

MARCH/APRIL 2020

CONNECTION

BROADBAND:
HELPING YOU LEARN



TAKING A VICTORY LAP

40 years of racing at
Madison Speedway



THE LESSONS OF LIFE

Reflecting and recounting
with Trevor Seales

UNLIMITED LEARNING

Broadband creates
education opportunities



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Let's 'build once' under RDOF

As an organization representing rural broadband providers, we are excited about the FCC's plans to invest \$20.4 billion to bring affordable high-speed broadband to rural Americans. While the agency's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) is a terrific opportunity for unserved and underserved communities, it is important that as a nation we are investing in networks that can meet broadband needs for the foreseeable future.

Services delivered in high-cost rural areas using RDOF funds should be reasonably comparable to those in urban areas — both now and over at least the term of support distribution, if not longer. We believe it is far more efficient to have policies that encourage providers to “build once,” deploying rural networks that are scalable and will offer services at speeds that are still relevant to customers another decade from now.

NTCA was one of the biggest and earliest supporters of a program that will promote sustainable networks capable of delivering the best possible broadband access for many years to come. After months of advocacy by our members and staff, including securing bipartisan letters signed by dozens of members of Congress, the FCC announced in January that it will consider rules to fund sustainable and forward-looking networks.

This will help strike a terrific balance by looking to reach as many rural Americans as possible while ensuring that the FCC is funding the best possible networks for the available budget. I am energized by the role that NTCA members can play in being a key part of the solution in bridging the digital divide. 🗨️



Once a decade, the United States counts its citizens. This results in a treasure trove of data relevant to politics, businesses, schools and much more. For example, federal agencies use census results to distribute more than \$675 billion in federal funds annually.

Similarly, states use census data to draw congressional district boundaries. The numbers can even determine how many congressional representatives a state sends to Washington, D.C. Locally, many counties, cities and towns lean on census statistics when planning infrastructure such as roads, schools and emergency services. Businesses also factor census data into calculations that determine the locations of new stores, hotels and more.

As you can see, the census is an important program and one in which you'll be asked to participate. For the first time, everyone can complete the census online, as well as by phone or by mail. You will still receive a census form by mail, but you will have the option of visiting respond.census.gov/acs to complete your duty to respond to the census.

Census Day is April 1, and census takers will visit households that have not already replied to census questionnaires online, by phone or through the mail. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau hired thousands of temporary workers to help implement the 2020 census.

The bureau also understands the unique challenges of counting people in rural areas. Some rural homes do not have typical mailing addresses, using instead post office boxes in nearby community centers. However, census questionnaires are not mailed to P.O. boxes. In these remote areas, census takers will deliver paper questionnaires to each home and offer guidance on how to respond by phone or online. If there's no response, expect an in-person follow-up.

By law, the Census Bureau must keep your information confidential, using the details to produce statistics. The bureau may not publicly release responses in any way that might identify an individual. 🗨️

Maybe it's not so smart

Streaming boxes can add a layer of TV security

Story by NOBLE SPRAYBERRY



Is your TV watching you? Could it be a backdoor to your private information? Those are questions recently posed by the FBI. For people who rely on a smart TV, the answer might be, “Yes.”

A smart TV can connect directly to the internet, allowing access to services and applications that provide movies, TV shows, music, videoconferencing, photo streaming and more. It's all right there in one consolidated interface.

But convenience comes with tradeoff. Some smart TVs include microphones and cameras. These features allow voice commands and the potential of using facial recognition to customize content to an individual viewer.

Those innovations, however, raise the possibility of TV manufacturers eavesdropping. Similarly, an unsecured TV has the potential to be used by a hacker as a backdoor into your other Wi-Fi-connected devices.

The FBI suggests a range of strategies to ensure a TV protects your security. Do internet research on your specific TV model to check the status of updates and reports of security breaches. Also, if possible, change passwords. Then, learn how to turn off microphones, cameras and the ability of the TV manufacturer to collect personal information. Even placing tape over the camera lens is an option.

