

HCTC

MAY/JUNE 2025

CONNECTION



Launching Careers

Ingram ISD fuels students' success

LINDSAY RANCH

PLAY BALL!



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

The Journey to Connectivity


NTCA members create broadband networks so fast and reliable that it's easy to take for granted the effort and expertise needed to bring these services to homes and businesses. These professionals do amazing work, particularly when considering the intricate, multi-step journey to build, expand and maintain a network.

It begins with detailed research and careful planning. The broadband provider must learn exactly how many homes and businesses might want service, as well as the challenges posed by the landscape. Then, a thorough review of the numbers determines if the project makes financial sense. It's a puzzle where the pieces are population density, infrastructure costs and potential demand for the service.

Then there's the engineering—design, build and inspect. Detailed maps identify routes for cables, permitting, environmental regulations and access to land. Some of these projects can take two to four years from the first engineering drawing to the first connection.

The work doesn't stop when the network goes live. These networks require maintenance, technology upgrades and customer support.

These networks are lifelines connecting rural communities to telehealth, education, remote work and cutting-edge technologies. With the help of service providers like yours, we're building broadband to last and ensuring no community gets left behind in our increasingly digital world.

To learn more, check out the Foundation for Rural Service and JSI's latest report, "Delivering Broadband From Beginning to 'End,'" at frs.org/delivering-broadband-beginning-end. 



Safe Searches

Tips to avoid scams

When you need information fast, a quick check of Google is often the first stop. In fact, some people find it easier to search online for everything, including the addresses for a specific website like a bank, trusted repair service or health care provider.

Unfortunately, scammers know this, too, so they sometimes create bogus sites with addresses confusingly close to the real thing.

Google is aware of this trend, and it touts advanced systems that keep users' search results 99% spam-free. The company also offers a few tips for closing the final security weaknesses.

- Pay close attention to the URL—the specific web address—before clicking any unfamiliar link. Typically, in an email, hovering the cursor over the address will show the complete link. Don't click the link if it looks suspicious.
- The three dots next to the search results in Google can be used to find more details about the webpage, store or business you're considering. You can find clues indicating if the site is legitimate before clicking the link.
- When you're looking for official resources, watch out for unusual address formatting. For example, there's typically only one correct customer service number for a larger company. But not all businesses have customer service numbers, and searching for them requires you to be mindful. Watch for strange formatting in the website address, including unexpected symbols or emojis.

A Rockin' RECIPE

Hannah Dasher cooks up an online storm



Performer Hannah Dasher created a countryfied niche for herself on social media.

Photo courtesy of Jeremy Ryan Photography

Story by BRANDI DIXON

Hannah Dasher is a blast of classic country and rock 'n' roll paired with social media influencer. Stepping into the home she calls “Honky-Tonk Graceland” and features on her social media is, as Hannah says, like going back in time to “your meemaw’s house.”

“Avocado green canisters, gold salt and pepper shakers, brass pots. I love my retro kitchen, and I love that the fans feel right at home,” she says, adding that she enjoys entertaining.

Music and songwriting are Hannah’s first loves. “I was rehearsing my acceptance speech for best new female vocalist of the year in my mirror at age 10,” she says. “I grew up listening to ’90s country radio, and knew I wanted to be an entertainer.”

Hannah pursued music professionally, taking her big hair and a heaping helping of Southern charm to Nashville, Tennessee. She started out writing songs for other artists, getting some big accolades thanks to collaborations with Brad

Paisley, Lainey Wilson and Ian Munsick, to name a few. She continued performing whenever she had the chance.

STAND BY YOUR PAN

In 2020 during the pandemic, Hannah found herself stuck. “All the stages shut down, and I needed a stage,” she says. “Talking with some friends I learned a lot of girls my age couldn’t cook, so I stumbled into the world of social media, and it was the perfect storm.”

Hannah took to TikTok to share her

family’s beloved recipes and a few of her own, all while sprinkling in a bit of her signature rockin’ country flavor. The recipe produced the now-viral Stand By Your Pan social media accounts. More than 1.5 million followers join Hannah daily in her retro kitchen.

“I love that this brought country and noncountry music fans together,” she says. “It’s hard to pigeonhole into just one world, and I’m glad that I can be this representative of the past and the future via a semicelebrity chef.” 🗨️

ALL THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

When Hannah Dasher isn’t cranking out content, she’s picking up a guitar and writing music.

“God always sends it from the left side of the sky and out of my mouth,” she says of her process. “Sometimes it’s melody and lyrics simultaneously, but you just never know, and you always have to be looking for it.”

