

MARCH/APRIL 2026

CONNECTION



Forward Momentum

Carrie Toffefson's
Olympic journey

PUST
LIVESTOCK
EQUIPMENT

DIGITAL
SPRING
CLEANING



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
 NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A Grateful Goodbye

This column is different than the others I’ve written over the years, because it’s my last as CEO of NTCA. When I began working at NTCA nearly 40 years ago, “broadband” wasn’t a household word. “Universal service,” while a longtime national goal, was a concept more than a mission. And “rural America” was too often an afterthought in conversations about connectivity.

Over the course of my career, I have watched the industry transform and a movement grow, powered by NTCA’s small, community-based providers. These providers are determined to bring advanced broadband to the communities they call home, even in places where the maps say it couldn’t be done and the economics didn’t work. Every day they do the extraordinary, proving what is possible when community comes first.

I’ve been honored to witness that perseverance firsthand. I’ve seen providers work through the night after storms so families could reconnect with loved ones. Thanks to their hard work building Smart Rural Communities, students in small towns can access educational opportunities far beyond their county lines. Farmers, small businesses and entrepreneurs use their fiber connections to grow, compete and thrive—without leaving the places they love.

Broadband is about more than technology. It’s access to health care, education, safety and economic opportunities. It’s the ability to stay rooted while reaching outward. And at its core, it’s about people, the NTCA members who make connectivity possible and the customers they proudly serve.

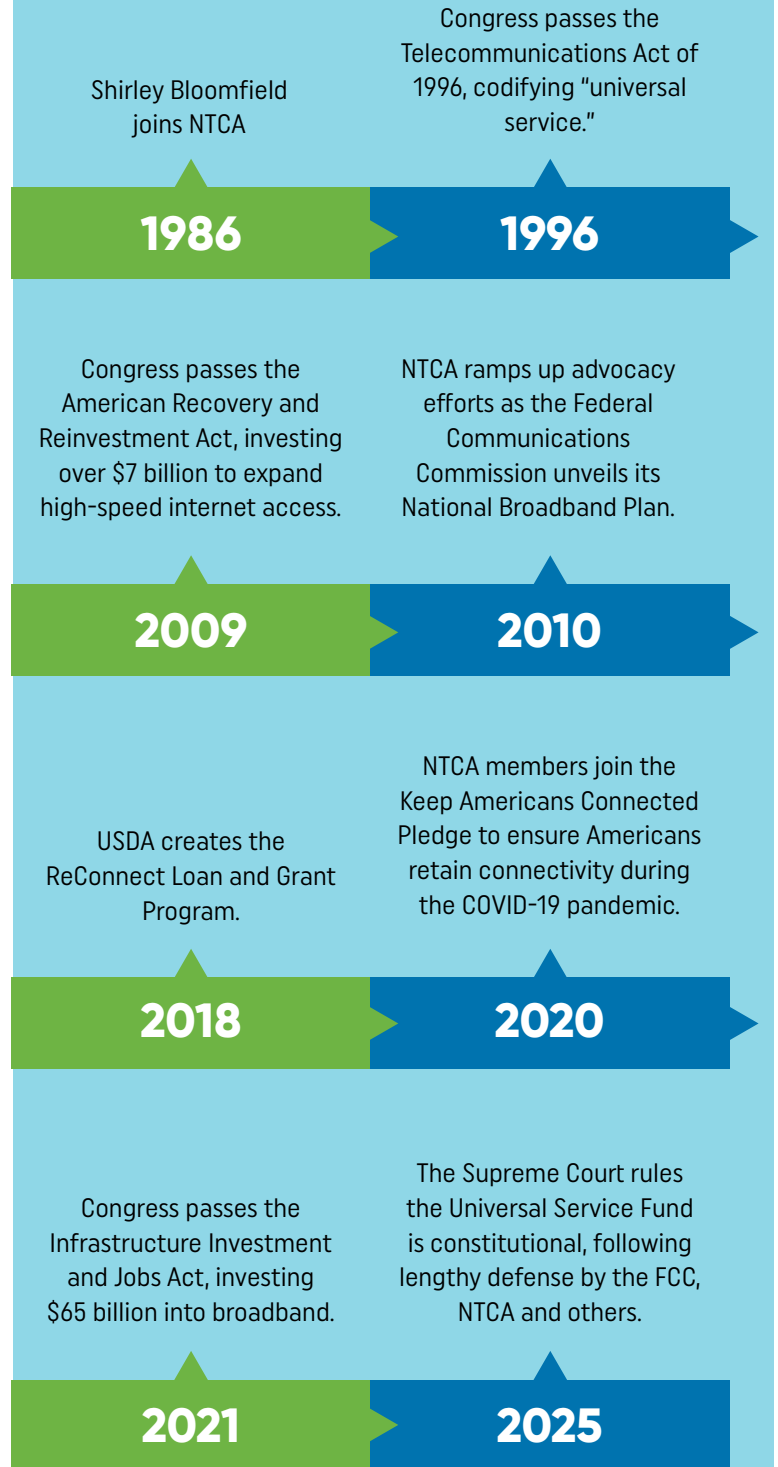
When I reflect on my many years with NTCA, I think about all of the people who shaped not only my journey, but the story of rural America itself. The CEOs who started out on construction crews or at finance desks, the family-owned companies now in their fourth generations, co-op boards that hold community meetings in gymnasiums, NTCA staff who pour every ounce of passion into serving members and the federal partners who understand what makes rural broadband so special.