There's another strategy, too — do not directly connect your TV to the internet. Instead, consider a third-party device to create a bridge between your television and streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu and more. 🗨️

HERE ARE A FEW OPTIONS TO CONSIDER:



Roku: Many devices that allow TVs to connect to online streaming services are sold by companies that also offer TV content. As a result, not all services are available on every device. If that's a concern, consider a Roku, which can generally connect to all content providers. Rokus typically range in price from \$30 to \$99.



Apple TV: Prices for an Apple TV device range from \$149 to \$199, with the more expensive options having more storage capacity and the ability to play 4K video. The device will connect to most streaming services, and currently the purchase of a new Apple TV comes with a one-year subscription to the Apple TV+ streaming service.



Amazon Fire TV Cube or Fire Stick: Amazon's Fire streaming devices cost from about \$30 to nearly \$200, based on capacity and the ability to offer 4K content. Look for frequent sales to find a bargain. The interface is clean and useful. Fans of Amazon Prime can have easy access to that service's streaming options. While most streaming services may be available, that has changed from time to time.



Google Chromecast: Google offers its twist on the streaming boxes with a small, hockey-puck-shaped device that allows content to be “cast” from a computer, tablet or phone to the television. Most streaming services are supported, and viewers with a Google Home smart speaker can control programming with voice commands.

The 2020 census matters for rural America



KEVIN BEYERS
Chief Executive Officer

How important is the 2020 census? For rural areas like ours, \$675 billion is at stake.

In mid-March the U.S. Census Bureau will send postcards to most addresses in Minnesota and across the country. That is one of the more important pieces of mail you will receive in 2020. Why does the census matter to your broadband and telephone provider, and why am I using this space to encourage you to participate?

Simply put, our part of Minnesota has a lot to gain from accurate census numbers — and a lot to lose if we aren't all counted.

These risks and benefits come in three main areas dependent on census data: government funding, political representation and statistics for economic growth.

According to the Census Bureau, census data determines the spending of more than \$675 billion in federal funds. That can mean anything from schools, roads and equipment for first responders to grants for expanding our broadband network or programs that help those in need. Many of those projects seek to do the most good for the most people — and if we don't help to create an accurate count of all of our people, that funding may go elsewhere.

“Simply put, our part of Minnesota has a lot to gain from accurate census numbers — and a lot to lose if we aren't all counted.”

As you may have heard if you follow political news, the census data is used to draw and redraw districts for state and federal lawmakers. The number of congressmen and congresswomen we have representing Minnesota is dependent on our population. If we don't count all of our state's residents, we would show a lower population and run the risk of losing representation in Congress to a bigger state that may have different interests than ours.

The same thing is true on a more local level in the state legislature. If the counties in our region come up short on the population count, we could lose a legislator and have a more difficult time making our area's concerns heard in Saint Paul.

Lastly, our area's population is a key factor in almost all of the statistics businesses look at when considering a market to build. Whether it's a fast-food restaurant or an industrial plant, corporate managers are looking at our population when it comes to customer base, workforce and market potential. Showing a lower population on the census because many people weren't counted would make us less appealing for businesses to locate here.

If you want to know more, visit [census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

I know everyone is busy, and that little postcard later this month may seem like just adding one more thing to your to-do list. But from what I've read, the Census Bureau is making things simple, quick and easy for everyone to be counted.

As someone who cares deeply about our rural area, I hope you'll take those few minutes of time to make sure you and your family participate in the census.

Our communities are counting on you. [👉](#)

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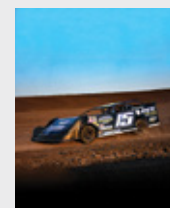
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WORDSOUTH

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On the Cover:



Many racers have competed at Madison Speedway, a local track operated by Troy and Barb Hoyles.
See story Page 9.



Lifeline SERVICE

LIFELINE IS A FEDERAL PROGRAM TO HELP LOW-INCOME AMERICANS PAY FOR PHONE OR BROADBAND SERVICE

You are eligible for Lifeline benefits if you qualify for and receive one of the following benefits:

- SNAP
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- The Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefit

DO YOU QUALIFY? Apply today!

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, please visit www.lifelinesupport.org or call your local telecommunications provider.

Help us celebrate these employee milestones

Shelley Evink



Tammy Marquart



Federated Telephone Company and Farmers Mutual is recognizing two dedicated employees that go the extra mile for our members.

