

**BROADBAND:**  
HEALTH CARE EDITION

MARCH/APRIL 2019

# CONNECTION

## GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

Greater Milan  
Initiative: Centered  
on community

### HONKIN' GOOD TIMES

Baseball, geese take  
center stage in Watson

### SUPER-DUPER SOUPS!

A whole bowl full of warm,  
hearty recipes



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Broadband and rural health care

This magazine brings you stories of businesses operating across the broadband network your telco is building. You read of people who are working from home or getting an online degree thanks to their connection. Stories like these are endless throughout your area, and across the rural landscape served by the members of NTCA.

In this issue there is a focus on a particularly powerful use of broadband — health care. Better health leads to stronger families and happier, more productive communities. With a reliable internet connection and technology such as smartphones, tablets and monitoring devices, people of all ages have the tools to improve their health, access physicians, age in place, and live better lives. Be sure to read this issue's special health care section.

Innovative approaches to solving the challenges of rural living are nothing new for your telco and others like it across the country. Recently, I was delighted to visit with hundreds of executives and board members who lead these companies at our association's national meeting and expo. I was encouraged — as always — to be around these women and men who face the challenges of serving rural America and do an incredible job delivering some of the best broadband service in the nation.

Your community-based provider is part of a national family creating new opportunities for your community and those like it from coast to coast. From health care to education to economic development and beyond, they are building the future of rural America. 📧



## Patients to have more access to telehealth services in 2020 under proposed Medicare Advantage changes

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

The elderly and disabled who participate in Medicare Advantage programs could see more opportunities for telehealth services next year.

The proposed changes, announced in October, would remove barriers and allow Medicare Advantage plans to offer additional telehealth benefits starting in plan year 2020, according to a press release from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Seema Verma, administrator of the CMS, says these changes “give Medicare Advantage plans more flexibility to innovate in response to patients’ needs,” adding that she is “especially excited about proposed changes to allow additional telehealth benefits, which will promote access to care in a more convenient and cost-effective manner for patients.”

The key to providing telehealth services, including remote doctor visits and patient monitoring, is the availability of reliable broadband access. The research paper *Anticipating Economic Returns of Rural Telehealth*, published by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, states: “Highly advanced, state of the art telemedicine applications — including some not even yet developed — can only be possible when accessed via a high-speed, reliable broadband network. This is particularly critical in rural America, where the highest potential benefits from telemedicine — and the greatest challenges to deploying broadband — can be found.”

Rural telecommunications providers continue to expand broadband service to some of the most sparsely populated areas of the country. All of the nearly 850 NTCA member companies provide broadband service, many bringing gigabit internet speeds to their communities.

In remarks at a telehealth policy forum shortly after the CMS announcement, Verma said the proposed Medicare Advantage changes are “a major step towards expanding access to telehealth services because the rule would eliminate barriers for private Medicare Advantage plans to cover additional telehealth benefits for enrollees in MA plans.” 📧

# MULTITASKING

## CONSUMERS FIND NEW WAYS TO ENJOY MEDIA

Phones, tablets, streaming boxes, smart televisions, desktops, laptops and more provide consumers a wealth of opportunities to go online, resulting in increasingly complex and individualized habits for content consumption.

There is no better company to illustrate the trends than Nielsen, a global enterprise specializing in measuring and tracking consumer media trends. In December of last year, the company took a deep dive into how audiences are making use of the growing media world to create its Nielsen Total Audience Report.

Adults in the United States spent more than 10 hours daily with some form of media: live or time-shifted TV, nearly five hours; radio, nearly two hours; and digital devices, nearly three and a half hours. They often combine the tools they use. For example, someone might watch television while also surfing the web on an iPad.

Forty-five percent of those responding to a survey of Nielsen's Media Enthusiast Community watched TV while using digital devices "very often" or "always." Nearly a third reported using both platforms "sometimes," while only 12 percent never use both at the same time.

The report concluded that new digital platforms such as smartphones and tablets have changed how consumers interact with and consume media, often using multiple devices at once to create a better overall experience.

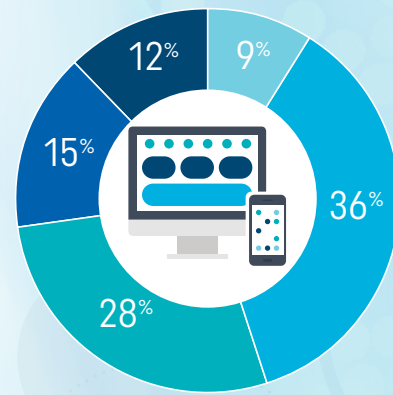
How often, for example, have you been watching a TV program, wondered what other shows an actor has appeared in and used a smartphone or tablet to find the answer? Well, you're not alone. More than 71 percent of respondents to the survey had looked up information about TV content they were viewing, and 51 percent reported the same habit for audio.