Hannah is on the road this year with her band on The Wanted Tour, featuring stops across the United States, the United Kingdom and Sweden. She encourages fans to spread the word and come see her and her “boys.”

Unmatched Performance

No technology beats the speed of our network

There's something magical when technology becomes so advanced that it simply works, without muss, fuss or the need for advanced skills. Your smartphone is a great example, particularly whatever app you prefer for photos. Looking for an image of your cat or dog, a mountain or a beach? Just ask and the search will likely provide shockingly good results.



CRAIG COOK
Chief Executive Officer

That app simply does the job, and our internet service is much the same—it simply works. It's fast, reliable and resilient. Thanks to the long-term investments to create a network supported by a team of local professionals, we can provide services that unlock the online world. If you consider internet access essential, there's no better option.

Whether you're working from home, attending virtual classes or binge-watching your favorite shows, our service makes sure everything runs smoothly. Do you have multiple devices online at once, rely on video calls or enjoy challenging online games? No problem. The performance is there whenever you need it.

It is important to remember that not all broadband technologies have the same benefits. While there may be differences, our teams are well trained in the proper deployment of each. From construction and engineering to installation and repair, each type of technology is carefully engineered to deliver the highest quality service at the most responsible cost to our membership.

Not every rural community across the country gets to enjoy this type of service. At HCTC, we designed our network not only for today but also with the features capable of handling future online tools and resources. Considering how quickly technology is advancing, an adaptable network is vital for our community to stay competitive in an increasingly online world.

After all, high-speed internet is more than a nice-to-have luxury. From telehealth services to online education, fast internet gives us access to essential resources that fundamentally improve our quality of life. Similarly, reliable, fast internet energizes our economy. From established area businesses to new entrepreneurs, the internet provides the tools needed to compete.

We're committed to bringing these benefits to every corner of our community. And please remember, HCTC is about more than the physical network. The dedicated professionals making up our team live here, believe in our area's future and are committed to providing unparalleled support.

So, let's celebrate the progress we've made and look forward to a future where everyone can enjoy the advantages of cutting-edge technology. Our goal is to ensure that no one is left behind and that everyone has access to the opportunities that high-speed internet provides.

Thank you for your continued support and trust. Together, we're building a brighter, more connected future. 📶

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HCTC

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

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

Send address corrections to:

HCTC
P.O. Box 768 • 220 Carolyn
Ingram, TX 78025
Telephone: 830-367-5333

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UTILITY RESOURCES

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Photo courtesy of Ingram ISD

Ingram students can earn an associate degree by the time they graduate high school through the Pathways in Technology Early College High School program. See story Page 8.

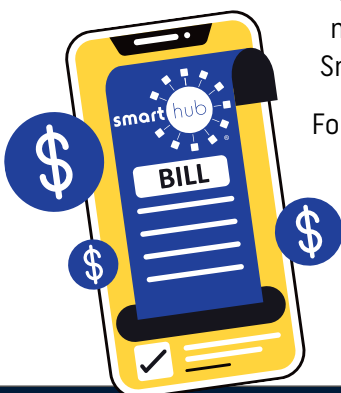


SIMPLIFY FOR *Summer*

Before you set off on that road trip this summer, make monthly bill paying much easier with HCTC's SmartHub app.

For more information and to register go to hctc.net/smarthub or call our Customer Experience Center at 800-292-5457.

Smartphone users can download the SmartHub app from their app store. Have your account number and most recent billing statement handy.



Broadband Glossary

Understanding broadband terms can sometimes feel like trying to decipher a foreign language. Here are a few definitions to help you understand how we serve you.

MESH NETWORK: Walls, appliances and more can block your Wi-Fi signal, meaning every room may not have the same quality connection. A mesh network can help. Mesh networks use multiple devices working together to bring reliable internet service to every corner of your home.

SOCIAL ENGINEERING FRAUD: A cybercrime using social media, email and other communications to earn a person's trust to eventually reveal confidential information or other money-making scams. These can even target employees with access to sensitive information and cause significant financial loss or data breaches.

BANDWIDTH: Imagine bandwidth like a water pipe. The wider the pipe, the more water can flow. So, in the case of your internet service, greater bandwidth means more data can move at once. If you live in a home with multiple connected devices, sufficient bandwidth is critical.

5G: This is a common type of mobile internet that's much faster than earlier versions. It's like upgrading from an old bicycle to a super-powered electric bike—everything moves quicker. It is, however, limited by availability.

