Eastex Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

CONNECTION

Sip, Savor and Socialize

Britt's Wine and Dine

D.P. FLOOR CARE & INTERIOR

COWBOY POETS

NTCA THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

RURAL CONNECTIONS

By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association

Ensuring Access for All

Supreme Court upholds Universal Service Fund

Money raised by a small fee on your communications bill makes a critical difference throughout rural America. Earlier this year, a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the Universal Service Fund, or USF, to continue.

I can't emphasize enough how critical this ruling is in a journey that began in 1934, when the Communications Act decreed all Americans should have access to rapid, efficient and nationwide communication services at reasonable prices.

Then, the 1996 Telecommunications Act created the USF to better connect rural areas and make voice and broadband services more affordable for rural and low-income consumers, schools, libraries and rural health care facilities.

By affirming that the Federal Communications Commission has discretion to collect the fees, the court kept this foundational tool in place. A March survey of nearly 270 NTCA members indicated that the USF programs help keep rural broadband rates more affordable. Without this funding, rural consumer rates could be more than double those in urban areas.

Policymakers in Washington, D.C., are debating how to reform universal service programs going forward, so that they can continue to serve the needs of millions of Americans.

It is essential that our elected officials understand the positive impacts the critical USF programs have had—and continue to have—on the availability, affordability and sustainability of voice and broadband services for millions of consumers, businesses and anchor institutions in rural America.

Visit ntca.org/universalservice.

Secure Your Digital World

Keys for success

While October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, protecting yourself requires year-long vigilance. And everyone's needs vary based on the online tools and resources you use.

Remember, bad actors are increasingly sophisticated—they want access to your information. The FBI offers a few tips for some of the key points of emphasis, and they provide a good starting point for planning your personalized security strategy.

Create a sturdy defense. Update systems and software. Also, install a strong, reputable antivirus program.

Connect carefully. Be cautious when connecting to a public Wi-Fi network. Avoid sensitive transactions, including purchases. Create a strong and unique passphrase for each online account.

Lock down all accounts. Establish multifactor authentication. Examine the email address in all correspondence and scrutinize website URLs before responding to a message or visiting a site. Don't click on anything in unsolicited emails or text messages.

Guard your information. Be cautious about your information in online profiles and social media accounts. Sharing the names of pets, schools and family members gives scammers hints they need to guess your passwords or the answers to your account security questions. Never send payments to unknown people or organizations, particularly those urging immediate action.

RAISING HISTORY

Heritage breed farmers preserve the past while protecting the future

Story by LES O'DELL

Farmers, ranchers, shepherds and homesteaders work to raise crops and livestock as efficiently as possible. Like any business, the goal is to maximize income and profitability.

Yet many agriculturalists also see themselves as conservationists, working to preserve the past while ensuring the future by using Earth-friendly farming methods and raising animals facing extinction.

In Pikeville, Tennessee, Amy Balog and her family raise endangered agricultural animals, also called heritage livestock breeds. "There are so many reasons why," she says. "It's not only keeping the genetics going. It's the history and provenance of the breeds."

Her Faverolles chickens, Sebastopol geese and Saxony ducks are among 180 breeds listed on the Conservation Priority List, an annual ranking of farm animals on the brink of disappearing. The list includes varieties of 11 different animals, from rabbits to cattle, horses and hogs. Many breeds fall out of favor in commercial agricultural settings. Perhaps they don't put on weight as quickly as other breeds, for example. But they still have value.

SUSTAINABILITY

Protecting biodiversity and genetic resources is an important reason for protecting heritage breeds, says Allison Kincaid, executive director of The Livestock Conservancy. But many producers choose heritage animals because they want to make a difference.

"None of us can predict what the future of agriculture will look like. This is about keeping these breeds around as a genetic reservoir," she says, adding these animals are key to food security. "If we didn't have this diversity, eventually we would narrow our food system down to where it wasn't sustainable. There would be no backup."

Likewise, farmer Grant Breitkreutz of Redwood Falls, Minnesota, takes a conservation approach to crop production. "We've been no-till for 12 years for all of our crops," he says. Grant leaves farm implements that expose the soil, such as plows and discs, in the machine shed. Instead, he plants cover crops, grasses and other plants he sows without exposing the soil in order to replenish organic nutrients and to minimize erosion.