While some trends are changing as the technology landscape expands, others do not: Prime time still rules. Adult media usage still peaks from 9-10 p.m., with nearly 38 out of a possible 60 minutes spent consuming media.

The study reached a clear conclusion: Today's media landscape keeps consumers engaged. 📱



## SIMULTANEOUS USAGE TV + DIGITAL



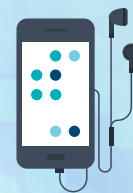
How often do you watch TV and use a digital device simultaneously?



## SIMULTANEOUS USAGE OF DEVICES

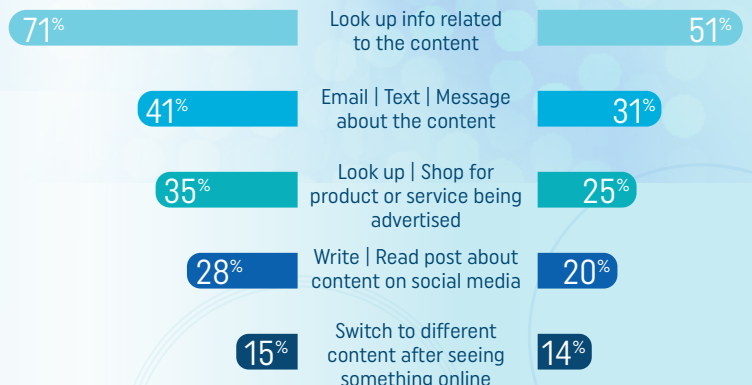
### DIGITAL USAGE WHILE WATCHING TV

In what ways have you used your digital device to engage with the TV content you were watching?



### DIGITAL USAGE WHILE LISTENING TO AUDIO

In what ways have you used your digital device to engage with audio content you were listening to?



# Broadband opens new health care frontiers

When I talk to state and local leaders, they say they're pleased by what a broadband network can do in our homes, schools and businesses. But increasingly, the place where experts and leaders are most excited about broadband technology for rural America is at the doctor's office.



**KEVIN BEYER**  
Chief Executive Officer

The American Telemedicine Association defines "telehealth" as "the remote delivery of health care services and clinical information using telecommunications technology." It's no overstatement to say that it can revolutionize health care across our country.

And since telehealth requires high-speed broadband, we're excited to be in the middle of that revolution.

As you'll read in the pages of this issue, telehealth is already helping doctors deliver improved care to patients on cases ranging from stroke to mental health. It's helping sick people eliminate trips to the emergency room. It may even encourage doctors to come to rural clinics and hospitals.

Based on studies, telehealth is already improving patient outcomes and satisfaction while also reducing costs and increasing efficiency for health care providers.

Because of broadband technology, local residents can work with their physicians to connect with specialists around the country via virtual visits and consultations. Eliminating the hurdle of traveling to big-city hospitals has proven to make patients more likely to seek care when they need it, which translates into faster and more complete recoveries.

Telehealth can also increase the pace of care when minutes and seconds matter. Whether it's giving a stroke patient an immediate evaluation by a specialist or enabling a regional radiologist to read the X-ray of a broken arm in the middle of the night, health care providers can use technology to eliminate dangerous delays. Tapping into a regional telehealth network of experts over broadband could mean that patients don't have to wait for help from local medical professionals who may not have the expertise or simply can't be everywhere at once.

I find, however, that when explaining what telehealth is, it's also important to discuss what it's not. In my view, telehealth should not be a way to replace local physicians with robots or with doctors a patient never meets in person. Telehealth should be an essential tool and an important resource for your doctor to use in the care of his or her patients.

When we say our mission at Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone is to improve the lives of the people in our service area, I can't think of a better way to do that than by working with talented doctors and nurses to help local residents live longer and healthier lives.

As we've built and improved our network, we're happy for the convenience and entertainment it provides. But it is health care — along with economic development and educational opportunities — that drives us to invest the millions of dollars required to build a modern communications network in our rural area. [📞](#)

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On the Cover:



Greater Milan Initiative's project coordinator Ann Thompson works with numerous individuals and civic groups that use the repurposed school.  
*See story Page 12.*

# FARMERS MUTUAL AND FEDERATED TELEPHONE RECEIVE NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Farmers Mutual Telephone Company and Federated Telephone Cooperative were recently recognized as Certified Gig-Capable Providers by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association for its efforts to provide gigabit broadband speeds and to enable new technology innovations in Big Stone, Lac qui Parle, Stevens and Swift counties.

"I applaud Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone for their commitment to delivering the internet's fastest speeds—an accomplishment worthy of much praise, considering the unique and challenging cir-



cumstances small, community-based telecommunications providers operate under every day in serving some of our country's most rural and remote communities," says NTCA Chief Executive Officer Shirley Bloomfield. "By building a gigabit-capable network, Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone have not only overcome these challenges, but they've also shattered conventional benchmarks for broadband speed to enable cutting-edge technologies that drive innovation and promote economic development in their communities, the region and nationwide."