MEMORIAL DAY

HCTC's offices will be closed on **MONDAY, MAY 26**, in observance of **MEMORIAL DAY**. Take time to recognize and remember the men and women who gave their lives while serving in the U.S. military so we can continue to live in freedom.

HATS OFF to the



Congratulations to all 2025 high school, college and technical school graduates. Enjoy this moment—your future is bright!

Everyone at HCTC is excited about your future.



Photo Illustrations by Mark Gilliland

Minor Leagues

MAJOR FUN

Road trip to
baseball's most
entertaining
destinations

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Ric Sisler admits he misses the annual spring-to-fall marathon of a baseball season. “When it’s in your blood, it doesn’t matter what you’re doing. You’re always going to be pulled toward that industry, and I’m certainly no

exception,” he says. “Going to the ballpark, the camaraderie and being around the yard was just a thrill for me.

“I certainly don’t miss tarp pulls and some of those types of things,” he says with a laugh, referring to the backbreaking

work of getting protective tarps on and off the diamond during rainy weather.

The national pastime is most certainly in Ric’s blood. He played for three seasons in the New York Yankees minor league system before running several

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Marketers and merchandisers will say quite a lot. Creative—some may say outlandish—nicknames, mascots and logos are part of the landscape of minor league baseball. Here are a couple of our Texas favorites:

The Sugar Land Space Cowboys became the Triple-A affiliate of the neighboring Houston Astros in 2021, changing the team name from the Skeeters, a reference to mosquitos. The new name fits with the Astros and Houston’s history with NASA and may be familiar to rock fans as a classic tune by the Steve Miller Band.

When the San Antonio Missions moved to Amarillo in 2019, the team went in a different direction and became the Amarillo Sod Poodles. Sod Poodles won a name-the-team contest over Boot Scooters, Bronc Busters, Jerky and Long Haulers. Sod poodle is a reference to prairie dogs in West Texas.

Fun fact—in 2015, the then-Skeeters signed former Major Leaguer Rafael Palmeiro to a contract so he could play alongside his son, Patrick. The father-son duo, batting 2-3 in the order, combined to drive in five runs in a 10-4 win over the Camden Riversharks.



Rocky, the Midland Rockhounds' mascot, poses with fans during a 2024 Texas League game in Midland, Texas.

minor league organizations as a front office executive and as vice president/general manager of the independent South Coast League based in Georgia. His father, Dick Sisler, was a Major League Baseball manager and All-Star player, and his grandfather, George Sisler, is enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Ric, who is still involved in athletics as director of corporate sponsorships at Western Carolina University, says many fans of the game come back season after season.

"Minor league baseball has been part of the fabric of our society in a lot of smaller towns," he says. "It was kind of a binding agent for folks to come watch baseball with their friends and neighbors and just have a wholesome time."

While the minor leagues are about family fun and community pride to many fans, the game is a balance of business and player development for the teams and their MLB affiliates. The minors have long relied on fan-friendly, creative promotions and player interactions to sell tickets, and all of that comes with an affordable price tag.

"I think people have always gone to minor league games because it's affordable," Ric says. "You had great entertainment and could see some potential big-league players there at an affordable price.



The sun sets behind Rio Grande Credit Union Field at Isotopes Park, which is known to fans as "The Lab," home to the Triple-A Pacific Coast League's Albuquerque Isotopes.



You're very close to the field and close to the players. It was a different setting from the Major League parks. I don't want to see that change."

Planning a trip this summer—or maybe even a baseball pilgrimage? There's a game, sports history and tradition, as well as a bunch of fun waiting for you. 📺

STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE IN THE LONE STAR STATE

The Texas League has been in business since 1902 and is a Double-A league with its five South Division teams based in Texas.

North Division teams are in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas. The Houston Buffaloes, who played in the Texas League from 1903-61 and originated in 1888, won a league-record 16 championships.

Texas League alumni include MLB Hall of Famers Roberto Alomar, Willard Brown, Dennis Eckersley, Hank Greenberg, Chick Hafey, Willie McCovey, Joe Medwick, Joe Morgan, Brooks Robinson, Al Rosen, Ron Santo, Don Sutton, Billy Williams and Dick Williams.

FUN FACTS

John Robert "Red" Murff, a native of Burlington, made his 1956 MLB debut with the Milwaukee Braves as a 35-year-old rookie. He was named Minor League Pitcher of the Year by The Sporting News and Texas League Pitcher of the Year in 1955 after going 27-11 for the Dallas Eagles. He threw a no-hitter for the Texas City Texans in 1951 and pitched 19 2/3 innings of a 3-2 20-inning loss to the Texarkana Bears in 1952.