Grant pivoted to conservation farming practices to ensure his soil is healthy and hearty enough to produce bumper crops for generations to come. "If we've done this for 130 years of farming, how much time do we have left? So, that's why we focus so hard on building our soils back," he says. "It has made a world of difference, and the crops are much more drought resistant and are yielding more bushels per acre. Plus, our pastures have tripled in production over the years by taking care of the soil first."

The Breitkreutz family won the inaugural Minnesota Leopold Conservation Award, presented in 2024 by the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition. Grant says honors are not important, but preserving things for future generations is. Amy agrees.

"It's more about quality over quantity and quality is what keeps these lines going. If we don't do it, I'm afraid they'll all get lost," she says.

Photo courtesy of Amy and Daniel Balog

Amy and Daniel Balog, who live outside Pikeville, Tennessee, raise heritage animals like the Sebastopol goose she's holding.

Photo courtesy of Grant Breitkreutz

Grant Breitkreutz uses no-till techniques that protect soil quality on his Minnesota farm.

For more about agronomic conservation, visit sandcountyfoundation.org and to learn about livestock conservation efforts, visit livestockconservancy.org.

A Homework Power-up

Bringing students the digital tools they deserve

Growing up here in East Texas, I remember when doing your homework meant sitting at the kitchen table, flipping through textbooks and maybe making a trip to the local library if you needed something extra. Things sure have changed. These days, our kids need a fast and reliable internet connection as much as they need a good night's sleep—and in many ways, it's just as vital as notebooks and pencils.

RUSTY DORMAN
General Manager

That's why at Eastex Telephone Cooperative, we don't just talk about high-speed internet—we live and breathe it. We believe every student in our community deserves the same opportunities as students in the big cities, and we've worked hard to make sure our fiber network helps close that digital divide.

When we connect a home in our rural service area, we're not just running fiber, we're opening doors. Doors to education, to new career paths, to brighter futures. And with the new school year underway, it's a great time to think about how fast internet, used wisely and securely, can be a real game-changer for local families.

HELPING OUR KIDS SUCCEED—SAFELY

Let's face it: The online world isn't always simple or safe. We've all heard stories about scams, phishing links or kids stumbling into places they shouldn't. That's why cybersecurity is such a big part of the conversation now—not just in Washington, D.C., or Silicon Valley, but right here in our own living rooms.

October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, and we'll continue sharing tips and resources to help you keep your family safe online. Talk with your kids about basic safety—like not sharing personal information, avoiding suspicious links and setting screen-time boundaries. These conversations are every bit as important as helping with math homework.

EXPLORING NEW TECH TOGETHER

If you're hearing more about AI lately, you're not alone. Tools like ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot are showing up everywhere—from classrooms to job sites—and our kids are growing up in a world where using them will be second nature. I encourage you to sit down with your student and explore these tools together. Ask the same question in Google and then in an AI chat tool. Talk about what's helpful, what's missing and how to use these tools responsibly.

Our students are walking into a future where technology will touch every job, from health care and auto repair to farming and running a small business. The more they understand how to safely and effectively use the internet now, the more prepared they'll be later.

WHY FAST, RELIABLE INTERNET MATTERS

Behind every online lesson, research paper or virtual project is a broadband connection making it all possible. With our fiber network, we're bringing high-speed access to homes across East Texas—access that makes it easier for students to learn, families to work remotely and small businesses to grow.

This isn't just about faster downloads. It's about giving our children the same shot at success as anyone, anywhere. It's about keeping our community strong, safe and ready for whatever comes next.

At Eastex Telephone, we're proud to be more than a utility. We're your neighbors, your fellow parents and your partners in building a better-connected Texas. Thank you for trusting us to power that future—one safe, secure, high-speed connection at a time.

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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:

Britt Davis, owner of Britt's Wine and Dine, first became interested in wine, viticulture and wine production in the 1980s.
See story Page 12.

Photo courtesy of Christy Parrott

When in doubt, check it out!

Eastex will never ask for your personal information by call, text or email.