Shelley Evink, a customer experience specialist, will have served for 15 years as of March.

Tammy Marquart, also a customer experience specialist, will mark 15 years in April.



Please welcome our new employee, Angela Solemsaas, who is starting as a customer experience specialist.



Get SPAMmed in Austin

Potted meat gets its due at Hormel's SPAM Museum

Story by ANNE BRALY

In this day and time, the word “spam” is most often a reference to unwanted emails or scams, but there was a time when the word simply made mouths water. And in Austin, Minnesota, there’s a museum that puts the humble canned meat on a pedestal.

“I just got an email from somebody who wrote, ‘SPAM Museum, what could be in that?’” Those types of questions come frequently into Savile Lord’s inbox. As public relations manager for Hormel’s SPAM Museum, she’s the one to answer them. But the best way to find out is to get up close and personal with a food staple that is purely American but loved throughout the world.

“SPAM creates more community than most foods ever will,” Lord says.

“People have served it to their families for more than 80 years, and they have a relationship with that food, whether they’re from here in the United States mainland or over in Hawaii or the Philippines or from one of the many, many countries outside the U.S.”

THE MUSEUM

It was supposed to be a temporary, 12-month exhibit in the local mall, but interest was so high that Hormel Foods made a decision that would significantly impact the small town of Austin, population 24,000. Now, more than 100,000 people every year come to the SPAM Museum, which since 2016 has had a 14,000-square-foot permanent home along the city’s Third Avenue. With

seven main galleries of SPAM memorabilia, getting SPAMmed in Austin is a world-class experience.

As soon as you enter the front door, SPAM makes its presence known with a tower of the potted meat rising almost 4,000 cans high. Look up! There’s a 12-foot-tall rocket made of SPAM cans, too. Nearby, a conveyor belt carries a SPAM train with hundreds of SPAM “cars” racing along at ceiling level.

Many exhibits are interactive, such as the large screens on which you can select recipes for SPAM cheesecake, quiche and cookies and have them emailed to you. “Truly SPAM email,” Lord jokes. Guides called “SPAMBassadors” roam the floor of the SPAM Museum.

If you get there at the right hour, you might find a tray of SPAM served on pretzel sticks. A small theater, its doors shaped like the face of a grinning pig, screens a 15-minute SPAM video. An electronic tote board at the museum records the number of SPAM cans produced. A dancing can of SPAM greets you at The SPAM Shack that boasts half a dozen separate kitchens displaying SPAM recipes and memorabilia from countries around the world. And somewhere in the distance you can hear the cast of Monty Python's "Spamalot" singing selections from the Tony-winning musical comedy.

WHERE DID IT BEGIN?

SPAM originally began as a product that was shelf-stable because it was cooked in its own can. It was sent to soldiers overseas in World War II and was a godsend to victims of disasters around the world. When Jay Hormel created SPAM, he didn't have a name for it, so during a New Year's Eve party he offered \$100 to anyone who could come up with a name for his pork product.

"Apparently, it took till the fourth or fifth round of drinks before the names really started to flow," Lord says. "SPAM was named that evening." The "SP" is for spiced, and the "AM" stands for ham.

"Since then it has taken on a life of its own, as any product with our history should," Lord says. "It is a huge piece of Americana."

FUN FACTS

A visit to the SPAM Museum will teach you a lot, including interesting trivia like the following:

- SPAM may be considered the world's top mystery meat, but the mystery has been solved. A giant pig display in the SPAM Museum breaks it down to a mixture of pork, salt, water, sugar, potato starch and sodium nitrite.
- Troops consumed nearly 100 million pounds of SPAM in World War II, which prompted then-Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower to write a letter thanking Hormel for sending SPAM and forgiving the company's only sin — sending so much of it! The letter is on display in the museum.
- Hormel produces 44,000 cans of SPAM every hour. 📧



Minnesota Museums of a Different Sort

Museums aren't just for art. Here's a look at what you might find if you're willing to look beyond the expected:

