



JULY/AUGUST 2023

# CONNECTION

## Current challenge

Frio River outfitters go with the flow

COMPOUND SOLUTION

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GOURMET GADGET





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Take a BOLD step

### A new toolkit opens doors


Summer is finally here! That means barbecues, days at the pool and, if you have kids, reminding them to tackle their dreaded summer reading list before it is too late.

As they are doing their homework, I have an assignment for you. But don't worry, it's only a dozen pages.

The past few years have shown the world that broadband access is a necessity, not a luxury. As the demand and investment in broadband increases across rural America, so does the need for a skilled workforce to build and maintain these broadband networks.

NTCA's Smart Communities program recently teamed up with the National Rural Education Association to create the Broadband Opportunities and Leadership Development (BOLD) K-12 Career Awareness Toolkit, which is chock-full of new and creative ways to engage students and get them excited about careers in the broadband industry. Whether your student is interested in computer science, engineering and even accounting or marketing, there are opportunities for everyone in the broadband industry.

From guidance on organizing hands-on internships and site visits, to working with schools to develop curricula, or even ways to get involved with local esports and robotics teams, this toolkit is a wonderful resource for parents, educators and community-based broadband providers alike.

Summer may be in full swing, but back-to-school season will be here before you know it. Make sure you add the Smart Rural Community K-12 Career Awareness Toolkit to your summer reading list today! Read it here: [ntca.org/BOLDToolkit](https://ntca.org/BOLDToolkit). 




## Avoid QR mischief

### Scammers co-opt this handy code

QR codes — it stands for Quick Response — pop up frequently. TV ads, restaurant menus and much more rely on these little squares of blocky lines to quickly link a smartphone user to handy information, a download or as a way to digitally send money to someone.

The FBI, however, has warned that cybercriminals may tamper with the codes. The FBI offers a few tips so you can take advantage of QR codes while staying safe and secure:

- After scanning a QR code, check the URL to make sure it is the site you want. A malicious domain name may be similar to the intended URL but with typos or a misplaced letter.
- Be cautious when entering login, personal or financial information.
- If scanning a physical QR code, ensure the code shows no signs of tampering, such as a sticker placed over the original.
- Do not download an app from a QR code.
- If you receive an email asking you to complete a payment through a QR code, call the requesting company to verify. Look up the company's number on a trusted site — don't use a number from the email.
- Do not download a QR code scanner app — the built-in phone camera is a safer option.
- If you receive a QR code you believe to be from someone you know, contact them through a known number or address to verify.
- Avoid making payments through a site navigated to from a QR code. Instead, manually enter a known and trusted URL to complete the payment. 



# Seeding the future

## THE CLOUD UPLIFTS EDUCATION

The arrival of fast, reliable internet service in rural areas sparked innovation across businesses, health care providers and government resources, leading to more options and richer services. When it comes to education, how students interact now with schools and each other has evolved at a similarly blistering pace.

First, there was the growth of cloud-based services — multiple remote networked computers that handle storage and processing of information. Then, since the cloud was doing the heavy computing work, an entire class of low-power, lower-cost devices sprang up.

Together, this combo — low-cost Chromebooks, as well as similar devices, and cloud-based tools — have changed how many students learn.

**Collaboration:** The cloud allows students to work together on group projects after school or other times they're not physically in the same room. Cloud-based storage systems, such as Google Drive, Microsoft's OneDrive and others, allow the creation and sharing of documents, spreadsheets and presentations in real time — you can see the work of other members of your team as they're making changes.

Collaboration and brainstorming are easier than ever.

**Accessibility:** With their Chromebooks or similar devices students can access their work from any location, at any time. All their work is saved on the cloud, making it easily accessible and organized.

**Efficiency:** In many school systems, teachers use the cloud to grade assignments more efficiently and even easily share the results with parents. Students might receive immediate feedback, allowing them to improve their work and better understand the material.

**Personalization:** These cloud-based systems create the option for personalized learning experiences. Students can access online resources and tools that cater to their specific needs and learning styles. For families that home-school, online communities with similar educational interests and other resources also become more accessible.