As I step into my next chapter, I do so with deep gratitude, for the providers who serve with heart, communities that refuse to settle for “just good enough” and Americans who know that high-quality connectivity is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Thank you for reminding me every day why this work matters. 📧

ADVANCING BROADBAND IN RURAL AMERICA

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association works to build a better broadband future for rural America, representing about 850 independent, family-owned and community-based telecommunications companies. The tenure of Shirley Bloomfield, named CEO in 2010, highlights a time of significant industry achievement.





Adobe Stock image by Primex Legacy

Keep Your Health on Track

Apps can be a helpful tool for managing medications

Story by MELANIE JONES

People who take just one pill a day may find it easy to remember. Adding in a few supplements makes the process a little more complicated. It's not hard to understand how individuals who take multiple prescriptions may need some help keeping up with it all.

It isn't simply a matter of remembering to take the pills or administer the injection. Some medications need to be taken at certain times of the day, while others require multiple, precisely timed doses. Certain drugs should be taken before eating, other treatments are taken with a meal, and still others instruct patients to take them on a full stomach.

Managing medications correctly is vital to staying healthy and living life to the fullest. Fortunately, there are digital tools that can help. Many of these apps also allow users to keep track of their vital signs and make notes about changes they notice in their health. With all this information at hand, doctor appointments can go much more smoothly.

Several free apps are available that not only remind users when to take their medicine but also offer information on how different drugs interact, track symptoms and even prepare a report for doctors. One warning—because they are free, some apps ask permission to share your data with drug companies so they can research drug compliance and effectiveness.

MY THERAPY

The My Therapy app has attracted attention in the last year, including being featured on ABC and in Wired magazine. The app allows users to set reminders, log when they've taken medicine or skipped it and track weight, blood pressure, blood sugar and other health indicators.

MEDISAFE

In addition to tracking prescriptions, schedules and health indicators and warning about potential drug interactions, Medisafe users can name a "Medifriend," someone who will be notified if a dose is

missed. Users can also keep tabs on their children's or other dependents' medication information separately from their own. When adding medications to their Medisafe profiles, users can specify the shape and color of the drug, helping them keep straight which pill or capsule is which.

DOSECAST

For people who have multiple medications to take at different times of the day, Dosecast may be the best choice. The app assigns a sound to each medication, so users receive prescription-specific reminder notifications. It also keeps track of when it's time to order refills. Like the other apps, Dosecast also allows users to track key health indicators.

All these apps are on Google Play or Apple's App Store. They also can interact with the health apps built into phones to provide a better overall picture of your health. [📱](#)

Spring Cleaning

Practical advice for broadband success



KEVIN BEYER
Chief Executive Officer

Spring cleaning might include neatening up the garage, preparing for a garden or straightening out a cluttered closet. It often takes some strategic planning and at least a little elbow grease. But there's another type of annual cleanup that can make life easier, and it doesn't even need much, if any, physical effort.

Over the past few years, how we use the internet has changed, expanding in ways that may seem surprising. The rise of artificial intelligence is a prominent example. So, the internet services that once supported email and basic web browsing now handle schoolwork, video calls, online shopping, security systems, streaming media and, yes, even AI-driven tools and resources.