Unsure if a message is real? Call us. We're always happy to chat.

Eastex Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

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GAME ON!

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ANSWERS

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Happy Labor Day!

You earned it, so enjoy your day off! In observance of the holiday, Eastex offices will be closed on Monday, Sept. 1.

HIT THE Highway

Mapping out your perfect road trip

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Fall is the perfect time for travel and new experiences with family and friends. And while flying can have its conveniences, most travelers prefer to hit the road when mapping out their next adventure. According to AAA's domestic travel forecast for a recent holiday weekend, 87% of travelers planned to make trips by car.

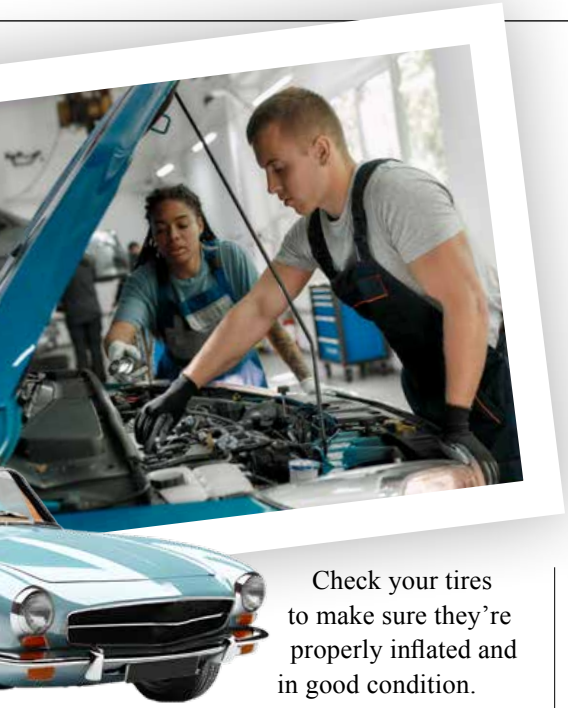
PREPARE FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

"I usually tend to drive, and most people choose to drive. And the reason for that is, for most families and groups of people, it's the most affordable way to travel," says AAA Texas Communications Manager Doug Shupe. "It's also the most convenient. You can leave when you want to leave and return when you want to. But there definitely needs to be some preparation before taking a long road trip."

Before everyone piles into the car, make sure you're ready for the journey. That includes giving your vehicle a quick inspection, planning a route and having the supplies—and the tunes—to keep everyone happy until you reach your destination.

SAFETY CHECK

Before any lengthy road trip, Doug recommends taking your vehicle for a tuneup at a trusted repair facility. But if you can't find time for that, it's still a good idea to do a few quick checks on your own.



Check your tires to make sure they're properly inflated and in good condition. That includes the tread. If you can put an upside-down quarter in the grooves of your tires and see the top of George Washington's head, it's probably a good idea to replace them before taking a long trip.

If your vehicle's battery is more than 3 years old, consider having it tested before getting on the road. Vibration can also cause a battery to fail sooner, so check that the terminals are secure and free of corrosion.

Examine your radiator and cooling system to make sure they're in good condition. Check belts and hoses for cracks or fraying that could lead to problems after extended use.

Ensure your wiper blades are in good shape in case you pass through a rainy patch, and have someone help you check that your headlights, taillights and turn signals are all working properly.

PLANNING YOUR ROUTE

One of the best parts of any road trip is mapping out a path, as long as there's a little room for improvisation. Plan ahead and make the most of these tools that can help you find the right stops along the way.

Know what's coming—Apps like Roadtrippers and GasBuddy can help you pick the best place to make a pit stop. Get suggestions for must-visit restaurants and scenic drives or just scope out the most affordable gas prices so you can make the most of your detours.

Go analog—GPS is an invaluable resource on the road, but it's still smart to have a physical map to orient yourself just in case you lose signal or your battery dies. Maps can even be a fun distraction for kids and give them a hands-on way to follow along with where you are.

Track your itinerary—If you've already set up all your reservations for hotels, restaurants and attractions, TripIt can keep track of it all in one place. The app syncs with your inbox to compile an itinerary, so you don't have to search for each confirmation email, and sends you reminders so you can focus on having fun.