**Productivity:** Thanks to the cloud and low-cost computing devices, students can be more productive, organized and collaborative. And because the tools are far less expensive than traditional computers, more people can affordably access them. 📧

### Looking ahead to a new school year?

*Make sure you're prepared.*

- **The essential computer:** If your student needs a basic laptop to do homework and access online learning platforms, try the Lenovo Flex 5i Chromebook. "It's comparatively inexpensive, and it offers fast performance plus an excellent keyboard and trackpad. The Flex 5i is also compact and light, and its 1080p touchscreen is vivid and bright," according to a review by Wirecutter, a website operated by The New York Times offering reviews of a range of devices. Prices vary, but expect to pay about \$350.
- **Quality web cam:** From education to work, video calls are common. If your computer isn't already equipped, consider adding a camera. The Logitech C270 HD, often available for less than \$30, is a good choice for students required to attend lessons online. It delivers quality and clarity.

# Is your Wi-Fi getting walloped?

Your home network might be busier than you think

**W**ould you mind answering a question for me — how many devices connect to your Wi-Fi? It may be more than you realize.



**CRAIG COOK**  
Chief Executive Officer

Consider starting in the room where you watch television. Do you have a smart TV or a device like a Roku that lets you stream services such as Netflix? If you're streaming music or podcasts, do you have a smart speaker like the ones from Google, Amazon or Apple? If you enjoy online gaming, please count those devices, too.

Next, let's move to the kitchen. Many appliances — everything from refrigerators to pressure cookers — have the option of using your Wi-Fi to connect to an app. Even some outdoor grills let you check in wirelessly. While you're thinking about the outside, do you have a security system, smart locks or smart devices? They use Wi-Fi, too.

Also, don't forget about the major systems of your home, such as heating and cooling. Smart thermostats can help you customize settings to your needs and schedules while helping you save money. Even some water heaters have smart options so you can monitor and manage usage.

Finally, count the big ones. How many computers connect to your Wi-Fi? What about tablets like iPads? Does your phone use Wi-Fi for calling or as a speed boost over the cellular connection?

The numbers add up, don't they? In fact, there are studies that indicate the typical U.S. household has more than 20 Wi-Fi-connected devices.

Just a few years ago, many of the now-common devices simply didn't exist. I suspect if you do this same exercise a few years from now you'll find more devices, and likely even entirely new classes of technology, using your home network.

This connected world is the reason we've committed to bringing you a fast, reliable internet connection, one not only capable of managing your needs today but also powerful enough to accommodate the demands of tomorrow. It's the type of forward-thinking innovation and investment at the heart of how HCTC has always operated.

You see, the more connected devices added to your network, the more robust it needs to be. Imagine that instead of cables moving bits, your internet is a large water pipe. Then, each device on your network is a faucet. Every faucet you turn on reduces available volume and water pressure. Also, the bigger the faucet, the more resources that specific pipe uses.

That last point becomes critical when considering your internet service — not all devices are equal. An intense gaming session or uploading large work files requires more speed and bandwidth than someone streaming music on a smartphone or checking in on social media. So, it's important to match your internet service not only to the number of devices connected to your network, but also to how they're used.

Did you count more connections than you anticipated? Well, if this exercise left you with questions about your service or what you need to do to get the most out of your internet connection, our team at HCTC is always available to help.

Thank you for letting us serve you. ☺

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



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

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

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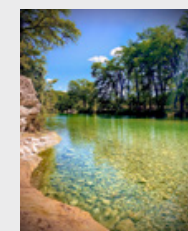
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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On the Cover:



The Frio River has created many opportunities for local outfitters, including Happy Hollow, where this shallow stretch offers a place to relax. *See story Page 12.*

Photo courtesy of Happy Hollow Frio River Outfitters



*Congratulations*  
to our 2023 scholarship winners!



HCTC has awarded a \$1,500 scholarship to the following students from communities within our service area:

**Center Point**

- Alexis Burrows
- Beck Wofford

**Comfort**

- Ava Govea

**Fredonia**

- Eliza Cope

**Frio Canyon**

- Anna Jones
- Annslie Shoemaker
- Colton Satterwhite

**Ingram**

- Danika Mosley
- Hannah Reed

- Maggie Rector
- Molly Rector
- Nickolas Cuellar

**Medina**

- Britton Wickham
- Wyatt Boatman
- Yadira Aguilar

# DIRECTORS SEEKING REELECTION

These incumbents will be running for the following board of director positions:

**JIM HAYNIE – DISTRICT 3** – Mountain Home/Garven Store

**KATHY BOHN – DISTRICT 6A** – Comfort and Sisterdale

**KARI POTTER – DISTRICT 7** – Center Point

**LINDA REAGOR – DISTRICT 9** – Frio Canyon including Concan, Leakey, Reagan Wells and Rio Frio



*The HCTC offices will be closed on Tuesday, July 4, in observance of Independence Day! We wish you all a safe and happy holiday.*





# SHIVER ME TIMBERS!

Family fun sets sail at pirate-themed attractions



Walk the plank aboard the Red Dragon in Port Aransas for a memorable afternoon spent as a pirate.