## Capital credit refunds and income tax forms

Customers who received a capital credit refund from Farmers Mutual Telephone Company or Federated Telephone Cooperative in 2018 may wonder if they need to include the refund when completing their income tax returns.

In all cases, please consult a tax accountant for your specific requirements.

For general refunds of capital credits, you do not need to report the income you received from your capital credit refund check if you only use your communication services for non-business purposes. The refund is subject to taxation if all or a portion of your communications bill was deducted as a business expense the year the credit was allocated. The amount reported would be proportionate to the amount previously deducted as a business expense for the corresponding year.

For estate refunds of capital credits, please consult with a tax accountant for your specific requirements.

Farmers Mutual Telephone Company and Federated Telephone Cooperative are required to provide 1099 forms based on Internal Revenue Service regulations.



Joe Stafki



Pat Knutson

## Committed to excellence

Please congratulate two dedicated employees who have reached career milestones at Acira: Joe Stafki is a combination technician who has reached five years. Pat Knutson is celebrating her 20-year anniversary as the accountant for the cooperatives.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**March 10:** Don't forget to check your clocks and spring forward.

**April 19:** The offices of Farmers Mutual Telephone Company and Federated Telephone Cooperative will be closed on April 19 in recognition of Good Friday.

**June 4:** Farmers Mutual Telephone Company annual meeting

**June 6:** Federated Telephone Cooperative annual meeting



Mark Lazarchic, left, owns Whistle Soda and North Star Soda, where Neal Skoy plays the role of Billy the Soda Jerk during tours.

Photos courtesy of Amorephotography.

# Take a sip of history

## Soda bottling tours offer a tasty treat

**T**hink of Mark Lazarchic as the Willy Wonka of sodas. In 2016, he bought the Whistler Soda and North Star Soda bottling business and moved the operation from Forest Lake, Minnesota, to Spring Lake Park. In less than two years, he has become a king of craft sodas.

“Am I living the dream of a 14-year-old boy or what?” Lazarchic asks. “I get to come to a job where everyone is amazed and happy every day. How could I not love it? When I was offered the chance to buy Whistler and North Star, I thought, ‘Why not?’ Being able to offer tours and having people being able to see soda being made is great.”

In an age when craft beers and whiskeys have spiked in popularity, soda factories have started popping up across the United States. For a man who doesn’t cotton to the spirits, soda was Lazarchic’s drink of choice.

And now, folks come from all around to taste one of 40 different flavors, the favorite being Whistler’s root beer, and to tour the bottling plant.

Tours, with a minimum of 10 people, cost \$5 per person and include a tasting. Offered most days but requiring a reservation, tours teach visitors about the process of making sodas and all the elements used, including the purified water, the glass used for the bottles, the sugar and other ingredients.

“It’s all pure happiness,” says Jeff Kasper, general manager of the Blue Sun Soda Shop, also owned by Lazarchic and connected to the bottling facility. One of the largest such shops in the world, it carries all 40 Whistler and North Star flavors, as well as 1,300 sodas from other brands around the country.

“And people are surprised when they learn that Whistler uses reusable bottles,” Kasper says. When you buy a soda, you are charged a deposit. If you return the bottle, you get your money back, and the bottle is sterilized and reused for bottling. “It’s greener than recycling,” Kasper notes.

Whistler’s bottling process, as you’ll discover on the tour, mixes modern techniques with machinery from a previous generation. Whistler Classic Soda and North Star Craft Soda are both bottled on an authentic 1952 Crown, Cork and Seal Dixie Model F bottling line. The result is a drink with a little less carbonation than the biggies in the business, such as Coca-Cola or Pepsi.

The vintage machine fills about 15 bottles of soda per minute. “It’s clunky, loud and great,” Kasper says. “But being so old, parts are not readily available. And it’s hard to find people who know about fixing it. Every day brings a new challenge. We’re maintaining the best parts of the past while moving forward.”

Tours culminate in the Blue Sun Soda Shop, where fun awaits. There’s an arcade with vintage pinball machines, as well as samplings of some of the shop’s many sodas. A 1935 Chevy delivery truck is parked out front.

“People are happy when they are in our shop,” Kasper says. “Soda and candy just make people happy.” And what is the No. 1 reaction Kasper hears from guests following a tour of the bottling operation and a stop in the soda shop? “The first sentence out their mouth is, ‘See, I told ya,’” he says. “We’ve had tourists from all over the world.” 🗨️



Lazarchic enjoys operating a business that captures the imagination and fascination of visitors.

