Eastex Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024

CONNECTION

Broadband Boost

Polk County thriving with new fiber

CYBERBULLIES

GHOST TOURS

NTCA THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

RURAL CONNECTIONS

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.

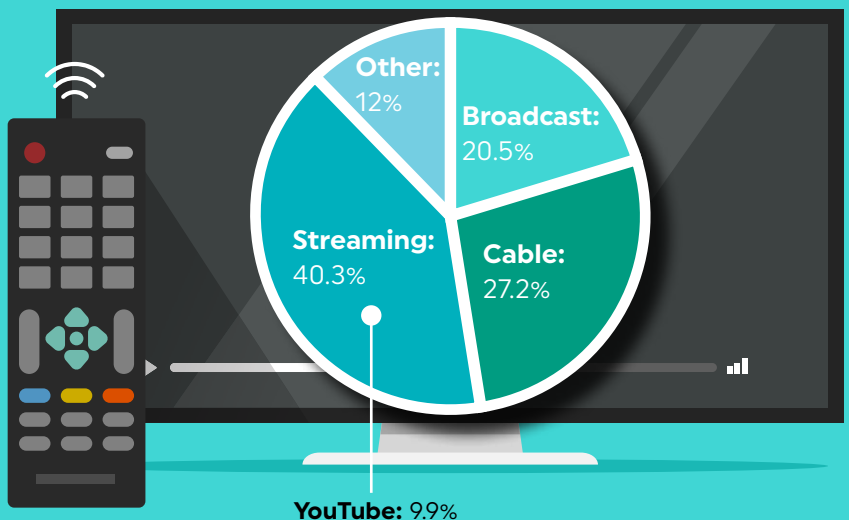
Streaming Remains Strong

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.

RUSTY DORMAN
General Manager

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. We all have the power to be positive influencers each and every day.

In fact, a commitment to helping others is a core part of our mission at Eastex. 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, Eastex 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 East Texas so special.

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

Livingston Branch Office:
P.O. Box 1510
1704 U.S. Highway 59 Loop N.
Livingston, TX 77351-0027
936-967-1000 • 800-732-7839

Headquarters:
P.O. Box 150
3675 U.S. Highway 79 S.
Henderson, TX 75653-0150
903-854-1000 • 800-232-7839

Waskom Branch Office:
P.O. Box 1691
705 Spur 156
Waskom, TX 75692-1691
903-687-3600 • 800-232-7839

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Eastex Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

A member-owned cooperative dedicated to delivering advanced telecommunications technology to the people in the Henderson, Livingston and Waskom areas.

Eastex is proud to offer broadband through Eastex Net, and security and automation services through ECS Solutions.

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On the Cover:

A fiber-build partnership between Eastex and Polk County resulted in a win-win for businesses and residents alike. *See story Page 12.*

Adobe Stock photo by vegefox.com

Understanding Online Security

Your Eastex internet is delivered over a secure network built to protect you. Because your safety is always a top priority, remember to follow these tips to further guard your information and identity online.

No phishing allowed!

Never give your personal information over email—even if it seems to be from a company you trust!

Not so fast...

Never answer or click on links in unsolicited texts. That text claiming to be from your bank or another big company just might be a scammer looking to steal your personal information.

If you can remember it, they can hack it.

Use a secure password manager to generate and save random, unique passwords for every account you have online.

A scammer 'liked' your survey!

Protect your personal information. If it's the answer to an account security question, it doesn't belong in a Facebook post.

Stop thieves in their tracks.

Always protect your smartphone with a secure passcode or fingerprint login.

GAME ON!

			5					
				1	6	7		
1		7	2				9	
8				4	1		6	
		5	3		8	1		
	6		7	5				9
	7				4	9		6
		4	1	3				
					5			

ANSWERS

8	3	4	5	7	9	6	1	2
5	7	2	6	3	1	4	8	9
9	1	6	4	2	8	3	7	5
6	8	3	2	5	7	1	9	4
2	4	1	8	9	3	5	6	7
7	9	5	1	4	6	2	3	8
4	6	9	3	8	2	7	5	1
3	5	7	9	1	4	8	2	6
1	2	8	7	6	5	9	4	3

Take a load off!