This is the world Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone's service were designed to serve—robust, reliable and scalable. We have the infrastructure to grow with your changing needs. But if you want to get the most out of your internet connection, you can help too. And this is where a little digital spring cleanup comes in. And it's easy.

Start with a practical step. Take stock of the number of connected devices you have. Include phones, tablets, smart televisions and security systems. Even look in places like the kitchen because a surprising number of appliances connect to Wi-Fi. Generally, when idle none of these devices stress your high-quality internet service. You have plenty of capacity.

But when everyone is home and those devices are in heavy use, you may notice a slowdown. Imagine a couple of kids gaming in one room, someone else streaming a high-definition movie down the hall and a student busy with homework on her laptop in another room.

After listing the number of devices on your network, consider if your internet service meets that demand. We're happy to help. Contact Farmers Mutual or Federated Telephone, and we'll match the most affordable services to your needs. In many households, it can make a big difference.

Once that is complete, it's just as important to make sure all of your devices are up to date. Keeping phones, computers, smart TVs and other connected devices on the latest operating systems and firmware helps fix bugs, close security gaps and improve overall performance. Most devices let you set up automatic updates, so you don't have to think about it, but we are always available for advice and support.

And that's it. Two steps to a broadband spring cleaning. It shouldn't take more than a few minutes, and the gains can be profound. The goal is an internet service that fits seamlessly into the background. Students can focus on learning instead of waiting on screens to load. Families can easily stay connected with loved ones and access services. You're even prepared if work comes home with you.

Enjoy the spring. Please let us know how we can help you make the most of our service. And thank you for being part of the Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone family. [📞](#)

CONNECTION

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On the Cover:



Carrie Tollefson's career milestones include joining Team USA as a middle-distance runner at the 2004 Olympics in Athens and becoming a broadcaster. See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of Paul Phillips

2026 Board Elections

Farmers Mutual Telephone Company and Federated Telephone Cooperative annual meetings are approaching. The following districts are up for election in 2026. The Board of Directors are responsible for representing their cooperative membership by helping to develop policies and objectives for their cooperative.

FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY

Annual Meeting:

- Tuesday, June 9

Districts up for election:

- District II
- District III
- District IV

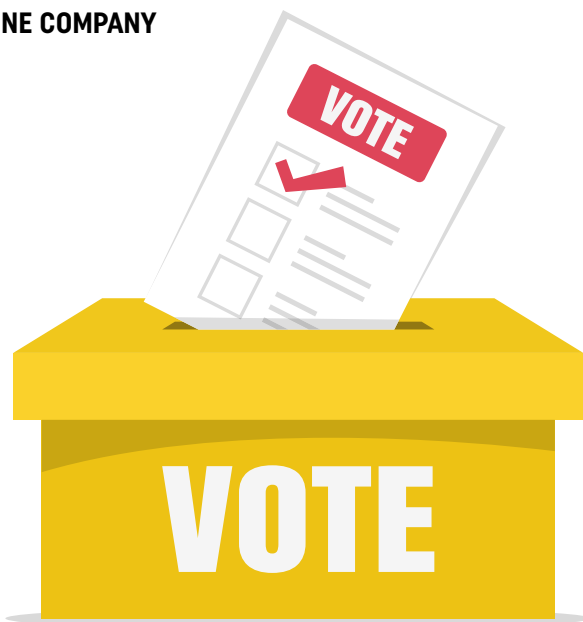
FEDERATED TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE

Annual Meeting:

- Thursday, June 11

Districts up for election:

- District No. 4
- District No. 7



If you are interested in being a board member, please see your cooperative bylaws for information about the qualification process.

Call Before You Dig



Underground utilities are closer than you think. Before driving that shovel into the ground for your new garden or backyard fence, call 811, and we'll come out and mark the locations of buried lines before you dig.

Minnesota law requires homeowners to contact 811 and wait two business days—excluding weekends and holidays—before digging, even if you're working in your own backyard.

Respect the marks, and call for a re-marking, if needed.

Learn more about digging safely at gopherstateonecall.org, or start a marking request by calling 811 or 800-252-1166.



Lifeline is a federal program that lowers the cost of phone or internet services.

To find out if your household qualifies for Lifeline assistance, please visit lifelinesupport.org or call your telecommunications provider.

Still Dodging Robocalls?