Homer Peel, originally from Port Sullivan, hit .300 for more than a dozen minor league seasons during the 1920s and '30s and was known as "the Ty Cobb of the Texas League." He won a World Series title with the New York Giants in 1933.

A Texas League team called the Atz Cats, managed by namesake Jake Atz and playing out of Fort Worth, won six straight league titles from 1920-25. Cats player John "Ziggy" Sears became a Major League umpire and also appeared in two movies, "The Stratton Story" and "The Babe Ruth Story," in 1948 and 1949, respectively, playing umpires in both films.

Reaching Higher

Ingram ISD students are ready for a high-tech future

Story by JUDY GARRISON

If education is key, students in the Ingram Independent School District receive everything they need to unlock future success.

With the help of dedicated educators and plenty of hard work, the Pathways in Technology and Early College High School program, also known as P-TECH, makes the possibility of a college degree a reality. In May 2024, more than half of Ingram Tom Moore High School seniors graduated with an associate degree or completed a comparable trade program before they finished high school.

"I'm thankful that Ingram supported me and that I didn't have to pay for it," says Brooke Block, who completed nursing classes at Schreiner University in prepara-

tion for her licensed vocational nurse certificate. "Ingram went to bat for me when things got hard, and I'm super grateful to be ahead for my future."

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

As the price of a college degree continues to rise, tuition is often a daunting financial challenge that's difficult to overcome. According to U.S. News and World Report, since 2005, in-state tuition and fees at public universities have increased nearly 45%, and college is often a family's biggest expense after buying a home.

Ingram ISD Superintendent Bobby Templeton knew he wanted to go further to help students pursue their next step after high school graduation—whether

it's college, a trade school, the military or something else.

"We never want this to be a college prep academy," Bobby says. "But our area is very economically depressed, and I got tired of seeing really bright kids leaving so much of their potential on the table."

Now, about six years since its start, Bobby estimates the P-TECH program pumped more than \$4 million back into the local economy by saving families about \$16,000 that would normally be spent on college tuition. With its success, the P-TECH program has also made Ingram a model for other school districts across Texas.

"We negotiated contracts with colleges that allow us to teach their material at very

Ingram Tom Moore High School Principal Brandie Guzman visits students in a technology classes.





ABOVE: Ingram Elementary students use their laptops to answer questions during an online lesson.

LEFT: Ingram ISD Superintendent Bobby Templeton congratulates a student.

reduced tuition rates,” Bobby says. “We essentially turn our teachers into college professors. We hire them with their master’s degree or we pay for them to get a master’s degree, so they’re qualified to teach college courses. We afford it with a really tight budget, grants and fundraising. It’s very expensive, but we’re here for the students. Last year, we secured well over \$1 million in scholarships for less than 100 kids.”

MAKING AN IMPACT WITH TECHNOLOGY

Technology creates endless learning opportunities for students, allowing them to experience the world without ever leaving the classroom. From online college courses to advanced cybersecurity training and digital design software that transfers blueprints into real-world welding projects, students learn about a wide variety of career possibilities. And at Ingram ISD, the connection to technology starts long before high school.

“We live in a digital world. Technology gives educators a variety of creative choices to help differentiate learning for all types of learners,” Ingram Elementary School Principal Kali Brandt says. “Technology also provides many helpful

learning tools, such as speech to text, allowing students to speak their thoughts to produce a written document rather than type them. Translation tools help bridge the language barrier between teachers and families to help them stay engaged with us.”

Programs like Class Dojo and Google Classroom also help parents communicate with teachers and stay up to date on daily lessons and homework.

“Every student is equipped with a Chromebook laptop, and that’s how we deliver assignments and give tests,” Bobby says. “Our schools have extremely robust broadband because we never want technology to be a limiting factor.”

PAYING IT FORWARD

Preparing for the future starts at Ingram Elementary. “The first thing kids are exposed to here is ‘Where Ya Going Wednesdays,’” Bobby says. “Everyone wears a college shirt, or maybe they want to go into the military or be a firefighter or police officer. It gets kids thinking about what’s ahead.”

Planning for what’s next is also helping create a new mindset with parents and students. “The generational poverty piece is one of the reasons the P-TECH model was implemented,” says Brandie Guzman, principal at Ingram Tom Moore High

School. “Most people join education because they want to make a difference and actually seeing that difference over generations is really special.”

For many families, that difference is having their son or daughter become the family’s first college graduate. “At first, we’d hear these amazing stories about first-generation college students. Now, it’s becoming the norm,” Bobby says. “Those are the kind of stories that make you proud to be in this profession.”