Photo courtesy of Port Aransas Tourist Bureau

Story by ANNE BRALY

There's something about spending a day of swashbuckling fun that fascinates kids and brings out the child in many adults. It's a chance to live out the life of Peter Pan aboard the Sea Devil as he battles the dastardly Captain Hook. Or, sail into the world of Blackbeard and imagine yourself swaggering across the deck of a wooden ship beneath billowing sails.

Stepping into the pirate world — even just for an hour or two — “gives people the chance to swagger and growl and be unapologetically bold,” says Ol’ Chumbucket, aka John Baur, a man who lives the pirate life in Tacoma, Washington, where he writes books about the daring and brutish men of the high seas. Some of his tomes include “Sails and Sorcery,” “The Pirate Life” and “Pirattitude: So You Wanna Be A Pirate?”

Why do pirates have us hooked? From Blackbeard to Black

Bart Roberts, Hollywood has helped fuel our interest in their vagabond way of life. John says there's an enduring appeal to the freedom pirates experienced when roaming the high seas. “They went their own way and made their own rules,” he says.

So matey, it's time for you to get your pirate on. And yo-ho-ho, Texas has a bounty of places to do it.

## **GALVESTON PIRATE MUSEUM**

*Galveston*

Pirates and privateers roamed along the Texas coast for many years. Names pop up throughout history — most notably the notorious Jean Lafitte who found the islands just off the coast to be the perfect hideaway as he plied the waters of the Gulf of Mexico waiting for his next prey.



Today, his story, as well as those of other colorful figures, comes to life at the Galveston Pirate Museum. Spend some time learning about the history of pirates — how they came to be and how they met their fates. Resident pirates roam the museum to take your experience to a new level, and don't forget a trip to the gift shop to take some treasures home.

- ▶ Admission: \$15, children under 5 are free
- ▶ Information: galvestonpiratemuseum.com

## PIRATE ADVENTURE WEEKEND TEXAS RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL

*Todd Mission*

The Golden Age of Piracy spanned approximately 1650-1726, but it comes back to life each year for one exciting weekend of the Texas Renaissance Festival, held for eight weekends every fall since 1974 in the central Texas town of Todd Mission. The festival will run Oct. 7-Nov. 26 this year, with the Pirate Adventure scheduled to set sail Oct. 21-22.

The pirate-themed weekend was inspired by Peter Pan, says festival marketing director Todd Wold. “Then, of course, you have ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ that has really helped keep the theme alive and kicking,” he says.

Hailed as the biggest pirate party north of the Gulf of Mexico, the weekendlong

event is filled with pirates roaming the festival grounds in traditional garb, along with songs of life on the sea — including a singalong at the Sea Devil Tavern. Visitors can also take part in a fish and chips-eating contest and a costume contest to show off their best buccaneer duds. “People love to dress the part here just because it’s fun,” Todd says.

It’s one of the most popular of all the themed weekends at the Renaissance festival and is sure to bring out the pirate in you.

- ▶ Admission: \$10-\$25
- ▶ Information: texrenfest.com

## RED DRAGON PIRATE CRUISE

*Port Aransas*

On the deck of the Red Dragon, the sound and light show begins when 10 computer-controlled cannons fire, allowing travelers a taste of a 17th century high-seas battle. A cruise aboard this pirate ship offers two hours of swashbuckling fun — everything from faux sword fighting to treasure hunting. You may even learn more about the life of a pirate. If the summer heat gets too hot, cool down and fill up at ye’ old Slurp and Burp Pub. During the summer, there are two cruises daily, at noon and again at 3:30 p.m. During the offseason, advance booking is available.

- ▶ Admission: \$40 for kids 3-12 and \$50 for adults
- ▶ Information: reddragonpiratecruises.com



Photo courtesy of Red Dragon Pirate Cruises

A modern-day sword fight aboard the Red Dragon that sets sail from Port Aransas.

## THE PIRATE ADVENTURE: CHAPTER III ESCAPE ROOM

*Arlington*

Band together with friends and family and use your collective wits to escape a dark fate in this pirate-themed escape room. Your group’s adventure begins with you tied up, blindfolded and locked inside the brig of a ship by Blackbeard, the one-legged terror of the seas. But you’re not alone. There’s also a bomb in the brig, and your team has just one hour to devise an escape. It’s a fun way to entertain everyone from ages 5 and up.