We hope you enjoy a relaxing and rejuvenating **LABOR DAY** weekend. In honor of the holiday, **Eastex offices will close MONDAY, SEPT. 2.**

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

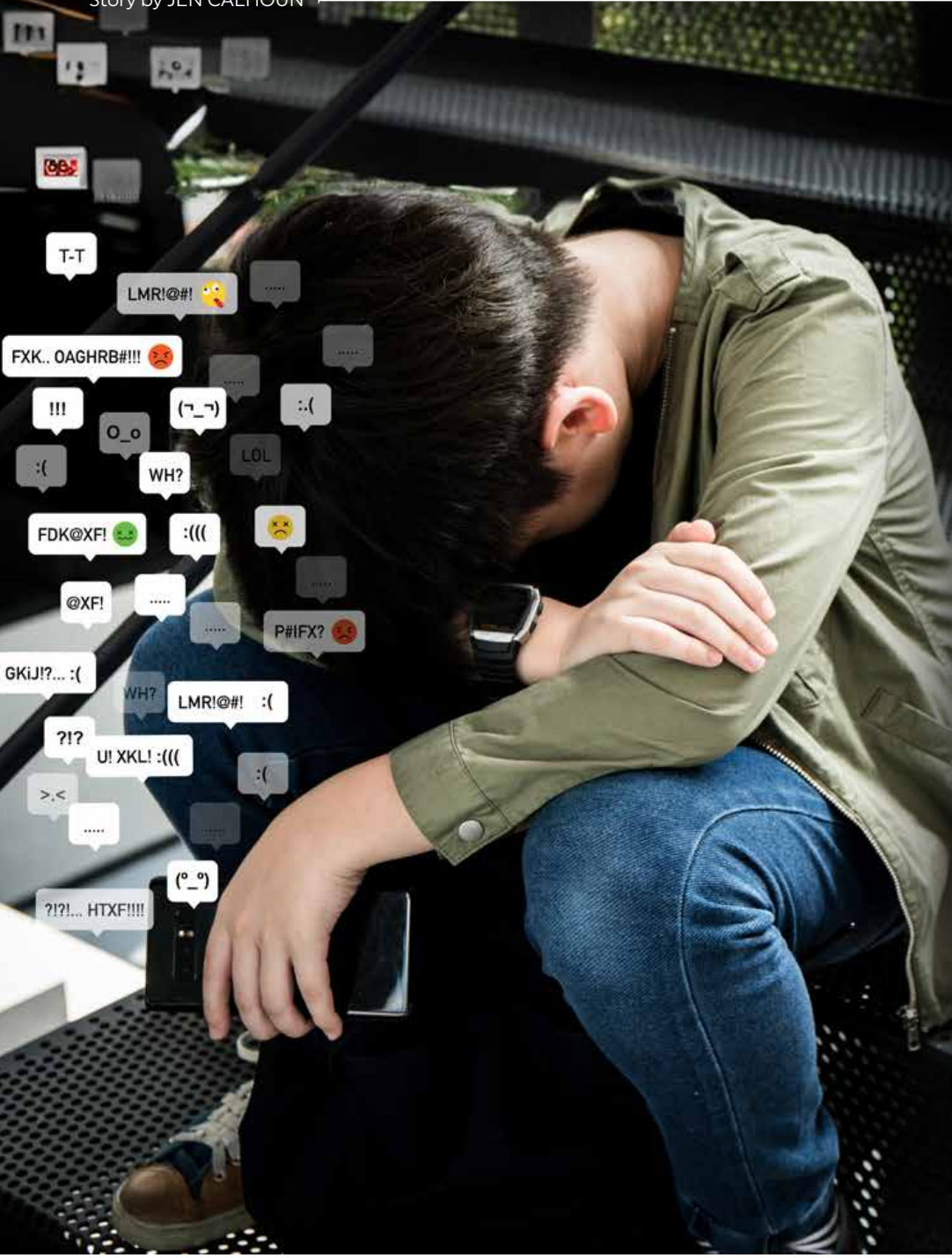
Check Google reviews and websites like Yelp or Tripadvisor for reviews. Search for detailed reviews that weigh the pros and cons of the tour. If you find positive reviews of a specific guide, you may be able to book a tour on a night when that person is working.