Nationwide, less than 40% of Americans age 25 or older have a bachelor’s degree, according to 2022 Pew Research Center data, but that isn’t stopping Ingram students from breaking the mold.

“I hope to enroll at Texas A&M to get my bachelor’s degree in nursing and then maybe even my master’s degree to become a nurse practitioner,” Brooke says. “Because of this program, I know that I always have a job. That’s priceless.”

Adobe Stock image by Feetplus Creator



LOOK TOWARD THE

Light

Whatever you call them, fireflies mesmerize

Story by SARA DIAMOND PATTERSON

Catching lightning bugs in a Mason jar with holes punched in the lid is a summer ritual for kids across the country. Watching their light show together is often a time for families to slow down, which is what Lynn Frierson Faust's family began doing in the Great Smoky Mountains during the 1960s.

They marveled for years at the unique light display, as the flying beetles blinked on and off at the same time for several hours after dark. When Lynn heard the August 1991 edition of *Science News* magazine featured an article on fireflies that blink in unison, she figured she would finally find out why and how they made their magic.

"I remember thinking, 'Oh cool, a lightning bug feature. It'll talk about our light show.' Only it didn't mention one thing," she says. In fact,

the authors said the Western Hemisphere had no species of fireflies that blinked synchronously.

Lynn let them know they were mistaken and invited them to come to the Smokies to see the show for themselves. The scientists did and agreed Lynn was right, lighting the way for her life's work.

'JUST SO DARN FUN'

As "The Lightning Bug Lady," Lynn is internationally known for her research on the ecology and habits of the more than 125 species of U.S. fireflies, helping

THE LOWDOWN

HOW: Fireflies produce their magical flashes through bioluminescence, a chemical reaction.

WHY: Each of the more than 125 species of fireflies in the United States—2,000 worldwide—has a unique signature flash pattern the males use to attract females of their specific type.

WHERE: Everywhere. Many Western species do not flash or fly, but they're out there.

WHEN: Warm summer nights.



AI-generated artwork by Firefly

LEND A HAND

Pesticides and habitat reduction have taken a toll on firefly populations. Maintaining a "wild" area of your yard with a little water, native vegetation and undisturbed soil will make your home more firefly friendly. But the easiest way to help is simply by turning out the lights during their active period. Visit xerces.org or firefly.org for more tips.

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Photo courtesy of Lynn Frierson Faust



A BBC crew takes a break from filming in 2019. Naturalist Lynn Frierson Faust examines equipment she and Mark Zloba, ecological manager at the Edge of Appalachia, use to gather fireflies at the preserve outside of Cincinnati.

to raise awareness of their unique life cycles and importance within ecosystems.

She scrambles to 14 states each year to catch them emerging during their eight-week active season, usually early June to late July. For 18 years, she has been the worldwide go-to on the subject, serving as on-site scientific consultant for BBC Earth, Discovery, National Geographic and other international film crews. Lynn's 2017 book, "Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs," was the first-ever comprehensive firefly field guide and shared the results of her nearly three decades of research on behalf of museums, universities, state and national parks and nature centers.

"I'm not a scientist per se, but I've done the research, a whole lot of research," she says. "I'm just a regular person obsessed with these and fortunate to have the time and a little knowledge to build on."

Throughout history, fireflies have symbolized hope and mystery, serving as transient reminders that life is fleeting. In some cultures, people see them as their lost ancestors, a sacred connection between the earthly and spiritual worlds.

When she began, Lynn didn't have much research to start with. "There were just a bunch of dusty old scientific papers, but that's about it," she says. "There's just not been that much research done on them since they aren't harmful or helpful to people or crops."

They are, however, a great indicator species for the health of ecosystems. "When they disappear, we have to know why and where to look." And

HERE THEY ARE!

No matter where you are, you don't have to go far to find the magic. You can look for lightning bugs anywhere from your own woods or backyard to wildlife management areas or wooded parks, avoiding light pollution and areas that spray for mosquitoes.

"I've always said Texas needs its own guidebook," firefly expert Lynn Frierson Faust says. "It's such a huge state and they have so many habitats, an adult firefly species is probably active year-round."

Houston's 2,500-acre urban wilderness, Armand Bayou Nature Center, is one of the best places in the country to catch light shows and learn more about their purpose.

"Three amazing ladies just became interested in the fireflies there on their own and began documenting them and leading firefly walks," Lynn says. They are among the many amateur researchers throughout the state who work with Lynn.

"It's just so big, but I have a really good glimpse into at least seven little spots throughout the state, and everywhere I go, I'm amazed," she says.