- ▶ Admission: \$140 for four players, \$35 for each additional player
- ▶ Information: thesecretchambers.com and follow the links to The Pirate Adventure: Chapter III

## PIRATES' COVE WATER PARK

*Burleson*

Pirates’ Cove makes for an exciting day splashing and sliding from a pirate-themed tower. With 11 waterslides, two waterfalls, a long lazy river and shaded indoor games to escape the sun and heat, it’s a place to spend a fun-filled day with the family.

- ▶ Admission: \$22.99 for senior citizens and kids under 42 inches tall, \$28.99 for adults and children under the age of 2 are free
- ▶ Information: piratescovefunzone.com



Festivalgoers dress in their finest pirate attire for the costume contest during Pirate Adventure weekend at the Texas Renaissance Festival.

Photo courtesy of Texas Renaissance Festival



# The mysterious cloud

## And other internet storage enigmas



**Y**ou've likely heard: "That document is in the cloud." Or, "I saved those pictures in the cloud." But what exactly is the cloud?

Simply, the cloud is the concept of using someone else's computer server to store, host or process data. If you use a computer, smartphone, smart TV or other devices that connect to the internet, you've likely taken advantage of cloud services. Netflix is one example. So are Google Drive, Apple iCloud, Yahoo Mail, Dropbox and Microsoft OneDrive. There are many, many more.

### WHY DOES THE CLOUD MATTER?

The cloud allows us to access large amounts of information on any device with an internet connection. Think about streaming a movie or episode of a Netflix show. Now, imagine trying to store every movie or show available on Netflix on your home computer. It would stop working! So, cloud technology is how we can choose from tens of thousands of movies to watch at the touch of our remote.

Cloud services also allow a child to write a paper on a laptop in a Google Doc that can be edited by a parent or teacher from anywhere with an internet connection. The cloud's remote servers handle most of the computing and the storage.

The cloud also allows you to store and back up data. For instance, you can store and view documents, videos and your entire photo collection on a cloud service without overloading your computer or smartphone's internal storage. If you use cloud services, anything you save is backed up and accessible from anywhere, provided you remember your usernames and passwords. A fire, network outage or even a power surge might destroy your devices, but your information can still be secure in the cloud.

### WHERE IS THE CLOUD?

The cloud is not actually in the clouds. Cloud services are right here on Earth on com-

puter servers inside giant, temperature-controlled facilities full of computers that store and transmit information. Think of rows of huge black boxes with blinking lights.

### NOT-SO SILVER LININGS

There can be downsides to storing and accessing information remotely, however. Cloud services cost money. Some devices, like iPhones, offer free cloud storage for up to a certain amount of data. After that, you'll need a subscription. Business cloud services often charge per gigabyte of storage.

Also, cloud services only work with internet access. Without the internet, you can't connect to the cloud — a fast, reliable connection is essential. ☑





# Just what the doctor ordered

## Apothecary Shoppe offers better living through nutrition

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

When Calvin and Sabrina Luck bought the Apothecary Shoppe five years ago, they had something different in mind. The couple previously owned pharmacies in northern New Mexico and Edna, Texas. But the Kerrville store would be their first time running a compounding pharmacy.

“That means we make all our prescriptions from scratch,” Calvin says. “I’m always telling our customers God put everything we needed here before chemistry.”

Those prescriptions can range from treatments for hormone replacement therapy, thyroid issues and pain mitigation. Each one is compounded under the supervision of Sabrina, who has more than 40 years of pharmacy experience in a variety of practice settings.

As with the Lucks’ previous pharmacies, the goal is to provide an alternative to the commercial pharmaceutical chains that dominate the handling of prescription drugs. While the Apothecary Shoppe doesn’t accept insurance, the couple is happy to work with customers to offer a cash price for their prescriptions that is lower than what commercial pharmacies charge.

“It’s just a much more satisfying practice because every person who comes through our door gets help or is at least offered the appropriate help,” Calvin says. “We feel like we’re offering a better alternative to the approach of a chemical pill for every ill.”

While Sabrina takes care of the pharmacy, Calvin tends to the store’s retail business, which provides over-the-counter nutritional wellness supplements. He estimates that side of the shop has grown five times in as many years, often as the Lucks begin stocking products requested by customers. “It’s always amusing that within the next month someone else will say, ‘I didn’t know you had this.’ We just expand based on our clientele’s need,” Calvin says.

While the growth of the business hasn’t changed the focus on holistic wellness,



Above: The Apothecary Shoppe is owned by Sabrina and Calvin Luck.