You're not alone. Robocalls are still a problem, even with stronger Federal Communications Commission rules in place. Stay one step ahead with these simple tips:

- Register your number on the National Do Not Call Registry.
- Let unfamiliar numbers go to voicemail.
- If you pick up a robocall, hang up right away. Don't press any keys or answer questions.
- Gift cards, cryptocurrency and urgent payment demands are common scam tactics.
- Report scam calls and texts to the FCC Consumer Complaint Center.



Gold Rush

Spring thaw gives way to maple syrup days

Story by SARA DIAMOND PATTERSON

After joining her children on preschool visits to sugarbushes—anywhere maples are tapped to collect their sap—Amy Perkins established one of her own with four maple trees at her Roseville home.

“It’s one of those seasonal things. When spring comes, it’s time to go find some maples,” the syrup maker says. “There are sugarbushes that have open houses or events, and the nature centers and state parks do some really neat programs.”

It was initially planned as a fun family project, but now neighbors and friends rely on Amy and her family for their yearly maple syruping experience.

“I have what you would call an urban sugarbush,” she says. “My son and I named our little operation the Come Over Sugarbush because I invite everyone I see to come on over and enjoy maple syrup making.”

It takes about 40 gallons of sap to make a single gallon of syrup. Syrupers filter and then boil the sap to remove excess water and concentrate its sugars. When the sap reaches 219 degrees, it thickens into syrup.

The tapping, gathering, boiling and tasting steps give the syrup-making process its social component.

“It’s fun for anyone who just wants to stop by and hang out by the fire,” Amy says. “The best days we have with the kids are when they invite piles of their friends over, and they all spend the day running around and playing and drinking hot sap in mugs off the evaporator. There’s nothing better.”

Stephen Saupe makes syrup at Saint John’s University in Colleeville. He agrees the social aspect is what makes syruping such a popular springtime activity.

“Making syrup the old-fashioned way like we do at Saint John’s requires a large community of individuals, from monks to students to families, and that’s what I like best about syruping,” he says.

SWEET CELEBRATIONS



This year’s College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University Maple Syrup Festival is on March 29 from 12-4 p.m., with sap collecting, syrup cooking, demonstrations and hot maple syrup sundaes. Visit csbsju.edu/outdooru to register.



The city of Roseville’s Tapping Time always draws a crowd to the Harriet Alexander Nature Center. This year, it’s



Adobe Stock image by Maridav

March 28, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and March 29, from 12-4 p.m., and features hands-on activity stations, a market with maple syrup and other local products and winter tree ID tours. For more information go to cityofroseville.com.



Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center in Sandstone always lays it on thick for Maple Syrup Day, this year on March 21. Visitors take part in all phases of syrup-making and enjoy a pancake brunch. Tours last about an hour, and the last meal is served at 2:30 p.m. Visit ospreywilds.org or call 320-245-2648 for details.



Five state parks—Fort Snelling, Lake Bemidji, Nerstrand Big Woods, Whitewater and Wild River—offer multiple maple syrup programs. Participants learn to identify Minnesota’s maples and discover the history of syrup- and sugar-making.


For a more detailed list of local maple products and sources, visit mnmale.org/directory. 



Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Maple Syrup Producers Association

A student taps a tree during the Maple Syrup Festival at Saint John’s University.

TIPS FOR HAPPY SAPPING

Temperatures fluctuate, so before heading out to a syringing event, check to make sure the sap is flowing.

Dress for the weather and be prepared for mud.

Some arboretums don’t allow pets. Always check before taking yours along.

Tap your own backyard maples with tips from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Search for maple syrup at dnr.state.mn.us.

Source: Minnesota Maple Syrup Producers Association

From Dawson to A

Carrie Tollefson runs across the world

Story by MATT LEDGER

Growing up in Dawson, Carrie Tollefson looked up to her older sisters, Kammie and Stacey. The Tollefson girls played sports year-round and were known for their hustle. “Sports were important to all of us, and it was a blast together,” Carrie says. “We all kind of pushed each other. I just kind of wanted to do all the things my big sisters did.”

MAKING STRIDES

In seventh grade, Carrie discovered running as Kammie competed in hurdles and the 400 meters at Dawson High School. Training alongside her older sister accelerated Carrie’s athletic development.