## Dining in Spring Lake Park

Though some may not agree, you can’t live on sodas alone. Thankfully there are plenty of places to dine in the Spring Lake Park area. Here are a few suggestions:

### **BIFF’S SPORTS BAR AND GRILL, 7777 Highway 65 NE**

There are daily specials, such as Friday night’s all-you-can-eat fish fry, which is \$10.99 per person and includes soup or salad and choice of potato. Otherwise, choose from salads, sandwiches, pastas, burgers and more.

### **EL BAMBA RESTAURANT, 8188 Central Ave. NE**

Authentic Mexican food is prepared fresh daily. There’s the familiar — such as traditional burritos, enchiladas, tacos and chimichangas — and house specialties like the Bamba Philly, which is a hoagie filled with steak, peppers and onions covered with homemade white sauce and served with fries on the side. Save room for the made-from-scratch sopapillas or flan.

### **HIBACHI GRILL AND SUPREME BUFFET, 8225 University Ave. NE**

If you want Chinese food, look no further for a huge selection that includes sushi. It’s all-you-can-eat for less than \$10 for adults.

### **MAHARAJA INDIAN CUISINE, 8492 Central Ave. NE**

Expect Indian food at its best. Favorites include Paneer Pakora, cubes of homemade cheese, deep fried and served with chutney; mulligatawny soup, a special Indian creation made with lentils, tomatoes and traditional Indian spices; and Tandoori Chicken marinated in homemade fresh yogurt and freshly ground herbs, and then barbecued in a clay oven.

## Elsewhere in Spring Lake Park

Spring Lake Park is a planned community of small-town charm and friendly folks 10 miles north of Minneapolis. With just over 2 square miles of land, there are six community parks in Spring Lake Park offering a range of recreational activities. And though there are no hotels in the town, there are too many to mention next door in Minneapolis. Take your pick of chains or mom-and-pop places. The Mall of America is open all year, offering shopping, dining in its massive food corridor and a great indoor amusement park for all ages. Consider making a weekend of it and introducing the kids to sodas like grandpa used to enjoy.



HI! I'M JADE GEHRKE!

In this column, in each issue, you'll learn about technology and read simple tips to get the most out of your electronics. For more tips or help with your devices, be sure to read this column in future publications. I'm always happy to help!

## DEVICE OF THE MONTH



### WaterHawk Smart Rain Shower Head

It's not all about saving electricity. You can also help conserve water with the WaterHawk Smart Rain Shower Head, which comes with a water-powered LED display — no batteries needed — that shows you water temperature and real-time usage in gallons per minute. It's much easier to cut down on those long showers when you can see the cost of the water you're using. MSRP \$49.99.

# Want to lower your electric bill?

## Turn to high-tech solutions

Smart devices can help you conserve energy and save money by automatically turning off the lights after you've left a room, managing heating and cooling throughout the house and more.

**ENERGY AUDIT:** Before buying devices, consider learning what is consuming the most power in your home. Heating and cooling usually account for almost half the energy usage, but there are ways to find out how the rest is being used. Energy monitors, such as those made by Sense, \$299, or Neurio, \$219, connect to your electrical panel and provide real-time data — through a smartphone app or on the web — about a home's energy usage. They are great tools for finding out if it's time to upgrade an old appliance to a more energy-efficient model.

**THERMOSTATS:** There are two big players in the smart thermostat market: Nest and ecobee. Both offer features that can not only cut energy costs but also make your home more comfortable. Smart thermostats, which can be controlled remotely, also learn your routine, warming up the house before you get out of bed or keeping it cool as you come home from work.

Which one to choose? Nest is owned by Google, and the thermostat is part of a line of smart devices designed to interact with one another and that are easily controlled through Google Assistant. The ecobee model, which

comes with Amazon's Alexa voice service built in, can double as a digital assistant and control hub for other devices.



### LIGHTS AND DEVICES:

About 25 percent of the average utility bill comes from lights in the home, so being able to better manage their use is essential to cutting costs. Companies such as TP-Link and Wemo offer several solutions. You can replace a traditional light switch with a smart version or put a smart plug into any outlet. A smartphone app or digital assistant can control the lights. Several models of smart lightbulbs can be programmed or remotely controlled to switch on and off, dim, change color and even report their own energy use.



A range of other energy-saving options are also available. Motion sensors can turn lights off when no one is in the room. And smart power strips offer surge protection while also reporting how much energy a plugged-in device uses. The strips can even turn off the devices using too much power. ☑



# DIAMOND DAYS

Watson community coming together

BY JOHN CLAYTON

After returning to his hometown of Watson about five years ago, Shane Augeson quickly discovered something was missing.

The baseball field he had grown up playing and dreaming on sat empty, even as summer arrived. There were no cheers and no laughter — no pop of the ball against a leather mitt or a bat. Aane Torgerson Field sat silent.

Augeson and other volunteers, including several players from the community, changed all that. In the summer of 2014, they worked to renovate the field and to make it playable. Dugouts were built with the help of a \$6,500 grant from the Minnesota Twins Community Foundation. The effort returned not only baseball with the aptly named Watson Honkers youth teams, but also a sense of community to Watson, which is to celebrate its 140th birthday this year.