Right: Apothecary Shoppe pharmacy technician Lara Ducker mixes compounded medications.

the Lucks are currently in the process of remodeling the store to make room for more alternative care practitioners who might want to set up a pop-up space in the store. Calvin imagines the space offering massages, infrared saunas, detox foot baths and applied kinesiology. “It’s a chance to expose our clientele to other holistic remedies and health care, while at the same time, their clientele is exposed to what we do,” he says. “So it’s a win-win for everybody.”

Regardless of what treatment each customer might be receiving, the most important part of the business for the Lucks is the one-to-one interaction with each person who comes through the door. It gives the business owners the chance to share their experience and what has worked for other customers.

“In a typical commercial pharmacy, where you’re filling prescriptions and charging insurance, you just don’t have



Photography by Matt Ledger

that time to spend with an individual patient,” Calvin says. “We try to give advice by asking, ‘If this was my body and my checkbook what would I want to do?’ It’s about being mindful of what we’re doing for the patient, not necessarily what we can do to maximize our sales.”





# FELLOW TRAVELERS

Digital communities keep travelers connected on the go

Story by DREW WOOLLEY



The internet was a much different place when Peter Daams started Travellerspoint.com with his brother, Samuel, in 2002. Back then, they were looking at sites like FriendsReunited and classmates.com for inspiration — places for people who had lost touch to reconnect.

“We wanted to make something similar for travelers who had lost track of people they met on trips,” Peter says. “Our tagline was ‘Travel Friends Reunited.’ Our initial launch included a service to help with that, as well as a very basic trip log and a basic travel diary feature.”

The site attracted some attention, but it soon became apparent that Travellerspoint wasn’t giving visitors many reasons to hang around after they had searched for or found their missing travel buddies. The next year, the brothers added travel forums to the site, with a little extra help from a Geocities project that was about to be shuttered.

“That really kick-started the community side of the site and has set the tone for how it’s grown since then,” Peter says. “The owner of that project agreed to let us take it over, so we instantly were able to kick-start our forums with a great group of users who were experts on many travel destinations.”

Today, the site has grown into one of the largest and most active travel communities on the internet with more than 1 million users sharing photos, blog posts and mapping trips. Travellerspoint and other online travel communities like it are also the perfect hubs for the growing number of travelers looking to share their adventures with other enthusiasts.



## NEW DESTINATIONS

Since the end of travel restrictions around the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans have been eager to get out and see more than their backyards. Data from the U.S. Travel Association showed that travel spending in March 2023 was up nearly 10% over the previous year and 5% over spending in 2019.

That enthusiasm shows no sign of slowing down as more than half of Americans say they plan to make travel a priority this year. But how they travel is starting to change. More travelers are putting an emphasis on finding destinations that are off the beaten path, family-friendly and environmentally responsible.

Online communities provide the perfect place for travelers to research these new adventures and get recommendations from others who have tried them. Many of these communities have migrated to social media platforms like Facebook, where they can cater to the specific needs of different groups.

Communities like Wanderful and Girls Love Travel, for example, provide a network of women who can support and even join other women in their travels. The TravelAwaits community offers stories, deals and advice geared toward travelers ages 50 and up. Digital Nomads Around the World, on the other hand, offers inspiration and advice for younger travelers living and working on the go.

While many of these groups rely on social media to maintain their communities, Peter still sees sites like his playing an important role for dedicated travelers. The rise of Facebook initially saw some of the more off-topic banter on Travellerspoint forums shift to the social media channel. But as other communities have shut down, Travellerspoint has become a haven for hardcore travelers looking for a place to discuss their passion.

“Many of those members are now very active on Travellerspoint,” Peter says. “We became something of a refuge for the people who lost their previous online communities.” 🗨️



# TRAVEL TROUPES

Whether you never stop traveling or you're planning each course for your next foodcation, you can find a community that has the same passions.

**Digital Nomads Around the World** — Digital nomads are people who travel freely while using the internet to work remotely. They tend to travel light and live out of temporary housing while they're on the move. It isn't a lifestyle for everyone, but if it piques your interest this group can answer your questions.

**TravelAwaits** — Traveling in your 50s and beyond often comes with the benefit of more time and resources to explore your interests. But it can also present unique challenges. TravelAwaits is a community by and for older travelers, so you can trust that every deal, recommendation and discussion keeps your needs in mind.

**Wanderful** — Whether you're a woman eager to explore solo or looking for a supportive group of fellow travelers, Wanderful has everything you need. Learn about safe travel practices, pick up inspiration for your next excursion or connect with other adventurous women at online and offline events.