Carrie ended her first competitive running season by placing ninth at the Minnesota State Championships. “I remember I was the first person on the floor after the race,” she says. “The top eight all had their own little block to stand on, and that was what bugged me. It wasn’t that I got beat. It wasn’t that I fell in the race. It was that I didn’t get my own block that showed my place. I remember going home and saying to my mom, ‘I’m not going to stand on the floor next year. I want to stand on that top block.’”

The following season, she did just that, notching a first-place finish at the state championships.

Her dominance grew in high school, competing for Lac Qui Parle Valley and Dawson-Boyd. “I learned early on the drive that it takes to be great at something,” Carrie says. She won eight individual state track championships between the 1,600 and 3,200 meters, the most in Minnesota history. She also set a national record in cross-country with five consecutive state titles from 1990-94.

PATH TO THE PODIUM

Carrie’s high school success made her a top collegiate recruit. She chose Villanova University, a powerhouse in distance running. “Supposedly I was the No. 1 recruit in the country, and to be the No. 1 recruit from little Dawson, Minnesota, in farm country, was pretty cool,” she says.

Villanova was a long way from home. “My parents told me they would visit when they could, but that I needed to go where the best runners go,” Carrie says. “It was an awesome opportunity.”

Carrie Tollefson and husband Charlie Peterson, left, catch up with her Villanova teammate and Canadian Olympian Carmen Douma-Hussar and her husband, Chris.



Athens and Beyond



ABOVE: Carrie and Charlie spent a week touring Greece after she competed in the 2004 Summer Olympics. RIGHT: Carrie is interviewed as a member of Team USA.



ABOVE: Carrie, right, is a frequent commentator for national and international running events, including the live broadcast of the New York City Marathon, with ESPN's John Anderson, left, and British broadcaster Tim Hutching.

Carrie placed seventh at the NCAA Cross-Country Championships as a freshman, making her mark at the elite level.

Aches and pains are common in competitive sports, but tests triggered by persistent, nagging soreness discovered a benign tumor in her heel in 1997.

She continued running despite the diagnosis, competing and winning her first individual NCAA title as a junior. In 1998, her heel was surgically replaced with donor bone, sidelining her from even walking for three months. "My career was saved because someone donated a part of themselves," she says. The experience led her to become an advocate for organ donation.

Carrie returned to win four more individual NCAA championships, also taking an NCAA championship with the Villanova cross-country team. By the time Carrie graduated in 1999, she was a five-time national champion. She turned pro in 2000, running for Adidas for 14 years.

LOCAL TO GLOBAL

By 2003, Carrie felt her training and timing align. "I knew I was coming around at the right time, and things were starting to click," she says.

A spot on Team USA requires a top-three finish at U.S. Olympic Trials. "I actually placed sixth in the 5,000-meter event that we all thought I would make the Olympic team with," she says.

Two days later, she earned the right to represent the U.S. in the 1,500 meters at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece.

During the opening ceremony, Carrie mingled with sports stars including LeBron James and Michael Phelps. "One of my favorite

memories was going into the cafeteria in the Olympic Village and seeing all the athletes," Carrie says. "I was at the table for the Americans, sitting across from Serena and Venus Williams. We looked up and here comes Yao Ming, who is huge, and he is walking in front of the American women's gymnasts, who are compact, powerful women. It was a really special time."

The Athens Games became a celebration for her family, with her husband, Charlie Peterson, serving as tour guide. Though Carrie did not medal, the experience marked a career peak.

'GET AFTER IT'

At Villanova, Carrie studied communications with an emphasis on broadcasting. She began working as commentator in 2002 with the Rock 'n' Roll Running Series and has since covered major marathons including New York, Boston and even the 2024 Paris Olympics.

After becoming a mother, she launched the YouTube channel C Tolle Run in 2009. "There weren't a lot of women becoming mothers and then returning to being a professional athlete," she says.

She shifted to podcasting in 2016 and continues public speaking and motivational coaching.

In 2025, she revamped her YouTube channel, posting weekly for more than 20,000 followers with a simple closing message—Get after it. She still finds time to run on weekdays, joking, "I'm too busy running my mouth, rather than my legs at all these races." 🗨️

ALWAYS PREPARED

Scouting America readies kids to protect themselves online

Dozens of Scouts attend a Department of Homeland Security event about online safety.

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In his days as a Scout, Justin Williams was always drawn to outdoor skills. He excelled at building fires and tying knots. He struggled more with identifying plants, and, even today, he says he still hasn't picked up the knack for it. But as he got older, the leadership skills he was learning every step of the way stood out to him.