Don't be afraid to rest—If you're driving for multiple days, be realistic about how far you can go before resting for the night. It's better to lean toward too many stops than too few. You can even pull over for a quick 30-minute nap if you're feeling drowsy.

FUN AND GAMES

Hitting the open road also means getting to spend plenty of time with your favorite people. So don't forget to prepare the food, games and music that will help you make the most of it.

State of play—Road trip games are classic, from the Alphabet Game and I Spy to Two Truths and a Lie and 20 Questions. Make your own fun by taking turns thinking of a movie and describing it in the worst way possible to see who can guess it. Or, learn more about each other by picking a category like songs, books or foods and building your own top-five lists.

Fight the munchies—Stops at hole-in-the-wall restaurants are a must for any road trip. But someone is bound to get hangry in between meals. Everyone's favorite snacks will vary, but it's hard to go wrong with some trail mix or jerky. You can even pack fruit and rice cakes for healthy options.

The perfect mix—Planning out a playlist that will make everyone happy is a tall task. You want music that will fit the mood and maybe even complement the terrain you're driving through. Fortunately, you don't have to do it alone these days. If everyone shares the same music service, you can make a shared playlist that everyone can contribute to. You can even make a game out of it, guessing who's the secret Swiftie or where all those oldies came from.

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More Than Floors

DP Floor Care & Interior builds quality

Story by JEN CALHOUN

About 25 years ago, Donnie Perez learned a simple lesson that changed his life. It was early in his contracting and remodeling career, and Donnie spent most of his time working out of a truck. He and two or three other men moved from job to job, laying tile, installing flooring and anything else that needed doing.

As time went on, he met experts—true craftsmen—who specialized in cabinetry or painting or tiling. Why not prep the site, then bring in the experts when it's time? Not only would it create a better end result, but he and his team could work on more than a couple of projects at a time.

"I mean, it was just so simple, so eye-opening," says Donnie, who co-owns DP Floor Care & Interior with his wife, Meloany Perez, the company's design specialist. "Your profit margin may be smaller, but the jobs turn out so much better. Not only are you able to deliver on time, you can also provide a higher level of workmanship."

Photos courtesy of Christy Parrott

Donnie Perez, right, discusses flooring samples with customer Jason Trlica.

DECADES OF EXPERIENCE

These days, Donnie no longer works out of his truck. Instead, he has two DP Floor Care & Interior stores, one in Onalaska and another in Livingston. He employs anywhere from 25 to 40 people weekly, including experts in framing, cabinetry, trim, flooring and paint.

After about eight years of running his own business, he bought the stores from the original owner in 2013. At that time, it was called Floor Care & Interiors. He kept the root of the name but added his initials.

The name wasn't the only thing that changed, however. Since its earliest days, the business has evolved into a full-on contractor company that performs complete remodels, additions and everything else. The company can even build entire homes.

"My logo is still DPFCI, because that's the legal name of the company," Donnie says. "We also call it DP Construction and Renovations. That way people know what we're capable of."

FAMILY CIRCLE

Despite its growth and success, DP Floor Care & Interior is still a small, family-owned business. Meloany helps clients design their interiors. The couple's son, Donaven, tends to the project management and contractor side of the company. Their daughter, Faythe, manages the Livingston store. Their son Domanic, 16, helps out when he can. And their 2-year-old granddaughter, Ellanor, often likes to play mascot for the team.

The entire Perez family helps with the business, including Donnie's wife, two sons and daughter. From left are, son Donaven, the company's project coordinator, Donnie and Meloany Perez.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

The business stays nimble and competitive by allowing customers to shop its showroom and then order materials directly from top suppliers.

"Everything we do we order or build," Donnie says. "We used to keep inventory like at Home Depot or Lowe's. But there's no reason for us to do that anymore. People can order it and have it delivered directly to their house."

The evolution of the business directly follows the evolution of the typical customer these days. "People are extremely intelligent, and there's so much information out there that they can do their own research," he says.

"They'll come to us and say, 'We found this tile, and this is what we want.' If that's the case, we're not going to spend two hours talking them into something we have at the store. Instead, we're like, 'That's awesome. You can deliver it to my store, and we'll take it from there.'"