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

CYBERBUL

What parents need to know

Story by JEN CALHOUN



Despite the changes in education these days, "the three R's"—reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic—still dominate most school curriculums. But parents should know about another couple of R's when it comes to their children's well-being.

The newest set of R's—recognize and report—pertains to cyberbullying. Like in-person bullying, cyberbullying is a repeated behavior that aims to frighten, anger, intimidate or shame the targeted person. It can happen through social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. And while it's not always harmful, cyberbullying can sometimes lead to physical, mental and emotional damage.

"Cyberbullying can cause a big problem with a child's self-esteem, even as early as elementary school," says Brooke Cox, a licensed professional counselor associate in Nacogdoches who primarily works with children and adolescents. "I try to tell parents they've got to be aware, because lots of times a child won't go home and tell their parents about it. Look out for signs like whether they're acting differently or if there are changes to their sleeping and eating. Do they no longer want to go to school? Things like that."

Cox suggests children learn to recognize bullying and report it. In some cases, she also recommends talking to a therapist. Therapy, she says, can help children deal with the complex

LYING

emotions that come with being the target of a cyberbully, while offering adults ways to help them.

ON THE RISE

Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 14.9% of high school students reported they had been bullied electronically. "Both cyberbullying and bullying are associated with depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, eating disorders, irritability, self-pity, decline in school performance, truancy" and other illnesses that could be caused by emotional distress, according to a February 2023 article in The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law.

Suicide has also been linked to cyberbullying in some media reports and anecdotes, but there's little conclusive scientific evidence of it. And while a study published in the Journal of American Medical Association found that 38.4% of those who were cyberbullied also reported suicidal ideation, it's still not a definitive link.

In her practice, Cox has seen quite a few cases of cyberbullying, and she's not surprised. "It makes sense because everything has become technology-based," she says. "Children today are online more than ever before."

Technology can open the world to its users, and it can also create difficulties if parents aren't aware and engaged in their children's activities. Social media apps, for example, can be a good outlet for children to talk, form friendships and express themselves.

But those same apps can give bullies anonymity, as well as a less confrontational way to taunt others. "Cyberbullying might be easier for some people than in-person bullying," Cox says. "This way they don't have to do it to someone's face. They don't have to see their reaction."

NAVIGATING A NEW WORLD

Despite the rise in cyberbullying cases, there are ways to manage and try to prevent it without going completely off the grid. The internet is a tool to be used. And like other tools, there's a way to use it safely.

The first thing parents can do to discourage cyberbullying is to take stock of online activities. Bullying of any kind often involves shame, which can prevent or delay children from telling anyone about it. But if parents sense something is off, they can review phone browsers for unusual or suspicious sites and activities. They can also check apps and social media accounts by going into the app library, which may include apps not found on the home screen.

In addition, parents should always keep the lines of communication open by letting their children know they can talk without repercussions—even if they're the ones doing the bullying.

"A kid should not get in trouble or get judged if they tell their parents what's going on," Cox says. "They shouldn't be feeling like they can't tell someone how they're feeling. That's where counseling can help, too. Sometimes it's easier to talk to someone who's not your parent."

Resources to STOP cyberbullying

To learn more about cyberbullying, we've compiled a few resources that can help. These resources offer tips on how to spot if your child is being bullied, as well as ways to make it stop.

Stopbullying.gov—This comprehensive site offers information and help on every aspect of cyberbullying, including the latest—and sneakiest—social media apps marketed directly to children. It also presents parents with ways to become digitally aware.