"Those are all important skills, but the thing we're really coaching is how to work within a team, be good citizens for the future and make good, ethical decisions," he says. "I thought I was just having fun. But I was really learning a lot of leadership skills that have benefited me throughout my life."

Today, as scout executive for Scouting America's Palmetto Council in South Carolina and den leader for a group of second graders, Justin is amazed at the technology available to young children. There's even technology that could have helped him identify plants as a Scout.

As a result, while Scouting America, formerly the Boy Scouts of America, still emphasizes the importance of getting outside and working with others, the organization is increasingly recognizing the need to meet kids where they are with technology.

Just last year, it introduced its first merit badges for cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Others, like the Know2Protect badge, are specifically aimed at teaching Scouts about the importance of personal safety online.

"While we know there are a lot of benefits to technology, we also know that, unfortunately, there are people online who do not have our kids' best interest at heart," Justin says. "We need to help our kids recognize who is an ally, who is trying to do them harm and what to do when they encounter those types of people."

THE NEW NORMAL

For Scouting America's Chief Safeguarding Officer Glen Pounder, that work starts with the adults around each Scout. His office in Irving, Texas, provides training for all Scout leaders around the threats kids may face online—from cyberbullying and body image issues to pornography and sexual exploitation.

"One of our key mottoes is be prepared for life. There's no life these days without the online space," he says. "Our new normal as an organization is we have to be comfortable always looking for what is next, particularly with technology. I think it's about landing the message in a way that is not creating fear. That this is just part of preparing for life."

Starting from kindergarten, Scouting America encourages parents of new Scouts to have their own conversations with their children about general safety practices. As kids earn their annual ranks, they must complete six core components, one of which is additional safety training. Starting in fourth grade, that training includes lessons on what information they should not give out in online settings.

In addition, Scouting America partnered with the Department of Homeland Security in 2024 to build an awareness campaign about the risks kids face online. Scouts and their families can join in-person training sessions and activities or online presentations to learn how to prevent and report online abuse, earning them an exclusive Know2Protect patch.

Glen's hope is that more widespread awareness and training within Scouting America troops can even help protect kids who are not part of the program.

"There's a ripple effect outside of scouting. Each Scout has

friends, siblings and other non-Scouts around them that they share things with,” he says. “So, if you’ve got a million trained Scouts out there it makes it much harder for anyone who’s thinking about abusing their position of trust to get away with it.”

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

While preventing these abuses from happening in the first place is the top priority, Glen emphasizes it is just as important for kids to feel comfortable speaking with an adult, whether it’s a parent or a Scout leader, if they do find themselves in one of these situations. If not, the outcome can be tragic.

Justin cites the example of an Eagle Scout in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in the last few years who took his own life. He had connected with someone online and shared compromising photos, only to have those photos used to exploit him.

“He didn’t think there was any other option, so he decided to take his own life,” Justin says. “When you think about the perfect kid, this is the kid that would come to mind. So, this isn’t something that only targets dysfunctional families. Criminals are getting smarter every day, and we just can’t take anything for granted.”

For Glen, that comes down to preparing kids for dangerous situations, trusting them to use the tools available to them and offering understanding if they find themselves in trouble.

“If we haven’t empowered these kids correctly, then the fear stays with them. We need to take that fear away,” he says. “Our focus is on prevention first. But then, if something happens, take a breath and then we’ll move forward. We know what to do, we’re going to get there. You’re not alone in this.” 📱

BADGE OF HONOR

Scouting America badges aren’t just for archery and pioneering anymore. Here are a few tech-savvy badges and patches today’s Scouts are collecting.

Cybersecurity Merit Badge

Introduces Scouts to various cyberthreats, including viruses, worms, social engineering and denial-of-service attacks. They learn to protect themselves with strong passwords, firewalls, antivirus software and encryption.



Artificial Intelligence Merit Badge

Helps Scouts explore what AI is, different types of AI and how to use it in everyday life. They are also challenged to discuss issues around data privacy, bias in AI systems and the ethics of this new technology.



Know2Protect Patch

Serves as a symbol of the Scout's commitment to online safety and digital citizenship through participation in the Department of Homeland Security's Project iGuardian training. The training provides knowledge and skills to protect themselves against online abuse.



A Scout tries on a Homeland Security investigations vest.