“A lot of times when we have practices on Sunday afternoons, people will come to sit in the stands and watch practice, so, yeah, I’d say it’s brought people together,” says Augeson, who returned home to run the family business, Augeson Insurance.

A single baseball team has grown into an organization with about 50 players, even as the town’s population has remained steady for the past two decades at about 200 residents.



Youth baseball coach Shane Augeson chawks the batter's boxes before a game.

## HOLDING STEADY

The community has seen a number of homes go on the market and sell, which is a good sign, says Watson City Clerk and Treasurer Nicole Koenen. “I think we’ve been pretty solid the past few years as far as maintaining the population and things like that.”

But Watson, which was founded in 1879 after the railroad reached the area and named after a grain elevator company, is probably most famous for its temporary residents.

The city is dubbed the “Goose Capital of the USA” due to its proximity to the migration patterns of Canada geese. The geese have traditionally flocked in large numbers to nearby Lac Qui Parle State Park, about 6 miles from Watson. Hunters can take advantage of guided hunts at the Watson Hunting Camp and Bar, and they can stop in at The Goose Bar & Grill. “It’s a big hunting and fishing kind of area,” Koenen says.

## TIME TO CELEBRATE

This year Koenen is planning a summer event to celebrate the town’s history, geese included.

“We haven’t done a summer event in a lot of years,” says Koenen, who took over her roles with the town in December 2017.



Nicole Koenen, Watson city clerk/treasurer.

“I asked the town council to do a summer event for our 140th anniversary, and they agreed.”

The anniversary celebration is scheduled for July 26-28. “I’m hoping we can start on Friday and go through Sunday evening,” she says. “It’ll be a great chance for the community to come together again.”

It’s going to be just the type of celebration that drew Augeson back to Watson and inspired him to bring baseball back to town. “I think the kids grow up a little differently in places like this,” he says. “There’s something to be said about small-town life.” 📱



# Closing the gap

## Broadband brings high-tech health to rural communities

BY DREW WOOLLEY

In rural communities, the local pharmacy is often more than just a place to pick up over-the-counter cold medicine and fill prescriptions. It's the first stop for all things health care.

"We've had trouble keeping doctors in our town," says Cole Sandlin, owner of Fred's Pharmacy in Hamilton, Alabama. "We are the first health care center for most people, and that goes for all independent pharmacies in small towns."

Fred's Pharmacy, independently owned since 1951, has been in the Sandlin family for three generations. Since he took over the business from his parents in 2014, Sandlin has seen people travel nearly an hour to cities like Jasper, Alabama, or Tupelo, Mississippi, just to visit a general practitioner.

So he jumped at the opportunity to install a telemedicine kiosk at his pharmacy as part of a pilot program with American Well. The company provides services connecting patients and doctors.

Installed in December 2017, the kiosk gave Hamilton residents the chance to consult with a remote physician without the lengthy drive.

The kiosk was equipped with devices to monitor blood pressure, oxygen levels, skin and ear health, and more. In short,



Cole Sandlin, left, works with the telemedicine kiosk installed in 2017 at his pharmacy in Hamilton, Alabama, as part of a pilot program with American Well.

Photo courtesy of Mandy Green.

it gave patients access to routine medical care right down the street.

"For us, it just provides another avenue in our store to help patients," says Sandlin. "And in my little town of Hamilton, I want everybody to have the same amenities people have in bigger cities."

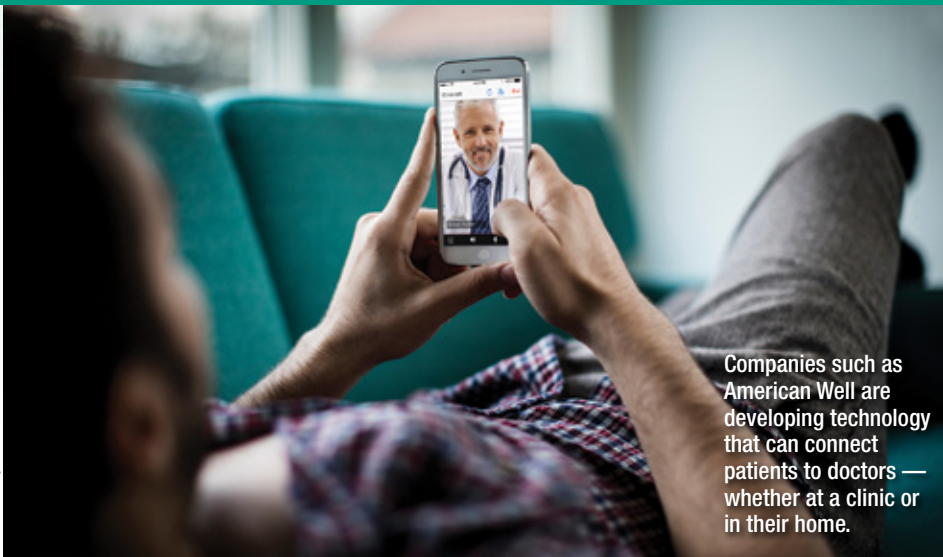
### A SMARTER APPROACH

That gap between health care access in rural and urban areas is a challenge not just in Hamilton but throughout the country — a problem largely brought

on by the rapid advancement of medical technology over the last century.