- **House of Balls, 1504 Seventh St. S., Minneapolis:** You'll be bowled over — literally — at sculptor Allen Christian's display of unique works made from old bowling balls and other discarded items. Speak into the microphone and make your own statement answering questions posed on the blackboard, then explore the works of art inside.
- **The Bakken Museum, 3537 Zenith Ave. S., Minneapolis:** An assortment of all things electrical, medicinal and technology related, The Bakken is known for its combination of fun exhibits. Kids and adults alike will enjoy Frankenstein's Laboratory, a show featuring Frankenstein's monster. If you're looking for a different way to entertain the kids, this is it.
- **Mill City Museum, 704 S. Second St., Minneapolis:** One of the most fascinating buildings and formerly the world's largest flour mill, the museum tells the history of the milling industry in Minnesota. The iconic ruins into which the museum is built are part of the Minneapolis riverfront and hold a special place in many a Minnesotan's heart.
- **Berenstain Bears Museum, 407 N. Main St., Austin:** The museum, located inside Sweet Reads Books and right across the street from the SPAM Museum, boasts the world's largest collection related to the beloved bears, with more than 700 books and almost 2,000 other Berenstain Bears-themed items like games, stuffed animals, clothing, figurines and more.

IF YOU GO

Where: SPAM Museum, 101 Third Ave., Austin, Minnesota

Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday; closed New Year's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day.

Admission: FREE

Information: 507-437-5100 or www.spam.com



From play areas to interactive learning opportunities, the SPAM museum makes for a fun stop.



HI! I'M JADE GEHRKE!

In this column, 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



Epson WorkForce ES-65WR Wireless Portable Color Receipt Scanner

Although using your phone to take a photo of a business document is perfectly acceptable in some situations, it is still no substitute for the sharpness and clarity that a scanner can offer. This Epson WorkForce scanner comes with USB 2.0 connectivity, built-in Wi-Fi and up to 600 dpi resolution. It exports to QuickBooks or Excel and can be taken on the go. \$259.99 MRSP.

Money matters

Turn to online tools



Tax season is far from anyone's favorite time of the year, but it's a good opportunity to take stock of your finances. In the past, this may have meant visiting an accountant or sitting down at the kitchen table with shoeboxes full of statements and receipts. Fortunately, technology has made it easier to track your banking and expenses and to even keep your credit secure. All it takes is your internet connection.

MONEY MANAGEMENT

There are several money management tools on the market. Some, such as Quicken — quicken.com — are software applications that offer web and mobile options, but full functionality requires their desktop version. Others, including Personal Capital — personalcapital.com — are online services accessed through a web browser.

Regardless of which you choose, these personal finance managers allow you to view and track your spending, savings and investments in a single screen, without the need to visit different sites or remember multiple passwords. The main dashboard for Personal Capital, for example, lists your bank accounts, investments, credit card balances, personal loans, mortgage and other assets, and its colorful graphics correspond to your net worth, budget and savings.

Along with a quick-glance view of your finances, Quicken allows you to organize and pay all your bills online, as well as manage a small business. The company's Home and Business option tracks assets and liabilities in a complete balance sheet.

Even if you are only looking for a simple way to manage your budget, these tools are worth a try. Personal Capital is a free service, and Quicken offers a starter plan for \$34.99 a year.

TAXES

If your income is \$69,000 or less, the IRS offers a free way to file your return: www.irs.gov/filing/free-file-do-your-federal-taxes-for-free. While the IRS offers a free option for those earning more, it is far from easy to use.

For those with a higher income who want to file from their computer, the better option is to use a commercial service, such as TurboTax, E-file.com or H&R Block.

CREDIT LOCK

Credit is an important part of your financial life, so protecting it from improper use is a must. You may have heard of "freezing" your credit, but you can also "lock" it. Both prevent creditors from accessing your credit report — protecting you from new accounts being opened without your knowledge — but there are differences between them.

Freezing your credit with all three major credit reporting bureaus — Equifax, TransUnion and Experian — is free, but Experian charges \$19.99 a month for a credit lock.

Whether you choose to freeze or lock your credit, remember you are entitled by law to a free copy of your credit report every 12 months from each of the credit reporting companies. [🔗](#)

In the fast lane

Madison Speedway powers forward after 40 years



Darren Engesser of Gary, South Dakota, kicks up the dirt.