Safesearchkids.com—Want to know how safe various sites are for kids? Safe Search Kids offers a breakdown of some of the most popular social media sites, ways they might be dangerous for children and how parents can monitor and control their usage.

Crisistextline.org—Need someone to talk to? This site can connect you to a crisis counselor via online chats, texting or WhatsApp messaging. It also offers various tools and resources for teachers, parents and children.

Adobe Stock/Happy-Lucky, myboys.me, deagreez

Story by DAVID HERDER and DREW WOOLEY

RUNNING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Photo illustration by Mark Gilliland

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 courtesy of Olivia Murphy

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

Photo courtesy of USA Archery

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

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 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.

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.

Broadba

Fiber partnership with Eastex helps Polk County thrive

Story by JEN CALHOUN

It's been a little over two years since Polk County's government partnered with Eastex to build a fiber optic network in parts of the county that didn't have it. Today, that project is nearing completion, delivering access to the fastest, most reliable internet service available to many residents and businesses who have never had it before now.

While the fiber internet service is still fairly new, many residents are already recognizing the benefits due to flexibility with work and school, Polk County Judge Sydney Murphy says. "Those benefits will become more obvious to young families when their kids return to school and have better, faster access to internet programs," she says. "It will be interesting to see it develop over the next few years."

Local government offices are experiencing benefits, too, including increased productivity and all-around better communication. The faster, more reliable internet service will ultimately improve residential services exponentially, she says. Some of that will happen once local service organizations update and modify software programs and websites.

"We are looking forward to having our 440-foot communications tower online that will improve communication during a disaster and general daily communications for that area of the county," says Murphy, referring to the northern parts of Polk County.

As for the fiber network's impact on economic development, there's no way yet to accurately estimate the potential, Murphy says. However, that could change quickly once the project is complete. "The benefits will become more measurable in terms of commercial/business development once full implementation has occurred, and the business community starts seeing measurable improvements in their businesses," Murphy says.

THE PROJECT

Polk County leaders started the partnership with the idea of making sure fiber internet service was available to everyone on all major corridors within the county, Eastex Plant Manager Anthony Hendrix says. "This would encourage economic development and achieve the added benefit of expanding fiber availability to more residents within the county," he says.

At the time, Eastex was already in the middle of planning an extensive fiber build in other portions of Polk County, where Eastex has provided service for decades. Winning the bid and partnership that provided additional funding from the

Members of the Polk County Commissioners Court and Eastex Telephone staff celebrate the formalization of their fiber partnership in 2022. From left: Anthony Hendrix, Guylene Robertson, Wes Robinson, C.T. "Tommy" Overstreet, Rusty Dorman, Judge Sydney Murphy, Ronnie Vincent and Milt Purvis.

Photo courtesy of Eastex

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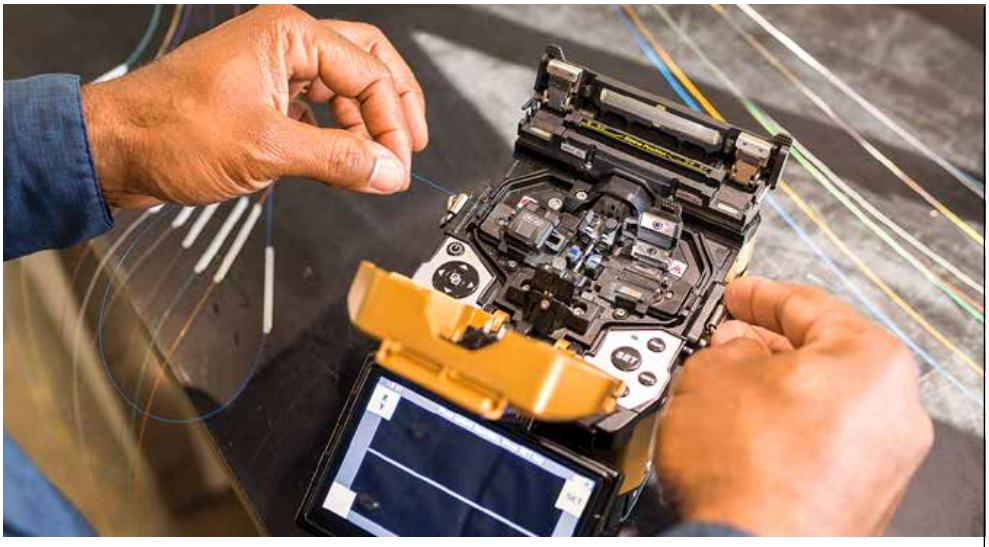