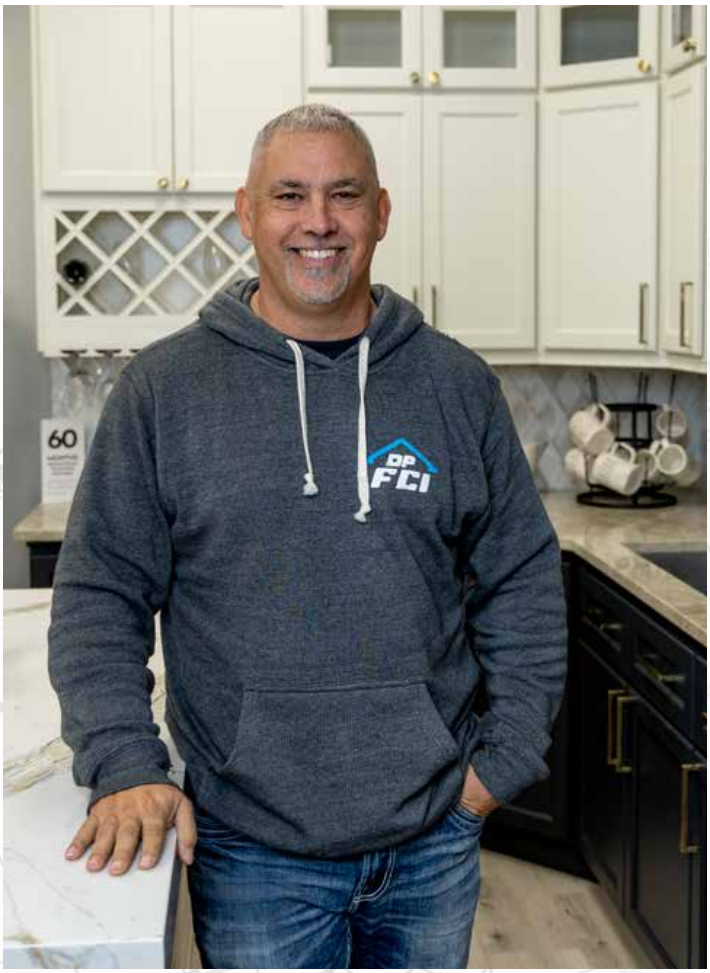
The business also uses social media sites like Instagram to connect with clients, and they pay close attention to online trends. "There's a lot of people that spend a lot of money on ads, but what we've found is that the more you pay Google, the more you're put out there online," Donnie says. "When you do that, it will take you to the social media sites and our website. So, we don't do a whole lot of traditional advertising. We have one sign up in town, but the rest is just internet traffic."

In addition, the company's yard signs and truck signage get positive responses. "I do get a lot of reaction from those," he says. "People will say, 'Man, we see your stuff everywhere!'"

But the business' true strength comes from its employees and contractors. Their skills keep the good reviews coming in, Donnie says.

"Normally on your family businesses or smaller businesses, the workforce is the hardest part of the equation," he says. "But I've been growing and cultivating relationships with craftspeople for years and years. That's the secret to being able to do what we do."

Meloany works on a material palette for a client.



Donnie started by working out of a truck. Today, he and his family own and operate two locations and work on multiple projects at a time.

Fresh Looks for the Home

DP Floor Care & Interior has two locations. The West Onalaska store is at 14310 U.S. Highway 190, and the Livingston store is at 1207 W. Church St. To find out more, visit dpfciconstruction.com or follow the company on Instagram.

HOW THE WEST WAS HEARD

Poet and musician captures cowboy culture

Story by MELANIE JONES

**Next morn'in just
at daybreak
And beneath his horse,
smashed to a pulp**

**His spur had rung his knell
Was our little Texas Faithful,
wrangl'in Joe**

—Lyrics of "Little Joe the Wrangler"

Photo courtesy of Gabrielle Watson

Andy Hedges plays several instruments favored by cowboys, including the banjo.