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photography courtesy of KRYSTAL OSTENSON/AOK PHOTOGRAPHY

Madison Speedway may have turned 40 this past year, but things haven't slowed down a bit.

From Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day, 100 cars on average compete each Saturday night in seven classes on the high-banked, three-eighths-mile oval.

Troy Hoyles says he began working at the track in 1989, 10 years after it opened. He and his wife, Barb, took over track operations and promotions in 2004. Since then, it's been a family business geared toward family entertainment and fueled by competition.

"A big family is what it is," Hoyles says. "We have several families that have been involved for a number of years, and you get to know them and treat everybody as a family. The drivers have been with us awhile, and they've turned into one big extended family."

Barb and Troy Hoyles, owners of Madison Speedway.



That doesn't mean there aren't family squabbles, as things sometimes get heated in a hard-nosed sport. "I give them a day or two to cool down, and 90% of them will call you back or talk to you somewhere and say, 'I guess I was out of line, so you're right,'" Hoyles says.

He also says the Madison area is part of a Midwest racing hotbed. Several classes at Madison are sanctioned by the WISSOTA Promoters Association, which includes tracks across Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Ontario, Manitoba and as far west as Idaho.

As a promoter himself, Hoyles says the business has changed over the years. The speedway has a comprehensive website at madisonspeedwaymn.com, and social media has become a staple for advertising and promotion. "The bulk of our advertising is done through social media in one form or another," he says.

For racer Noah Nelson, Madison is his home track — and has been since long before he started to drive a car himself.

"I've always loved the track," says Nelson, who has raced in the WISSOTA Hornet class but is considering a jump to Crate Late Models this year. "I was going to races when I was 2 weeks old, so I've been around it my whole life. I've just always considered it my home track."

Nelson raced sporadically in 2019, but

his girlfriend, Deanna Vanderostyne, got behind the wheel for six races and earned 10th place in the Hornet point standings with four top-10 finishes.

The points season ends each year with an annual Labor Day race, but that is not quite the end of the road in 2020 for Madison Speedway.

Lou's Madtown Showdown, a two-day event the last Friday and Saturday of September, is to be for the fourth straight year on Sept. 25-26. It features all seven classes of races each night. "Last year, we had around 150 cars for both nights," Hoyles says. "It's become our biggest event." 🗨️



Corey Mehrwerth, 17, pulls into victory lane after one of many wins.

If you're going ...

MADISON SPEEDWAY

104 Sixth Ave., Madison, Minnesota

- Grandstands entry fee — adults \$12; ages 12 and under free
- Pits entry fee — pit passes \$30; drivers and pit crew members \$25 each
- Races on Saturdays start at 7 p.m.



A class of their own

Broadband brings education to students on their schedule

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In 2012, Aziza Zemrani was busily putting together an accelerated online program for the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The curriculum would allow students to complete courses they need in just seven weeks from anywhere in the valley or beyond. But there was a lingering concern about handling presentations using the available online technology.

“I needed them to present so I could see their skills and competency in communication,” Zemrani says. “We use Blackboard Collaborate, which allows for face-to-face engagement and interaction. But my colleagues were worried about how it would work if we had a student with a disability.”

As if in answer to those concerns, the program’s first cohort group in 2013 included one deaf student, Phillip Robinson. When it came time for each student to present that June, the university’s Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology worked with the disability office to arrange for a sign language interpreter to present with him.

“He presented live with his classmate, and it was beautiful,” Zemrani says. “He was almost in tears telling me this was the first time he was able to present live like that in an academic setting.”

Robinson graduated in December, joining hundreds of other students who have

come through the accelerated online program of the university in Edinburg, Texas. While Zemrani originally expected the program to appeal primarily to students from outside the state or even the country, it has also been popular among local students in the valley looking to fast-track their education.

“Some of these students might be working two jobs, so they can’t fit traditional classes into their schedule,” she says. “With the online program, because of the course delivery and structure, students can take up to two more modules and finish in one year.”

A PLACE TO START

Online courses like the ones offered at UTRGV are taking off across the country thanks to improved broadband access. But with so many online options available to students, it can be daunting to figure out which one is the best fit. That’s why the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system contracted with Distance Minnesota to act as a single point of contact for all online students in 2004.