A technician splices a strand of fiber optic cable. Photo courtesy of Eastex

American Rescue Plan Act gave Eastex a perfect opportunity to fill the fiber gap that existed in northern Polk County.

The primary corridors within the county span about 140 miles and include areas along these routes: U.S. Highway 146, which runs from the Hardin County line to Livingston; U.S. Highway 190, which runs from the Tyler County line to the San Jacinto County line; U.S. Highway 287, which runs from the Trinity County line to the Tyler County line; and areas along Interstate 69 and U.S. Highway 59 that run into the San Jacinto County line and Angelina County line, as well as those that run into Eastex's traditional boundary line of coverage.

Hendrix says about 72 miles of fiber infrastructure were already in place—most of it along the major corridors in southern Polk County. That left the cooperative to build 68 more miles of infrastructure in the northern part of the county, which was completed in May.

In addition, Eastex agreed to install fiber in a few other areas with a high concentration of potential customers if 40% of them agreed to obtain service, Hendrix says. Two of those projects have finished, and Eastex is in the process of surveying the other areas to determine if enough people are interested in its fiber internet service.

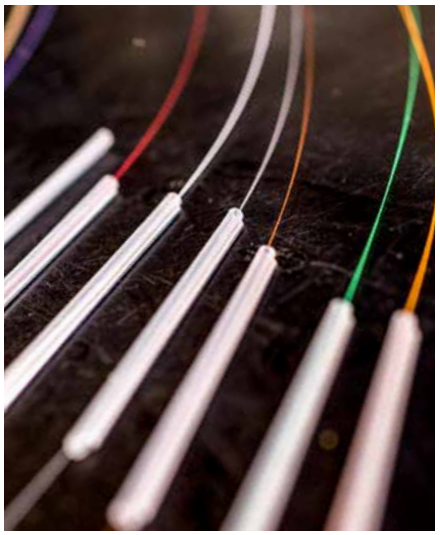
BIG PICTURE

As demand for high-speed fiber internet increases, government officials all over the country have recognized the need for connectivity. Fast, reliable internet service is a nonnegotiable necessity for education, business, government and just about anything else imaginable. "We want to make sure we're strategic about our growth and where it goes," Murphy noted in a previous Eastex Connection article.

But it's not a one-way street. What's good for Polk County and its people is also good for Eastex and its members, Hendrix says. "The partnership was equally important to us, as we understood their concern about having fiber available along the major corridors for economic development," he says. "Growth within the county is growth for Eastex, which benefits our members."

Eastex Leads the Way

For several years now, Eastex has been building fiber networks all over the cooperative's 2,314 square miles of service territory. It's all part of an ongoing plan to keep Eastex customers connected with fiber optic lines, which are considered the leader in broadband technology. The northern Polk County project is one piece of this wide-reaching objective.



The fiber advantage

Fiber is faster, more **reliable** and better able to adapt to the latest technology. That can mean that not only is the **signal stronger,** but there's **less interference**, **less lag time** and **improved security**. Fiber is also **scalable**, meaning it's easier and less expensive for companies like Eastex to increase broadband capability as an area grows.

Kick Off THE SEASON

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

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 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 indention 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.

Eastex Telephone Cooperative, Inc.
P.O. Box 150
Henderson, TX 75653

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