — on the skillet. Then, it goes back into the oven upside down, which keeps excess oil from pooling.

Robinson likes this formula for the oven settings — 200 degrees for two hours, 300 degrees for one hour, and finally 400 degrees for one hour.

"That will bake the seasoning back into it," says Robinson, who believes a properly seasoned skillet eliminates concerns about cleaning cast iron. "Once it's seasoned, you will be able to wash it with soap and water; it won't hurt it."

HOT DOG HAVEN

Any given weekend, day or night, folks crowd the town square in Abbeville, South Carolina, all coming for one thing: their love of a classic food America can call its very own — hot dogs. And no one serves them up any better than The Rough House.

The downtown eatery has been making hot dogs the same way for 84 years, says owner Darrow Kay. “Except for the kind of mustard we use,” he says. “We now use French’s.”

The Rough House keeps things simple. In a day when hot dog stands display outrageous toppings, such as avocados, cucumbers, tomatoes — even pineapple and teriyaki sauce — The Rough House takes a simpler approach that turns back the clock on tubular cuisine.

“Mustard, onions and chili are the only toppings we offer,” Kay says.

There’s Texas Pete on the table if you want to drizzle on some hot sauce to add a little bark to your dog. But if you want ketchup, you’ll have to add it yourself. Consider it a cardinal sin at The Rough House. “Our hot dogs taste too good to ruin them with ketchup,” Kay says.

And it’s not just the menu — hot dogs, ice cream and MoonPies, plus RC Cola, Cheerwine and Coca-Cola served in glass bottles — that takes a step back in time, adding a touch of nostalgia. So does the décor that sports old signs and photos from yesteryear.

“We have pictures on the walls of the old, local baseball teams from Abbeville and Calhoun Falls,” Kay says.

And don’t be surprised to find three generations of local families in one picture, all smiling back at you.

“One particular Saturday, there was a grandfather who was in one of the old baseball pictures,” Kay says. “He brought his son and grandson to see the old photos



Darrow Kay says things are built on tradition at The Rough House — from the hot dog toppings, sides and drinks to the old photos on the wall.

and to eat hot dogs and enjoy the atmosphere like he did as a young man. It most certainly put a smile on my face to keep the tradition alive.”

It’s all about life in a small town on a summer day, folks coming to The Rough House to experience one of life’s most-treasured, but simplest, culinary pleasures — a hot dog. Working guys in boots caked with mud and men in suits and ties sitting side-by-side. Grandparents with their grandkids, treating them to what may be their very first Rough House dog.

“It’s awesome to serve the children here in Abbeville,” Kay says. “The majority of the parents and grandparents make sure the children use good manners by saying ‘yes sir’ or ‘yes ma’am’ and ‘thank you.’ Thank goodness that manners are still important and alive in the South.”

While there’s nothing better than a hot

dog on a warm summer day, the sides that come with it are equally important. Here are several that Kay has found to be the best — and they’ll come as no surprise: baked beans, potato salad and coleslaw. ☺

IF YOU GO...

Where: The Rough House

Address: 116 Court Square, Abbeville, S.C.

Hours: 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday, 11 a.m. – 9 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m. – 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday.



Food Editor **Anne P. Braly** is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Prior to pursuing a freelance career, she spent 21 years as food editor and feature writer at a regional newspaper.

MAGIC BAKED BEANS

"I'll go ahead and warn you; these beans are delicious," Darrow Kay says.

- 8 slices of thick bacon
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 3 cans pork and beans (your favorite brand)
- 3/4 cup barbecue sauce
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup distilled white or apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

Cut bacon slices in half, then fry them on medium-low heat. You don't want to brown or crisp the bacon at all; the point is only to render the fat and get the bacon pieces ready to bake and turn brown in the oven. Remove bacon pieces once the fat is rendered; do not clean the skillet or pour off grease.

Add onion and green pepper to the skillet and saute until tender. Pour in beans and stir together.

Combine barbecue sauce, brown sugar, vinegar and mustard; stir into beans and simmer for a few minutes. Transfer mixture to a casserole dish and put half-cooked bacon slices on top. Since the fat has already been rendered from these, they're going to cook up really nicely in the oven ... and there won't be that big layer of grease standing on top of the beans. Bake slowly in a 325 F oven for 2 hours or until the beans have thickened with no soupiness at all.

CREAMY COLESLAW

- 1 pound package coleslaw mix
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup kosher salt

For the dressing:

- 2/3 cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon celery salt
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley leaves, chopped

Pour the coleslaw mix into a strainer and place in the sink. Sprinkle with 1/2 cup sugar and 1/4 cup kosher salt and lightly toss. Let sit for 5 minutes to draw out moisture from the cabbage; rinse well with cold water. Spin the coleslaw mix in a salad spinner and place in a large bowl.

For the dressing: In a medium bowl mix the mayonnaise, sugar, cider vinegar, celery salt, kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper and chopped parsley. Whisk well and pour 2/3 of the dressing over the cabbage mixture, and toss to combine. Add more of the dressing as desired and season with more salt, pepper or parsley to taste. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or overnight before serving.

GRILLED BLUE CHEESE-AND-BACON POTATO SALAD

- 3 pounds baby red potatoes, cut in half
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup white balsamic vinegar
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 4 ounces crumbled blue cheese
- 6 bacon slices, cooked crisp and crumbled

Preheat grill to 350-400 F (medium-high) heat. Place potatoes in a single layer in center of a large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Drizzle with olive oil; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bring up foil sides over potatoes; double fold top and side edges to seal, making 1 large packet. Grill potatoes, in foil packet, covered with grill lid, 15 minutes on each side. Remove packet from grill. Carefully open packet, using tongs, and let potatoes cool 5 minutes. Or, if you do not have a grill, potatoes can be roasted in a 400 F oven with olive oil until browned and tender. Whisk together mayonnaise, parsley, vinegar, sugar and mustard in a large bowl; add potatoes, tossing gently to coat. Stir in blue cheese and bacon. Serve. 🍴



Grilled Blue Cheese-and-Bacon Potato Salad



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