Distance Minnesota was founded as a consortium of three local colleges that wanted to offer online courses. Today, the organization partners with 37 colleges and universities throughout





the state, answering any questions prospective or current students may have about their online options.

“We do chat, phone assistance and email assistance seven days a week,” says Distance Minnesota Executive Director Lisa Leahy. “In all, we handle approximately 25,000 student inquiries a year.”

But more than acting as a helpline for students, Distance Minnesota compiles data on the programs each school offers and the level of interest in each course. This makes the organization a resource for schools deciding which classes to offer online and for students looking to fulfill a specific course requirement. That help is particularly important for making online programs accessible to out-of-state or international students.

“Throughout our nearly 20-year history with the school system, we’ve come to understand what each of the individual universities has to offer,” Leahy says. “Many of us have worked closely with the faculty and the administration on these campuses. So if a student has a specialized need for a certain class, we can tell them the best course is at this school, and often we’re able to put them in touch directly, whether they’re in Argentina, California or New York.”

VIRTUAL HIGH

College coursework isn’t the only level at which online programs are giving students more flexibility. Connections Academy, a nationwide program that offers tuition-free online K-12 public schooling in 28 states, launched a new online academy last fall in Tennessee. Since it opened, the academy has grown from about 750 students to 1,300 enrolled.

The Tennessee Connections Academy is authorized by Robertson County Public Schools, though it is available to students throughout the state. The system was already using a virtual curriculum from Connections Academy’s parent company, Pearson, to offer online classes to approximately 50 students. So it was a natural partnership to work together to bring that same experience to students across the state.

“It’s a unique learning environment with certified teachers in all subject areas for the kids,” says Derek Sanborn, principal at Tennessee Connections Academy. “The students are able to interact with their teachers and other kids with live lessons throughout the week. They receive textbooks and other materials at each level, and it’s all at no cost to the parent.”

The online academy is held to the same standards as any public school in the state, and students are required to attend for six-and-a-half hours each day. The program has been a good fit for kids who may be homebound, live in remote areas, or even be on traveling sports teams, allowing students to complete their hours in the evening or on weekends.


“We also have students who may have been bullied in their school or didn’t feel safe. Maybe the traditional setting wasn’t motivating for them,” Sanborn says. “I think giving parents that choice is really important because they get to decide what’s best for their kids.”

NEW ENGAGEMENT

Even with the increasing quality of online classes, there are still challenges educators work to overcome, including engaging students.

One way Tennessee Connections Academy attempts to address this issue is by scheduling in-person field trips, allowing families to meet and connect with their teachers and other students.

In her own classes, Zemrani has recorded live classroom sessions and used apps like Flipgrid to allow students to record short intro videos about themselves. While engagement continues to be a challenge for any online course, she believes finding new solutions is well worth the investment.

“We have students in the military who may be called to serve somewhere in the middle of their program,” Zemrani says. “The online course is a great opportunity for them to finish their program when they might not otherwise be able to. Broadband is so important to that.” 



After leaving the office for the day, Trevor Seales can check work remotely from the comfort of home.

Living gratefully

How cancer changed Trevor Seales' life in a positive way

Story by PATRICK SMITH | Photography by MATT LEDGER

Seales and Munsterman, the accounting and tax firm based in Morris, Minnesota, operates differently from most competitors. By striving to do more than tax preparation and paper processing, the company works to be a trusted consultant for making sound financial decisions.

“Where we add value for clients, and the real reason they’re willing to drive two hours for our services, is that we’re advisers,” firm owner Trevor Seales says. “We’re not just filling out forms. We approach the client relationship differently from most firms.”

Having a different approach can also describe Seales himself and his approach to tackling life’s challenges. From pursuing accounting to joining the military and surviving cancer, his life has been different, and for that, he’s grateful. “Cancer reset my focus and helped me to know the difference between the major and the minor things,” he says.

Today, Seales and Munsterman serves about 1,000 clients, mostly in agriculture-related needs but also providing counseling for medical offices, construction, retail, real estate, restaurants, hospitality businesses and more. “We work to empower people to make the best decisions,” Seales says. “We want people to take all those hopes and dreams and figure out how to map them out in a way that’s best for the business owner.”