A cowboy poet, musician and podcaster, Andy Hedges collects oral histories of the Old West the way rodeo champs collect belt buckles. He's a champion of cowboy culture, and he has the hat to prove it.

"I think there's something about that image that just resonates with people," he says. "They know cowboys represent some of the best of American values—independence, honesty, hard work. And when they hear it, they're hearing real, authentic stories from cowboy culture. They learn the real truth behind the cowboy image."

Cowboy poetry also extends to music, with songs like "Rounded Up in Glory" and "Little Joe the Wrangler." Roy Rogers and Gene Autry brought that style of music to the silver screen, although the Hollywood version is not at the heart of the genre.

Authenticity inspires events across the country, from the Cowpoke Fall Gathering in Loomis, California, to Old West Days in Valentine, Nebraska. Minnesota annually declares a Cowboy Poetry Week, and Andy is returning to Jonesborough, Tennessee, where he performed several times. Cowboy music has even made it to the world-famous Carnegie Hall.

DISCOVERY

Andy, who lives in Lubbock, Texas, is part of a movement that began in 1985, when a group of cowboys met in Elko, Nevada, for the inaugural National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. It's where cowboys swap tales, sing songs of the range and recite poetry that fills lonely days and nights.

What makes a poet a cowboy poet? Andy says his friend Vess Quinlan explains it this way: "He told me there's two ways you can make a deposit in the cowboy poetry bank. One is by being a working cowboy who writes poetry. The other one is to be a non-cowboy who writes poetry that is so good, it becomes accepted by working cowboys. And, of course, it has to be authentic. It has to ring true to those people.

"A lot of people write or recite cowboy poetry or sing the old cowboy songs or write new songs," Andy says. "The truth is a lot of us, including myself, have never made a living as a cowboy."

Andy has spent years immersing himself in cowboy culture's history, poetry and music. "I try really hard to represent the culture in an authentic way," he says.

He grew up hearing stories of his dad, who worked the rodeo circuit before becoming a Primitive Baptist preacher. He watched old Hollywood Westerns and listened to Western music. "All I really thought I wanted to do was be a cowboy," he says.

But his true obsession with cowboy culture began when he saw an episode of "Austin City Limits" featuring Michael Martin Murphy and friends. Those friends included cowboy poet Waddie Mitchell, cowboy singer Don Edwards and the groups Sons of the San Joaquin and Riders in the Sky. "It just opened that world up to me," Andy says. "I didn't realize there were people who still sang the old songs. I'd never heard cowboy poetry before I heard Waddie on that show."

A self-taught guitarist, young Andy learned some of the old songs. "It was really the beginning of a lifelong obsession with cowboy poetry and cowboy songs," he says.

By the time he could drive, the homeschooled teen was traveling to cowboy gatherings. By 20, he made it to Elko, where he's appeared 17 times. Since recording his album of duets, "Ride On, Cowboy," he and some of the album's guests have appeared on the Grand Ole Opry and practiced, practiced, practiced their way to Carnegie Hall, where they performed for an appreciative audience in March 2024.

The music has an international audience. While travelers come to the United States for gatherings, some performers also toured overseas. Andy even traveled to Turkmenistan as part of a cultural exchange. "The cowboy has always been the folk hero of America," he says. "People identify with that image. You know, when I traveled to Turkmenistan, or just travel overseas not performing, when I wear a cowboy hat, people love that and immediately associate that image with the United States."

SWAPPING STORIES

Cowboy poet and musician Andy Hedges will be the teller-in-residence at the National Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee, Sept. 2-6. Andy has participated in the National Storytelling Festival before.

"It's a really fantastic gathering of all kinds of storytellers from different traditions," he says of the festival. "I was honored to be there representing the cowboy tradition and sharing cowboy poetry with them." As teller-in-residence, he'll perform a concert every day, make media appearances and take part in other community events. For more information on the event, go to storytellingcenter.net.

To learn more about cowboy culture, check out Andy's podcast, "Cowboy Crossroads." You can download episodes at andyhedges.com/cowboy-crossroads.