Photos courtesy of Scouting America

Built on Know-How

Farming experience, engineering expertise drive Pust Livestock Equipment

A smartphone logged into a poultry farm through the internet monitors current environmental conditions.

Story by LAZ DENES

Tim Pust knows livestock from the ground up, from the engineering side and from the practical realities of a fourth-generation family farm.

The owner of Milan-based Pust Livestock Equipment has been immersed in the business for nearly two decades. He spent 16 years in the industry before launching his company in 2023. “I really liked it and knew we needed to move forward by doing it on my own,” he says.

ENGINEERING MEETS AGRICULTURE

Farming is still “the other half” of Tim’s life. He raises corn, soybeans, cattle and sheep. Growing up, he was hands-on in both the field and the barn. The equipment sales path came to fruition after he graduated from North Dakota State University with an agricultural engineering degree. He began designing ventilation systems and providing technical support for poultry, hog and dairy operations, a technical foundation that shapes how he works today.

“A lot of things that might seem scary, like controllers, cameras and data monitoring, are familiar to me,” he says. “I like helping producers connect to the solutions that make the most sense.”

Tim initially sold beef cattle equipment, a natural choice given the makeup of his own farm. Before long, other companies approached him about incorporating their products. Tim’s offerings quickly expanded to include Sioux Steel equipment and hoop buildings, Ritchie waterers, PWA Poly bins and ventilation, Rotem ventilation controllers and RosTech camera systems.

It’s mostly a one-man operation with Tim leaning on a trusted contractor for installations, and his daughter, Leila, a recent North Dakota State University graduate, assisting with marketing and design work. His wife, Natalie, also springs into action for trade show support.

What sets the business apart, Tim says, is the breadth of his expertise. “I don’t know another livestock equipment dealer that has experience in as many types

of livestock as I do,” Tim says. “That includes poultry, hogs, dairy, beef cattle, sheep, goats, horses.”

FOCUSED ON PRODUCT INTEGRITY

Tim’s business motto reflects his philosophy: “Only the best for your farm, because it has to work first.” It’s born from experience with equipment that fails and a firm resolve never to sell something he can’t stand behind.

Technology and reliable, high-speed internet, Tim says, play ever-increasing roles in the livestock industry. Camera systems for calving and lambing barns, for instance, rely on wireless links that can reach up to 2 miles. Ventilation controllers can be monitored and adjusted from a mobile phone.

None of it works without strong connectivity. Tim says his broadband service not only enables him to serve his customers but also keeps his own operation running. “I couldn’t do everything the way I do without it,” he says. 📶



A 40-foot-wide hoop building is used for feeding cattle.



Pust Livestock Equipment

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Follow Pust Livestock Equipment on Facebook.

Tim Pust poses with his family, from left, daughter Makiah, wife Natalie and daughters Leila and Adelyn at their booth during the Swift County Fair last year.



Tidy Up

Bring order to your digital life

Do you ever feel as if your digital life is as cluttered as an overstuffed closet? Old photos pile up, unused apps linger and inboxes overflow. A digital spring cleanup can help, and it might even make your world seem lighter, faster and a little less stressful. And you don't need to be techy to make a big difference. Try these five simple tips.

1. TIDY UP YOUR EMAIL INBOX.

First, don't try to read every message. Instead, turn to the search function and look for words like "unsubscribe" or "sale" to find all the ads you've received. Delete large batches at once instead of opening emails one by one. Also, look for email newsletters and unsubscribe from the ones you no longer want. Fewer incoming emails means less clutter going forward and fewer distractions every day.

2. DELETE UNUSED APPS.

Scroll through apps on each of your devices, from phones to computers. Ask yourself, "Have I used this in the last month?" If not, it's probably safe to remove. Unused apps not only take up space but removing them makes your devices easier to navigate and simpler to use.

3. ORGANIZE PHOTOS AND VIDEOS. EVEN A LITTLE BIT HELPS.

Don't try to sort every photo you've ever taken. Start small by deleting blurry images, screenshots you no longer need and

duplicate photos. Create one or two simple albums like "Family" or "Favorites" and move your best memories there. Even a quick cleanup can free up space and make photos easier to enjoy.