MADE FOR EACH OTHER

Some students struggle with what they'd like to pursue for work. But after a single accounting class in high school, Seales had his career questions answered. "I knew from the first day of class that I wanted to do accounting for the rest of my life," Seales says. "I went up to the teacher and asked what accountants do in the real world. I knew it was for me. I even did all the extra credit work, even though there weren't any points for it. I just loved it."

He entered the U.S. Army as a "split op," allowing him to complete basic training between his junior and senior years of high school. Seales eventually met his wife, Jennifer, in the military at Fort Sill near Lawton, Oklahoma. "As luck would have it, here I was — this passionate kid wanting to be an accountant and prepare taxes the rest of my life, and she had a grandfather who owned an accounting firm and was close to retirement," he says. "The stars aligned for us."

That said, for an analytical person who loves numbers and calculated decisions, his courtship with his new love moved faster than some love stories in Disney fairy tales. "We worked together about a month before we went on our first date," Seales says. "Then we dated for two months before I asked her to marry me."

Now, 15 years later, they have three children together.

BEATING CANCER

Not long after getting married, Seales and his wife found out she was pregnant with a boy. In the midst of trying to figure out bills, day care and the struggles of pregnancy, they faced a shocking setback. He was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins Lymphoma.

"Our son was born, and it was kind of a surreal experience," Seales says. "The cancer treatment center was adjacent to the hospital, and I walked over that morning for a chemo treatment. I came back and I'm holding my son, and it's still that moment in the treatment where everyone is telling you you'll be fine, but you just don't know. I'm holding a new baby but also wondering how much longer I'll be there for him."

After the birth of his son, Seales finished six months of chemo treatments and two months of radiation. He's been cancer-free ever since.

APPRECIATING EACH DAY

With that experience in the past, he has a different perspective on life. "It gave me a different level of empathy for people who are going through struggles," he says. "I'm grateful for my health. It's hard to take it for granted now."

The decor in his office includes a piece with a quote that says, "There are only so many tomorrows." For him, it's more than a decoration. "I know I'm an accountant, and I'm probably supposed to be really nerdy about paying down debt and picking up pennies on the sidewalk, but cancer makes me think through decisions like, 'If I had a little extra money, would I rather go out and buy a camper or pay down our house?'" Seales says.

"It's not like our family is going to go, 'Oh Daddy, remember

that time you paid off the mortgage early? That was so much fun!' But they'll remember every camping trip we go on and the memories we shared. I'm grateful to God for giving me a burden that wasn't over my head and helping me get through the burden. I learned a lot along the way. It's so strange to say this, but if I could go through it all again, I wouldn't change it."

It's also helped him appreciate the little things in life, like the extra family time he's able to enjoy thanks to fast internet. "Even though we feel like we're out in the sticks, we're really right up there with any big city," he says. "We don't have to think 'small ball' out here. We can think big. We're very fortunate to have the infrastructure we do."

"A big driver for us is having fiber right to our office," Seales says. "Employees are set up so they can work from home. Having fast internet speed equates to a better work-life balance." 🗨️



In 2019, owner Troy Munsterman retired, and Trevor Seales now manages the business.



Troy Munsterman's father, Don, founded the accounting firm in 1983.

Everyone's Irish

O'Brien's Public House brings to life age-old recipes

On St. Patrick's Day, everyone's Irish, right? But if you can't partake in a stout Guinness paired with some corned beef and cabbage, what's the point?

The week of St. Paddy's Day you'll need the luck o' the Irish to find a seat at O'Brien's Public House in Shakopee, Minnesota. But once you do, it won't be long before you're feasting on that corned beef and cabbage or a bowl of the restaurant's signature potato leek soup. Or you might go with a Reuben or a plateful of Irish poutine. Whatever you order, it's all made from scratch in the kitchen under the watchful eye of Le Cordon Bleu-trained manager Christine Flynn.