Lynn once found a "super rare" firefly along the banks of the Steinhagen Reservoir and says, "Caddo Lake is the ultimate spot. They have all sorts of good stuff there."

Lynn says they will always serve as a nostalgic reminder of days gone by.

"Lightning bugs are fantastic ambassadors leading people back into nature and to a better understanding of the connectedness of it all," she says. "Plus, they're just so darn fun." 🐞

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NAME GAME

Officially known as Lampyridae, worldwide fireflies are called blinkies, glowflies, moon bugs, peeney wallies, blinkin' bees, hoturu, fire beetles and candle flies. Here at home, "lightning bug" is more common in the South and Midwest, while "firefly" is typically heard in the West and large cities in the East. Some researchers attribute the differences to weather. While lightning is most active in the South and Midwest, the West sees the most wildfires.

Brilliant Discovery

Mason is a destination for topaz exploration

Story by BRANDI DIXON

The community of Mason knows Deloris Lindsay as “Dee.” With a can-do spirit and witty personality, she enjoys spending time discovering the gems that help make every day shine. Even the story of how she got her nickname shows her creativity.

“In my baseball years as a teen, the style was to flip up the bill of your cap and write your name,” she says. “Deloris didn’t fit, so I went with ‘Dee,’ and that stuck. I’ve been Dee for 75 years.”

Dee’s home is Lindsay Ranch, in the heart of Mason County. Dee and her husband, Alva Clay, built a life full of adventure, sharing the land with their children.

“We built a cabin on each property to use as hunting cabins—one named Cabin on Comanche Creek and then Mason Mountain Manor,” Dee says. “Hunting season lasts three months, so I thought about a way to use the houses for the rest of the year and decided that people from the big cities might want a nice place to get away, so I started renting them to guests in February through September.”

A GEM OF A GETAWAY

Dee never thought much about rock hunting as a draw for tourists, even though the more than 300 acres in northwest Mason County is part of the Llano Uplift, the exclusive area where topaz is found. The semiprecious state gem of Texas, topaz comes in a range of colors, from clear to yellow, brown and light blue and

is usually found along the bottom of streams or in ravines. It can sometimes be found by sifting dirt from the surface of the ground.

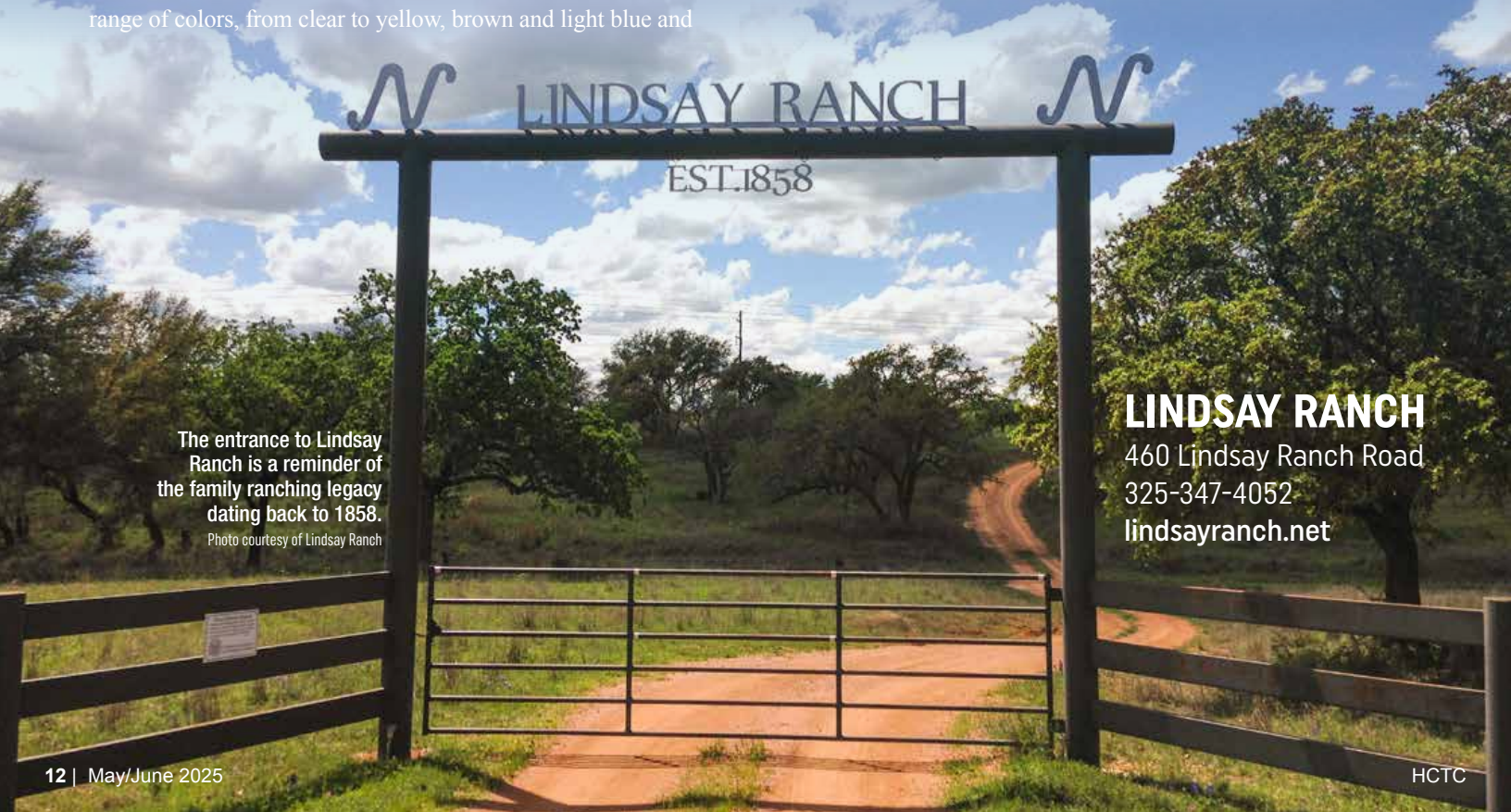
When the local chamber of commerce approached the family to ask if they would open up their property to the public, Dee simply decided, “why not?”