Adobe Stock image by Wattie2781

Raise a Glass

Britt's Wine and Dine is a labor of love

Story by JEN CALHOUN

As an undergrad in the 1980s, Britt Davis had the job of taking his fraternity brothers to tastings in California's wine country. "They were all into viticulture," Britt says. "But I was under 21, and I couldn't drink. So, they paid me to drive them around."

Although he wasn't able to sample the vineyards' offerings himself, Britt could learn the qualities of wine, how it was grown and its historical importance to humankind. Before long, what started out as designated-driver duty turned into a passion, leading Britt to study wine, food and cultures all over the world.

That same passion was also the driving force behind Britt's Wine and Dine, his Kilgore tasting room, eatery and event space that offers perfect pairings of food and wine in a relaxed atmosphere.

"You can come in and taste wines from all over the world," Britt says. "Plus, I have 17 of my own wines that I make, and I have a full menu Thursday, Friday and Saturday so people can come in and enjoy paired foods."

GATHERING KNOWLEDGE

Britt's job as a public relations director for the U.S. Department of Defense took him to Frankfurt, Germany. From there, he was able to travel all over Europe, visiting wineries and learning about local cuisine.

"There was a little winery behind my house, and that's where I really started learning and getting more interested," he says.

When he returned to the U.S., he taught at Kilgore College for 17 years. The flexibility of the job gave him the chance to travel the world during the summer.

OLD SCHOOL

In 2022, he bought and renovated the old Elder School on Highway 31, turning it into Britt's Wine and Dine, which he describes as "essentially a tasting room that serves food." The property offers different spaces, including a patio, a large multipurpose room and a tasting room filled with walnut wood decor and low lighting.

Photos courtesy of Christy Parrott

Britt Davis, owner of Britt's Wine and Dine, has explored the flavors of nearly every major wine region of the world.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The patio at Britt's Wine and Dine offers patrons a comfortable spot to sip, savor and socialize. Britt has visited nearly every major wine region of the world. The tasting room is a great place to enjoy and learn more about wine.

"We really try to make people feel like they're the only ones there," Britt says. "But at the same time, we like introducing them to people around them so no one feels like a stranger."

He also wanted to create a place where patrons don't have to wait two hours to get in, only to be treated like a random stranger once they're finally seated. "It's one of my goals to learn more about every person who comes in," he says. "I try to emphasize this to my employees. For example, we know there's Melanie.

She likes this sweet red and one piece of fish. She also likes to sit at this one table. We've really created this vibe where people feel ownership, and they feel comfortable just showing up."

SIP, SAVOR AND STUDY

The fact that Britt's Wine and Dine is in a schoolhouse feels right, too. One of his primary goals is to teach people about selecting the right wines for every occasion. In addition to regular evenings out, the venue offers various events throughout the month.

Events can include everything from special meals to blending parties that teach customers about the entire winemaking process, as well as how to blend wines. They can taste food, decide on wine styles, create their own blends and compete in blind tastings.

The best creations could even end up on Britt's shelves.

"Our tagline is 'Sip, Savor and Socialize,'" he says. "We want you to come in and sip on the wine and savor the food and enjoy yourself socializing. That's our whole premise. At first, we did a lot of dinner pairings, but now we've just really evolved into this place that has great activities."

Regularly scheduled events include bingo nights on the first Saturday of the month, karaoke on the third Saturday of the month, live music on the second and third Fridays of the month and a paired brunch on the third Saturday of the month.

Upcoming special events include a dinner with an expert from Sanglier Cellars in Sonoma County, California, on Sept. 6, and a day of sipping and shopping on Nov. 15. During the Sip & Shop, customers can find unique gifts for the wine lovers in their lives, while they browse a curated selection of local vendors and try out new wines.

BRITT'S BOONDOCK

Britt's Wine and Dine also offers camping space for RVs. He recently joined up with a boondocking program called Harvest Host that allows members to come and park free for one night in exchange for patronizing the venue. Britt's is one of thousands of wineries, distilleries, farms and various other spots that take part in the program.

"We can hold up to four at a time," he says. "Sometimes we get a few more, and it's like a party out there. They just come in, and they're from all over the world. Our guest book reads like the Who's Who of travelers."