**Food Travelist** — Everyone loves a great meal on vacation. But for some travelers, the food is the point. If that's you, Food Travelist has your back with tasty recommendations and mouth-watering photos. When your wanderlust kicks in back home, you can even find recipe ideas to take your taste buds on a trip instead.



# FLOATIN' ON BY

## The fascinating Frio River provides opportunities

Story by LAZ DENES

Anyone who knows Josh Shandley will tell you the last thing he could be accused of is being lazy. But the man himself offers a surprising revelation. “I’m honestly quite the procrastinator by nature,” he says with a straight face. “Idle hands are not good for me.”

Josh’s hands have been anything but idle since, encouraged by his parents, he opened his own bait and tackle shop out of his dad’s real estate office in 1991. Josh was 11 at the time. He was one of the first to rent inner tubes for customers to float down the Frio, a hugely popular summertime activity.

The third-generation avid fisherman has been hard at it over the more than three decades since the launch of Josh’s Frio River Outfitters. His local business empire now features stores in both Leakey and Concan, as well as Gran’s Guns, a hunting supply store in Leakey, named after his father and 10-year-old son.

“It all started really small. I remember having my first \$100 day, I was so excited, I

couldn’t believe I was making money doing what I love,” Josh says. “My parents kept encouraging me, suggesting new things, and now I encourage young people to be productive whenever I can. It’s been an awesome experience.”

The entrepreneurial spirit resounds throughout the Shandley household. Josh’s wife, Tessa, 10-year-old son, Gran, and his 7-year-old daughter, Eileen, are actively involved in the family businesses. Tessa, alongside Josh, helps run the shops and Frio Coffee at both outfitter locations, as well as a boutique called The Frio Gal, with offerings that include its signature cologne and perfume made with local ingredients.

Gran is one day expected to take charge of the hunting store that bears his name, and even Eileen has gotten in on the act. Last summer, at the age of 6, Eileen started her own ice cream business called Sweet Eileen’s. Her tasty soft serve ice cream is accompanied by a fish-shaped waffle made in the store.



Photo courtesy of Uvalde County Visitor Center

### TOES IN THE WATER

Located smack between the Shandleys’ Leakey and Concan stores is another burgeoning family business called Happy Hollow Frio River Outfitters, run by the husband-wife team of Jerry and Melissa Bates.

In 2004, after an eight-year career trading stocks in Austin, Jerry decided to move with Melissa back to the area where he grew up. The couple bought the modest business housed in a building built in 1932 and immediately began growing the operation. They rent tubes and kayaks and shuttle customers to Rio Frio Crossing, the starting point of serene two- to four-hour float trips down the river back to Happy Hollow.