SEARCHING FOR STONES

Dee gives Lindsay Ranch guests maps pinpointing the locations where topaz has been found on the property. She stocks the cabins with rock-hunting tools for guests who did not bring their own. In addition to topaz, visitors may find quartz and other minerals, as well as artifacts. Anything they discover is theirs to keep as a hard-earned souvenir of their time on the ranch.

Established in 1858 by James Buchanan Lindsay, Lindsay Ranch is one of Mason County’s true gems full of heritage and history. The Llano River is just 15 miles from the ranch with great spots to picnic, swim and fish. In 1904, the first topaz found in North America was unearthed in Streeter, 5 miles west of Mason. The pale-blue crystal weighed in at 6,480 carats.

“It is elusive, like digging for buried treasure and not easily found, but you will be happy if you happen to find a piece,” Dee says. “As one young lady said, ‘It’s small but it’s perfect, it’s beautiful and it’s mine!’”



The entrance to Lindsay Ranch is a reminder of the family ranching legacy dating back to 1858.

Photo courtesy of Lindsay Ranch

LINDSAY RANCH

460 Lindsay Ranch Road
325-347-4052
lindsayranch.net



Adobe Stock photo by sdscret

Browser Power-Ups

Polish your online experience

While computers and mobile devices increasingly rely on dedicated apps to connect to online resources, one software tool is still essential decades after its introduction—the web browser. And today’s browsers are more powerful, and customizable, than ever.

Google’s Chrome is the most popular, but there are plenty of other options, including Apple’s Safari and Microsoft’s Edge. Additionally, the Firefox browser is a project of the independent Mozilla Foundation. All are free.

CUSTOMIZE

From arranging the toolbars to custom themes, most browsers allow users to tailor the settings to use the software in a way that best suits their needs and preferences. For example, most include a dark mode for those who prefer a browsing experience with greater contrast between the text and background.

CHOOSE YOUR EXTENSIONS

Extensions allow your browser to connect directly to other services or online resources. If you often work from home,

extensions might allow you to connect to online office resources or note-taking tools. Similarly, a common extension gives one-click access to a password manager, making that vital security tool more convenient.

ENJOY EASY READING

Most browsers now offer a reading mode. With one click—usually a button found in or near the address bar of the browser—the ads and other graphics are stripped away to leave minimally formatted text. It’s a great option to activate when reading longer articles.

SYNC ACROSS DEVICES

If you use the same browser on multiple devices, try the sync feature so your bookmarks, history, passwords and settings are mirrored across your devices. If you wish, you can start reading an article on your laptop and seamlessly continue it on your phone.

MANAGE YOUR PRIVACY AND SECURITY

Online privacy and security are more important than ever. Browsers typically

offer a range of options so users can make choices about the data shared with various websites, social media apps and more. Good security and privacy practices evolve, so frequently check the help section of your browser of choice to review the available options.