O'Brien's Public House doesn't just serve specialties of the Emerald Isle on the weekend leading up to March 17, though. Every day will bring out the Irish in you as soon as you walk through the doors. The decor, woodsy from top to bottom, is reminiscent of many pubs in Ireland with handsome wood rafters traversing the ceiling and well-worn wooden floors beneath your feet. The 150-year-old bar is from an old Irish pub in Boston. Stained-glass windows are from an old pub on that other island — England.

Seeing a need for an Irish pub in this town of 40,000 in Minneapolis' backyard, Scott and Jody O'Brien bought a former car dealership, renovated the old brick building and opened the pub in 2016. "Irish pubs help round out a neighborhood," Flynn says. "They're a place where people can come and have a good meal and tell stories."

And it didn't take long for the restaurant to become a gathering place, fulfilling a craving for comfort food that only Irish

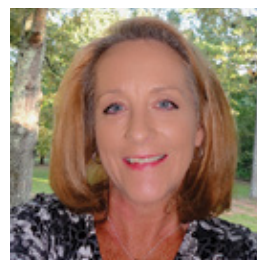


General Manager and Executive Chef Christine Flynn holds one of several authentic Irish dishes, the shepherd's pie.

fare can satisfy. "It's the kind of food that brings you back home," Flynn says.

She well knows. Flynn worked at an Irish pub while attending Le Cordon Bleu in St. Paul and then two others in the area before joining O'Briens Public House at its inception. Most dishes on the menu are her creations. "A lot of people ask me the secret for our potato leek soup," she says. "It's mashed potatoes. No need to waste them, so we use them for our soup, along with our special seasonings and buttermilk."

It's the waste-not-want-not philosophy that's found so often in Irish recipes — ancient dishes that have become as much a part of Ireland's history as its music, dance and folklore.



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

Traditional shepherd's pie

This is one version of shepherd's pie, a much-loved Irish classic at O'Brien's. Sop up the delicious gravy with some Irish soda bread.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 3-4 large carrots, finely diced
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 1 pound ground beef or lamb
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 cup red wine
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 6 cups mashed potatoes
- 1 egg, beaten
- Grated cheddar cheese (optional)

Heat oven to 350 F. Saute carrots in the olive oil until tender. Add in the onions and saute for a minute or two, then add meat. Season with black pepper. Cook until browned. Drain fat. Add butter and peas. Sprinkle with flour and stir through. Add wine, tomato paste and Worcestershire sauce. Reduce slightly, then add the chicken stock. Allow to reduce down until you have a thick, meaty gravy. Season to your taste.

Remove from heat. Grease a 9-by-13-inch dish with butter and add the sauce. Spoon or pipe the mashed potatoes over the top. Brush with egg and sprinkle with cheese. Bake for about 20 minutes or until the potato is nice and browned on top.

Irish soda bread

The "X" on the top crust has a dual purpose. Ancient cooks thought it would ward off evil spirits, but we now know it as a method for ensuring the bread is evenly baked.

- 1 3/4 cups buttermilk (full fat, if possible)
- 1 large egg



Traditional Shepherd's Pie

- 4 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 5 tablespoons unsalted cold butter, cubed

Heat oven to 400 F. There are options for the baking pan. Grease a 9- or 10-inch cake pan, pie dish or 10- to 12-inch cast-iron skillet. Set aside.

Whisk the buttermilk and egg together. Set aside. Whisk the flour, granulated sugar, baking soda and salt together in a large bowl. Cut in the butter using a pastry cutter, a fork or your fingers. Work the dough into coarse crumbs. Pour in the buttermilk/egg mixture. Gently fold the dough together until it is too stiff to stir. With floured hands on a lightly floured surface, work the dough into a round loaf approximately 8 to 9

inches in diameter. Knead the dough for about 30 seconds or until all the flour is moistened. If the dough is too sticky, add a little more flour.

Transfer the dough to the prepared pan. Using a very sharp knife, score an X into the top. Bake until the bread is golden brown and the center appears cooked through — about 45 minutes. Loosely cover the bread with aluminum foil during baking if you notice heavy browning on top.

Remove from the oven and allow the bread to cool for 10 minutes, then transfer it to a wire rack. Serve warm, at room temperature or toasted with desired toppings/spreads. Cover and store the bread at room temperature for two days or in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. This bread will also freeze well for up to 3 months. 📺

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