"Seventy-five years ago, when doctors carried most of what we could do in a black bag, you could have about the same care in tiny towns as you did in the big city," says Dr. Nancy Dickey, executive director of Texas A&M's Rural and Community Health Institute. "The reality today is it takes a much bigger patient base to pay for high-tech care."

But thanks to modern broadband connections, patients no longer have to make



Companies such as American Well are developing technology that can connect patients to doctors — whether at a clinic or in their home.

a trip in person to benefit from the latest medical technology. Electronic medical records allow a specialist hundreds of miles away to stay apprised of a rural patient’s condition while the patient has remote checkups at a local clinic or pharmacy.

“What we always try to tell people is that telemedicine is not meant to replace a physician,” says Lloyd Sirmons, director of the Southeastern Telehealth Resource Center. “The whole goal behind telemedicine is to create access.”

While some rural clinics may be deterred by the idea that telemedicine requires expensive technology beyond their means, Sirmons is quick to point out that flashy setups aren’t always the answer. A remote mental health counseling program, for example, is relatively easy and inexpensive to establish.

“It doesn’t take much in the way of equipment,” he says. “I can take a laptop, one I use every day as a physician, and download software that gives me the ability to connect to a specialist. Then, I have a telemedicine unit.”

### SUPPORT NETWORK

For larger health networks, broadband connectivity gives every hospital and clinic on their system access to the same quality of care. One such system is Essentia Health, which consists of 17 hospitals, about 70 clinics and eight nursing homes across Wisconsin, North Dakota and Northern Minnesota.

Since bringing on Maureen Ideker as a senior telehealth adviser six years ago, Essentia has installed videoconferencing technology at each of its locations. “They wanted to stretch scarce specialist resources to bring their expertise to rural communities, and that’s what we did,” she says.

In all, Essentia clinics and hospitals have access to about 30 specialist programs, including stroke, psychiatry and neonatal care. Larger hospitals can even partner with local pharmacies to design prescription dosages to ease patients who struggle with opioids off their addiction.

Ideker estimates that Essentia specialists see around 5,000 patients via telemedicine annually, with patients’ satisfaction improving as they have grown accustomed to the new technology. It also provides needed support for rural physicians.

“If you’re the only health provider in a rural community, that can be a pretty isolated feeling,” Ideker says. “I think they feel a lot of support from this, which makes for happier doctors who are likely to stay around longer.”

### NEW SOLUTIONS

As broadband continues to open up health care opportunities in rural communities, new challenges also arise. Along with educating patients about the medical options available to them, Sirmons sees consistent insurance coverage for telemedicine and across the board as one of the biggest hurdles to its adoption.

That hurdle was enough to put an end to telemedicine at Fred’s Pharmacy, at least for now. Despite hoping to continue offering consultations through the American Well kiosk, Sandlin was forced to end the service after the pilot program concluded due to a lack of insurance coverage for users.

“We were probably a little ahead of our time, but it was an opportunity we didn’t want to miss,” he says. “We learned a lot, and we plan to have telemedicine back as soon as it’s covered.”

In fact, according to experts like Dickey, as broadband internet becomes more widespread, telemedicine won’t just be an option in rural communities. Patients will increasingly demand it. The rise of technology in medicine may be the source of the health care gap, but she believes it can close it as well.

“Not everything can be done by telemedicine,” Dickey says. “But if we can provide medical care for someone in space using this technology, we can probably close the distance between your local clinic and the next big city.”

## Did you know?

Minnesota and North Dakota have both passed telehealth laws since 2015 that require private insurance companies to cover telehealth services at the same rate as in-person services. That means if your insurance covers an in-person visit to the doctor, it also covers a remote consultation.

Minnesota’s Medicaid program even covers home health monitoring and live video consultations up to three e-consults per week.

→ To learn more about telehealth reimbursement in your state, visit [cchpca.org](http://cchpca.org).



Aspiring home cooks take a baking class at the Milan Village Arts School.



Children get their faces painted during the summer luau party at the Milan Youth Center.

# THE ART of the MATTER

## Greater Milan Initiative turned former school into community center

BY JOHN CLAYTON

**The Greater Milan Initiative turned a painful loss for the small town of Milan, Minnesota, into an unexpected gain.**

With the population of Milan and other communities in the region decreasing in the mid-2000s, local education leaders opted to close the Milan School in 2007.