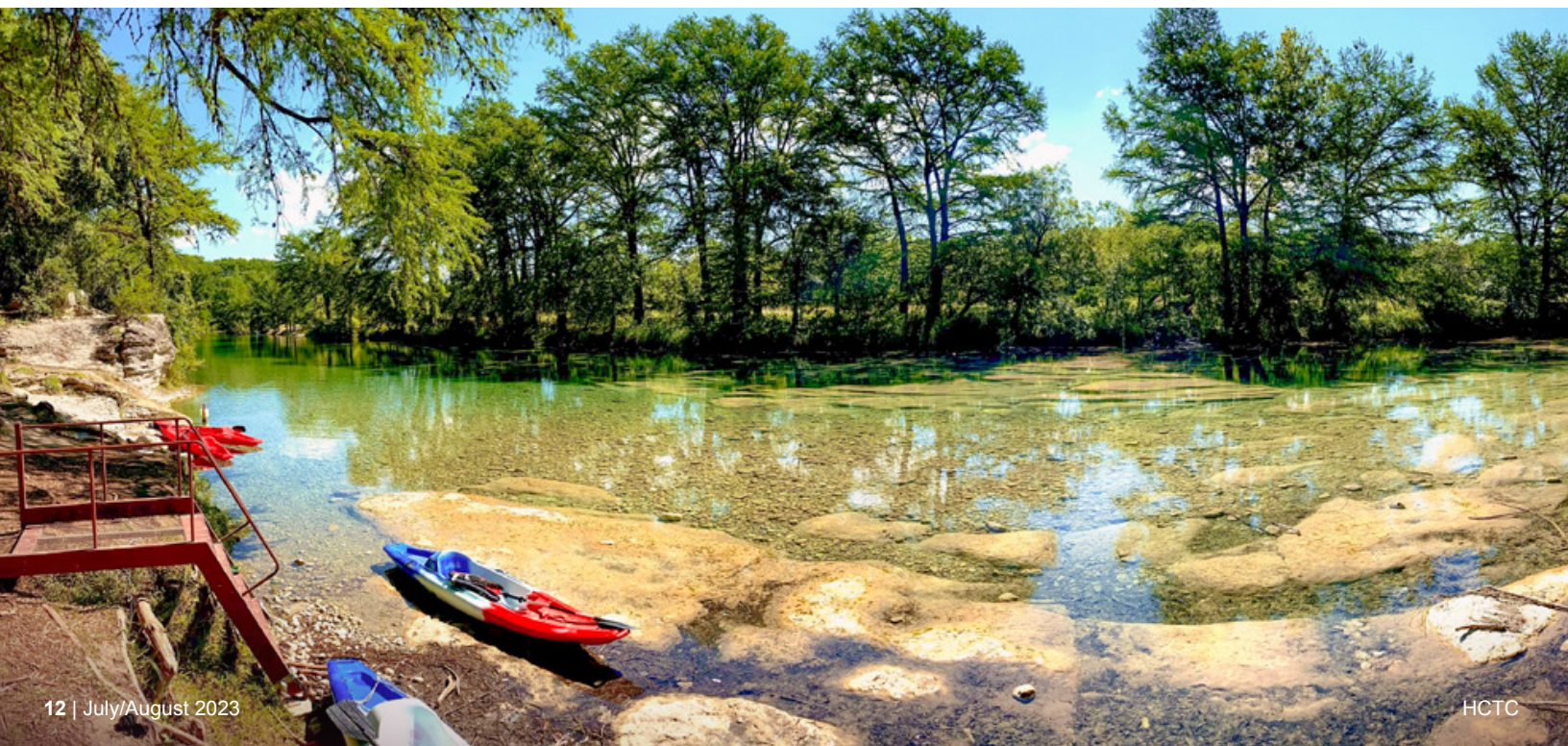






Photo courtesy of Adam Jennings from Happy Hollow Frio River Outfitters



Photo courtesy of Josh's Frio River Outfitters

There's a country store and beverage store on the property, as well as six rental houses of various sizes and four bungalows. "I've been on this river since I was 6 weeks old, that's when I first put my toes in the water, according to my mother," Jerry says. "When we first bought the business, we started with a little bit of tubing, then we turned it into a much bigger animal. At the peak of the season, we'll have 800 to 1,000 people a day, seven days a week. It's a great atmosphere."

In concert with the Texas Hill Country

River Region organization's Up to You conservation program, Jerry and Melissa encourage all of their customers to use the Frio responsibly. They provide customers with free mesh bags to collect their garbage and any other trash they find along the river. "I would say 99 percent of the people take it seriously, but you do have a few bad apples," Jerry says.

Far left: The spectacular views along the river make the rafting trips perfect for photo ops and social media posts.

Left: Tessa Shandley, center, with her two children, Gran and Eileen, go for a float down the Frio River.

Above: Two-year-old Trip Jennings plays in the water along the Frio River.

"But for the most part, the river stays pretty clean. It's something that we really believe in." 📱



Photo courtesy of Happy Hollow Frio River Outfitters

## GARNER STATE PARK IS AN OUTDOOR LOVER'S OASIS

Long before tubing down the Frio was a thing, there was Garner State Park, established in 1941 by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

It's the largest state park in Texas at 1,775 acres and features 18 miles of hiking trails, including the climb to the top of Old Baldy, where tourists take in the spectacular, 360-degree views of the Hill Country and the Frio River.

"I would say the park is the anchor for the growth of our tourist industry that's taken place in recent decades all up and down the river," says Brett Rimkus. Brett runs the concession business inside the state park and is widely known for his regular video updates of park and river conditions called The Dam Report, available on the park's Facebook page, @brettandthedamreport, and Instagram account, @garnerstateparktx.

In addition to activities like hiking and fishing — the river is stocked with trout multiple times each winter — one of the most popular events for camp guests and locals are nightly jukebox dances which started in the 1950s. Brett says from 600 to 800 people take to the Pavilion Dance Floor seven nights a week from Memorial Day through the summer season.



# Time-saving devices

Gourmet gadgets can make meals manageable

Instant pots became a “thing” in the 2010s, and people fell instantly in love with them. Combining an electric pressure cooker, slow cooker, rice cooker and yogurt maker in one, multicookers save space and cook meals quickly. What better time to hop on the bandwagon than now, when summer produce is at its height?