4. UPDATE PASSWORDS.

Spring is a great time to refresh passwords for important accounts like email, banking and shopping. Choose passwords that are easy for you to remember but hard for others to guess. There are several great software tools to manage passwords, and a good starting place to find the one right for you would be the support pages for your devices. Apple, Microsoft and Google all have options, and there are also secure third-party tools.

5. BACK UP WHAT MATTERS MOST.

Make sure your important photos, documents and contacts are backed up somewhere safe. This way, if a device is lost or damaged, your memories and information aren't gone with it. Think of backups as insurance for your digital life. Ideally, store these files on a cloud-based service, such as Apple's iCloud or Microsoft's OneDrive, as well as locally on an external hard drive in your home.

Digital spring cleaning doesn't have to happen all at once. Even 15 minutes can make a noticeable difference. A tidier digital world can help you feel more organized, more in control and ready for whatever a busy life brings. 🗨️

Treat Yourself

WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK

Rich desserts shouldn't cost a fortune

For many Americans, going to the grocery store can be stressful since prices don't seem to be coming down. But we still want to have our cake and eat it too. So, it's nice—and entirely possible—to treat ourselves to something sweet at the end of the meal without breaking the bank.

There are some tricks to keep in mind to help you stay on budget while still satisfying your sweet tooth. For example, if a recipe calls for pecans, walnuts, a less expensive alternative, can be substituted. And use store brands whenever possible—a cost-saving practice that always saves pennies.



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

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

CHOCOLATE BANANA BARS

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1/2 cup butter | 1 teaspoon baking powder |
| 1 cup sugar | 1 teaspoon baking soda |
| 1 egg | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla | 1/4 cup baking cocoa powder |
| 1 1/2 cups mashed banana | 1 cup chocolate chips |
| 1 1/2 cups flour | |

Preheat oven to 350 F.

Mix the butter, sugar, egg, vanilla and banana. Then add the flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Put half of the mixture into a separate bowl and add the cocoa powder.

Grease the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch pan and pour in the cocoa mixture. The mixture will be thick, just try and spread a thin layer across the bottom. It will rise and make a beautiful, thin bar. Use a smaller pan if you want a thicker bar, however, it will need to bake longer to get the middle done.

Spread the rest of the batter on top of the cocoa mixture. Sprinkle the top with as many or as few chocolate chips as you like.

Bake for about 30 minutes or until the top is browned and a toothpick comes out clean.



BLUEBERRY COFFEECAKE

- 2 cups white sugar
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup plus 10 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup pecans
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon powdered sugar for dusting

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease and flour a 9-inch Bundt pan.

Beat sugar and butter together in a large bowl with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in sour cream and vanilla extract. In another bowl, combine flour, baking powder and salt. Stir into butter mixture until just blended. Fold in blueberries.

Spoon half of the batter into the prepared pan. Combine brown sugar, pecans and cinnamon in a small bowl. Sprinkle half of the mixture over the batter in the pan.

Spoon remaining batter on top, then sprinkle on remaining pecan mixture. Use a knife or thin spatula to swirl the mixture into the cake.

Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes. Let cake cool in the pan for 15 minutes before inverting. Invert carefully onto a serving plate. Dust with powdered sugar just before serving.



TROPICAL TWISTER

- 2 cups frozen pineapple chunks
- 4 ounces pineapple juice
- 2 scoops vanilla ice cream

Combine all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. If it's too thick, add a bit more pineapple juice. Scoop into bowls and, if desired, garnish with additional chopped pineapple and a dollop of whipped cream. Serve immediately. Makes 3 servings.

STRAWBERRIES AND CREAM PIE

- 1 prepared 9-inch pie shell, graham cracker or pastry crust, baked and cooled
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- 1 cup whipped topping, thawed
- 4 cups fresh strawberries, washed, hulled and halved
- 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 tablespoon shortening

Bake crust at 350 F for 15 minutes or until light golden brown. Cool completely.

In a large bowl, beat the softened cream cheese until it is fluffy. Gradually add the sugar and almond extract, beating until fully combined. Gently fold the whipped topping into the cream cheese mixture until smooth.

Spread the cream cheese mixture evenly into the cooled pie crust. Arrange the strawberry halves, cut side down or pointed side up, over the filling.

In a small, microwave-safe bowl, combine the chocolate chips and shortening. Microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring in between, until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Drizzle the melted chocolate over the top of the strawberries and cream filling.

Refrigerate the pie for at least 1-2 hours or until it is set and chilled before serving.



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