After attempts to save the school failed, a group of citizens formed the Greater Milan Initiative, purchasing the former school building for \$1 from the school district and creating a hub for the entire community, known locally as the GMI.

The nonprofit GMI has evolved into a complete community center, supporting the arts, athletics, fitness, and other community projects and needs.

“I think people feel comfortable here. It’s a very welcoming place,” says Ann Thompson, who is the GMI project coordinator. “I always get comments from people saying that there’s a warm, inviting atmosphere. Maybe I’m biased because I grew up going to this school, but I think there would be a huge physical and emotional hole in our community if we didn’t have this space.”

From the beginning, the people behind the GMI wanted a say in what happened to the former school. By August 2007, the

school board accepted their pitch for a community center and opted to sell the nonprofit the building.

“So, \$1 seems like an incredible bargain until you have to start heating and keeping it up,” Thompson says. “A lot of people thought we were crazy, but you learn as a board to ignore that. We learned that we weren’t going to waste time worrying about the naysayers. That would be counterproductive.”

### PAST AND PRESENT

Milan School graduates have made donations to alumni rooms located upstairs at the GMI that display memorabilia dating from the school’s beginnings over a century ago.

While those rooms provide a trip down memory lane for anyone who just wants to learn about or even relive a little local history, the majority of the GMI is focused on the present and future.

“The alumni can come back and reminisce for sure, but I also think it’s inspiring for those people to see that there’s still life here,” Thompson says. “It’s not just about remembering the past. It’s also about living today and helping to create a bright future, because we have a really young community.”

Soon after GMI purchased the building, the local Prairie Sun Bank loaned the nonprofit \$34,000 for equipment for a fitness center, which is still in use.



Team uniforms and yearbooks from the Milan School are a blast from the past in the community center's memorabilia room.

The GMI also hosts a youth center for grades seven to 12. The dining room is home to a church congregation each Sunday. The local 4-H Club also meets at the GMI, as do adult education classes. Several local artists rent former classrooms as studio or storage space.

The Milan Village Art School rents space for its textiles program, where students learn and practice on six floor looms and two table looms. There is also an art-framing class with state-of-the-art equipment.

In the winter, the center's gymnasium hosts both a men's basketball league and practices for the local school district.

"It kind of just happened that we're multipurpose," Thompson says. "We didn't want to put all our eggs in one basket. We have the art studios, recreation and education opportunities. We're multipurpose, and we really would like to keep it that way."

The gymnasium, kitchen and dining room also allow for event-space rentals, including wedding receptions, parties and

even funerals. It now hosts an annual craft fair each November and has become an annual stop during the Upper Minnesota River Art Crawl each October.

"Our biggest wedding reception had 430 people comfortably in the gymnasium," Thompson says. "There aren't any other places in our region that can handle that many people." By comparison, the town population of Milan is about 370.

### GROUP EFFORT

Thompson says a group of dedicated volunteers has kept the GMI up and running since it opened in 2010. "We have people who mow grass and move snow," she says. "Our volunteers do so much."

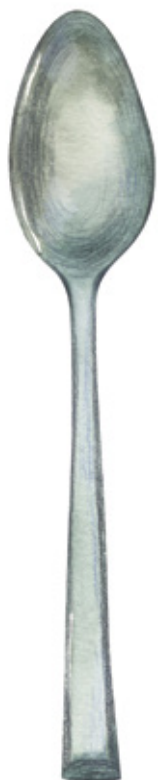
Opening a thrift store to help with funding was among the first projects taken on by the GMI board, and the store has been open and operated successfully by volunteers ever since.

The GMI has also been aided by federal and state grants that have helped update the building with additional insulation and new energy-efficient windows.



Ann Thompson, project coordinator for Greater Milan Initiative, oversees the diverse community projects.

Thompson says the efforts from the volunteers and supporters of the GMI are similar to the passion that kept the former Milan School alive at the heart of the community for nearly 100 years. "The community has been putting blood, sweat and tears into this building since 1915," she says. ☑



# Warm it up

## Enjoy the comfort of a super soup

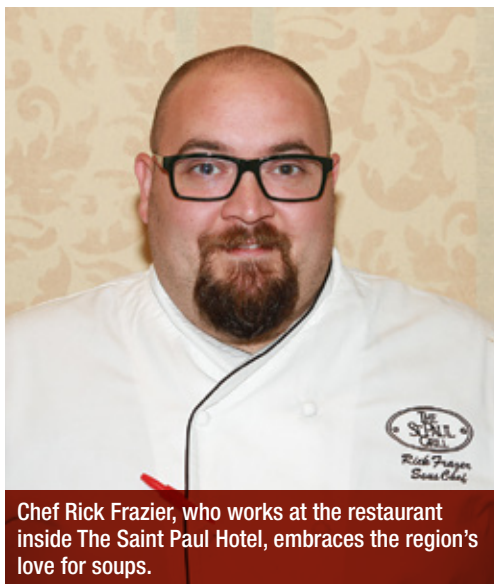
**W**inters in the Midwest last just a bit longer than in other parts of America, and for many, that's a happy thought. It means you can warm up to a steaming bowl of soup and be comforted while Mother Nature does her best to continue chilling you to the bone.