SAVOR THE FLAVORS

Britt's Wine and Dine is at 400 N. Garcia St. in Kilgore. The business offers a perfectly paired wine and food experience in a relaxed atmosphere. Britt's hosts themed tastings, private and corporate events, wine education and great company. To find out more, buy tickets to the latest events or book a private party, visit brittswine.com, follow the business on Facebook or call 833-427-4887.

Dinner on a Stick

Kabobs make for easy meals, quick cleanup

Do you ever crave an easy meal with meat and vegetables? Try putting kabobs on the menu. It's a tasty grill-friendly choice, and cleanup is easy.

Begin with a tender cut of meat like top sirloin, which is affordable. Filet also works well. If you'd like, substitute chicken or tofu. Just remember to cut your protein portions to about the same size so they cook evenly. You can add as many chopped veggies as you like.

Begin with a fresh marinade. Homemade chimichurri does double duty as a marinade and seasoning sauce—it works for any protein. Round out your meal with crunchy Asian coleslaw and a fresh apple cake for dessert.

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

GRILLED CHIMICHURRI STEAK KABOBS

CHIMICHURRI SAUCE

- 1/2 cup fresh cilantro, packed, leaves and tender stems
- 1/2 cup fresh parsley, packed
- 3 tablespoons fresh oregano or 3 teaspoons dried
- 1 lemon, zested and juiced
- 3-4 cloves of garlic
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Put all ingredients in a food processor and pulse until blended. Taste and season with salt and pepper as desired.

STEAK KABOBS

- 32 ounces top sirloin, or the protein of your choice, cut into 2-inch cubes
- 36-48 baby potatoes, golden or mini reds
- 2 medium bell peppers, any color, chopped into 2-inch pieces
- 2 small red onions, chopped into 2-inch pieces
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper

CRUNCHY ASIAN COLESLAW

- 2 packages ramen noodles, any flavor
- 2 16-ounce packages shredded coleslaw mix
- 1 cup slivered almonds, toasted
- 5 green onions, chopped
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/3 cup rice vinegar

Reserve the flavor packets from the noodles for another use or toss. Crush the noodles and set aside. Toss together the coleslaw mix, almonds and green onions in a large salad bowl.

Whisk together the sugar, oil and vinegar in a small bowl until mixed. Add the dressing to the coleslaw mixture and toss to coat. Mix in the chopped noodles. Serve immediately. Makes 12 servings.

Note: You may prepare the salad in advance, adding the noodles just before serving so they are crunchy.

FRESH APPLE CAKE

- 1 cup oil
- 2 cups sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup pecans or walnuts, chopped
- 3 cups apples, peeled and chopped

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 16 ounces powdered sugar
- 8 tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons vanilla

Measure oil into a large bowl, then whisk in sugar and eggs.

Mix together the flour, salt, baking powder and cinnamon, then add to the creamed mixture, beating well. Add vanilla, then fold in nuts and apples.

Pour mixture into a greased 9-by-13-inch pan. Bake at 350 F for 50 minutes or until cake tests done. Cover with foil if it gets too dark around the edges.

To make frosting: Combine all frosting ingredients and spread over cooled cake.

After reserving some of the chimichurri to use during cooking and for dipping the cooked kabobs, combine the rest of the sauce and the cubed protein in a sealable bag. Set aside to marinate. Meanwhile, soak the skewers in water a minimum of 20 minutes so they don't burn on the grill.

Add potatoes to a large pot, cover with water and 2 teaspoons of salt. Boil for 5-7 minutes or until fork tender. Drain and rinse the potatoes. Let them sit in cold water to cool. Chop veggies and have them ready to slide onto your skewers.

Now it's time to assemble: Using a soaked skewer, put either a potato or piece of meat on first, so the rest of the veggies don't slide off the end. Then alternate between meat, potatoes and veggies.

Prepare the grill to about 500 F. Once it's ready, place steak kabobs perpendicular to the grill grates. Grill 3 minutes on each side for medium doneness. If you use chicken, cook for 5-7 minutes. Tofu needs to cook about 10 minutes. While cooking, brush the reserved chimichurri on the kabobs.

Remove the kabobs from the grill and let rest for 3-5 minutes. Use the chimichurri as an extra dipping sauce, if desired.

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