If you’re old enough to remember your grandmother’s pressure cooker, you may know horror stories of it blowing up and causing injuries. But don’t worry! Today’s electric pressure cookers have a slew of safety features, including sensors to monitor temperature and pressure.

The price of multicookers has come



down from north of \$500 to under \$65, an excellent price for beginners. If you want more functions or higher wattage, expect to spend upward of \$100. Here are some recipes to get you started.



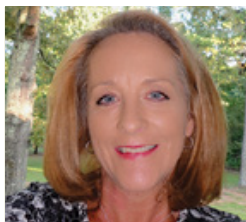
## SUMMER VEGETABLE SOUP

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 3 medium ears fresh corn, kernels removed (or 2 1/4 cups frozen corn)
- 2 pounds tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 sweet bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 2 medium zucchini, diced
- 1 cup fresh or frozen lima beans
- 8 ounces sliced mushrooms
- 1 small eggplant, peeled and diced
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon vinegar (red wine, balsamic or white)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- Ground black pepper, to taste

Press the saute button. Add olive oil to the stainless steel insert. Wait 2 minutes for it to preheat.

Add onion and garlic. Saute, stirring frequently, just until onion is tender (about 5 minutes). Press off/stop button. Add remaining ingredients. Place lid on the cooker and make sure the valve is set to sealing. Press soup and set the timer for 12 minutes.

The cooker will beep and start cooking. It may take about 20 minutes for it to come to pressure before the timer starts. When the cooking is done, allow the pressure to naturally release for about 5 minutes, then quick release any remaining pressure by switching the valve to venting. Carefully remove the lid, away from your face, and set aside. Stir and season with salt and pepper. Let cool a bit before serving.



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

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



## VEGGIE TOMATO SAUCE

Using canned tomatoes rather than fresh in this recipe from Instant Pot makes this recipe a breeze.

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 small to medium carrots, diced
- 2 celery sticks, diced
- 3 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon thyme leaves
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 small beets (canned or fresh), diced
- 1 cup diced red bell pepper
- 5 mushrooms, diced
- 1/2 of a medium zucchini, diced
- 2 cups fresh spinach leaves
- 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 jalapeno red chili (Use half or less if you don't like some heat.)
- 3 cans whole tomatoes in juice
- 1/2 cup water

Turn the multicooker on and press the saute key. Once hot, add the olive oil, onions, carrots and celery and cook for 5 minutes, stirring a few times.

Add the rest of the ingredients. Press cancel to stop the saute process. Stir the contents and pop the lid on top.

Lock the lid, making sure the top valve points to sealing. Set to manual/pressure cook on high pressure for 10 minutes. The cooker will take 5-10 minutes to build up the pressure and the timer will begin.

Once finished, allow the pressure to release naturally for 10 minutes and then move the top valve to venting to quickly release of the remaining pressure.



Open the lid and stir. Using an immersion blender, puree into a thick sauce. You can also do this in a blender or a food processor, but make sure to cool the sauce down slightly and do this in batches. Pour the sauce into containers or mason jars for storage or use right away as a sauce for pasta, pizza, enchiladas, meatballs and more.

## INSTANT POT ROAST

This recipe from Instapot is a cooker full of comfort.

- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1 (4-4 1/2-pound) boneless chuck roast, excess fat trimmed and cut into 6 pieces
- 1 cup beef stock
- 6-8 jarred pepperoncini salad peppers, plus 1/4 cup liquid from jar
- 1 (1-ounce) package dry onion soup mix
- 2 tablespoons dried parsley flakes
- 1 tablespoon dried chives
- 2 teaspoons dried dill
- 1 1/2 teaspoons onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch

Set a 6-quart cooker to the high saute setting. Heat oil then add beef and cook until evenly browned, about 2-3 minutes per side. Set aside.

Stir in beef stock, scraping any browned bits from the bottom. Stir in pepperoncini and liquid, onion soup mix, parsley flakes, chives, dill, onion powder, garlic powder and pepper. Return beef to the pot.

Select manual setting, adjust pressure to high, and set timer for 45 minutes. When finished cooking, naturally release pressure according to manufacturer's directions, 20-30 minutes.

Remove beef from the pot, then shred, using two forks.

In a small bowl, whisk together cornstarch and 3 tablespoons cold water and set aside.

Select high saute setting. Bring to a boil, stir in cornstarch mixture and cook, stirring frequently until slightly thickened, about 3-5 minutes. If the mixture is too thick, add more beef stock as needed until desired consistency is reached. Serve immediately. 🍴







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