Winter soups in Minnesota and throughout the Upper Midwest tend to be hearty with lots of slow-cooked meats and root vegetables, says Rick Frazier, executive chef at the St. Paul Grill in St. Paul, Minnesota. He says cream-based soups — such as one of the region's favorites, wild rice soup — are on menus more during the cold months than other times of year.

As a child growing up in the Heartland, soup was a mainstay in his hometown of Oakdale, a suburb of St. Paul. While he can't nail down his favorite, "I would say it's a three-way tie between my mother's chicken noodle soup, my Grandma's bean-and-ham soup, and the wild rice soup with almonds from the local Byerly's supermarket chain."

Since then, he says, his taste hasn't changed much when it comes to soup. But now his list of soup favorites include the Seafood Pozole Verde, a voluptuous mixture of fresh seafood in a rich broth with a dash of spicy salsa verde, served at the OCTO Fishbar in St. Paul.

"Over the years, I've been open to trying every ingredient and every style of food that comes my way. I try to use some of those new techniques and new flavors to expand my food vocabulary," says the graduate of Le Cordon Bleu in France.



**Chef Rick Frazier, who works at the restaurant inside The Saint Paul Hotel, embraces the region's love for soups.**

Wild rice soup is the top seller at St. Paul Grill, a restaurant that in just the past two years has received an Experts Choice award from TripExpert, DiRoNa's Distinction in Dining award and an Award of Excellence from Wine Spectator. During the colder months, the restaurant goes through about 12 gallons of the Midwestern classic a day. It's made year-round, though, because dedicated soup lovers continue to order it, even in the heat of summer.

### MINNESOTA WILD RICE SOUP

- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1/4 cup minced yellow onion
- 1/2 cup diced celery
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- 4 cups cooked wild rice
- 1 cup grated carrot
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds
- 1 pinch red pepper flakes (optional)
- 2 cups half-and-half
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Stir in garlic, onion and celery, cooking until the onion has softened and turned translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in flour and cook for 3 minutes more. Pour in the vegetable broth, bringing to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring frequently. Stir in wild rice, carrot, almonds and red pepper flakes; return to a simmer, and cook until the carrots are tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in half-and-half, cooking until warmed through. Season to taste with salt and pepper before serving.



**FOOD EDITOR ANNE P. BRALY IS A NATIVE OF CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE.**

## WHITE WINE CHICKEN SOUP/STEW

- 4 slices bacon, cut into 1/8-inch strips
- 1 pound chicken wings
- 2 pounds boneless skinless chicken thighs, cut in half horizontally and trimmed
- 4 carrots, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 celery rib, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/8 cups dry white wine
- 5 cups unsalted chicken broth, divided
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1 tablespoon sections
- 1/3 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 pound small new red potatoes, washed and quartered
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Place oven rack to lower-middle position; preheat oven to 325 degrees. Cook bacon in a Dutch oven over medium-low heat until bacon browns; transfer bacon to a large bowl. Turn heat to medium-high.

In small batches, without crowding the pan, sear chicken wings and thighs in the bacon fat. If more fat is needed, add 2 tablespoons canola oil. Place seared chicken in the bowl with the bacon. Reduce heat to medium and place the carrots in the Dutch oven, cooking until softened. Add the diced onion and celery, cooking until onion is translucent and celery has softened. Add minced garlic and cook 30 seconds until it is fragrant.

Increase heat to medium-high. Add wine, 1 cup broth and Worcestershire sauce. Scrape brown bits from the



**White Wine  
Chicken Soup/Stew**

bottom of the pan and bring mixture to a boil. Cook, stirring occasionally, until liquid reduces to 1/4 cup and vegetables start to sizzle, 12-15 minutes. Add butter and stir to melt. Sprinkle the vegetables with flour and stir.

Gradually add remaining 4 cups of broth, thyme and smoked paprika; whisk until smooth. Add quartered potatoes; bring to a low boil. Turn off heat. Taste the stew and season with salt and pepper, if needed.

Transfer stew to the oven. Cook, uncovered, for 30 minutes, stirring once halfway through cooking. Transfer pot to stove top and, with wooden spoon, scrape any bits of the stew that has collected on the sides of the pot back into the stew. Stir well. Add chicken pieces and bacon. Return pot to oven and continue cooking, uncovered, 45 minutes or until chicken and vegetables are fork-tender. Stir occasionally. 🍲

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