UPDATE REGULARLY

The online world changes fast, and browsers must adapt just as quickly. So, make sure to keep your favorite browser up to date. Consider choosing to update your browser automatically, which is generally safe and reliable. If you prefer more control, make a point of regularly checking your browser’s settings for available updates.

BOOKMARK YOUR FAVORITES

One of the oldest browser features is still one of the most useful—bookmarks. These are quick links to sites and tools you use often. Not only can they be kept in their own section of the browser, they can also typically be added to the prominent toolbar so they’re even more handy. ☞

Fantastic Frying

Flavorful chicken with the finest sides

Many say munching on piping-hot, crispy fried chicken is a joy like no other. Whether it's juicy white meat from the breast or the wings or the deep, engaging flavors of the dark meat found in thighs and legs, when it comes to fried chicken, most everyone has a preference. But there are a few things that good pieces of fried chicken have in common—the skin must stay on, and it must be crispy.

That's not too much to ask, but it's something that many cooks cannot achieve. There's a knack to it that may take a few extra steps, but the endgame is well worth it.

Serve the chicken alongside a big spoonful of potato salad and finish with a bowl of banana pudding and you have a meal fit for a beautiful summer evening.



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

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

CRISPY FRIED CHICKEN

- 1 (4-pound) chicken, cut into pieces
- 1 cup whole milk buttermilk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour for coating
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 quarts vegetable oil for frying

Dry chicken with paper towels. Put the flour in a large plastic bag. Let the amount of chicken you are cooking dictate the amount of flour you use. Season the flour with paprika, garlic powder, salt and pepper to taste. Paprika helps to brown the chicken.

Dip chicken pieces in buttermilk then, a few at a time, put them in the bag with the flour, seal the bag and shake to coat well.

Place the coated chicken on a cookie sheet or tray, and cover with a clean dish

towel or waxed paper. Let sit until the flour reaches a paste-like consistency. This step is important to ensure that the skin will be crispy and adhere to the chicken.

Fill a large skillet (cast iron is best) about 1/3 to 1/2 full of vegetable oil. Heat until very hot.

Put in as many chicken pieces as the skillet can hold. Brown the chicken in hot oil on both sides.

When browned, reduce heat and cover the skillet. Let cook for 30 minutes (the chicken will be cooked through but not crispy). Remove cover, raise heat again and continue to fry until crispy. Drain the fried chicken on paper towels. Depending on how much chicken you have, you may have to fry it in a few batches. Keep the finished chicken in a slightly warm oven while preparing the rest.



LOADED BAKED POTATO SALAD

- 4 pounds russet potatoes
- 1-2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 3/4 cup sour cream or full-fat Greek yogurt
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 12 ounces bacon, cooked, cooled and chopped
- 6 green onions, whites and green parts, chopped

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place cleaned potatoes on a baking sheet and pierce four to five times with a fork. Lightly coat with olive oil, sprinkle with kosher salt and cook for 50-60 minutes or until easily pierced with a cake tester or skewer. Remove from the oven and let cool for 5 minutes. When cool enough to

handle, peel the potatoes and cut into 1-inch chunks, discarding the potato skins. The potato flesh may crumble and get shaggy, and that's OK—transfer it all to a large mixing bowl. While still warm, sprinkle the potatoes with the apple cider vinegar. Set aside for 15-30 minutes or until the potatoes are cooled.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a large skillet or in the oven, drain and let cool. Crumble into bite-size pieces.

In a small bowl, mix the mayonnaise and sour cream. Season with the kosher salt and pepper.

When the potatoes are cool, pour the mayonnaise mix over them with the crumbled bacon, green onion and cheddar cheese. Gently fold the ingredients together. Season with more salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate for 3 hours up to overnight before serving. Store in the refrigerator for up to four days.

NUTTER BUTTER 'NANA PUDDING

- 8 ounces softened cream cheese
- 1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 (3.4-ounce) boxes instant vanilla pudding
- 2 3/4 cups cold milk

- 8 ounces whipped topping divided
- 1 (1-pound) package Nutter Butter or other peanut butter sandwich cookies
- 5-7 ripe bananas, sliced



In a large mixing bowl, beat the softened cream cheese until smooth. Add the condensed milk and mix until there are no lumps.

In a second bowl, mix the pudding mix and milk together until smooth. Pour the pudding into the cream cheese mixture and mix until completely combined. Fold in half of the whipped topping.

Line the bottom of a trifle dish with a layer of Nutter Butter cookies. Add a layer of banana slices on top of the cookies. Spread a layer of the pudding mixture evenly over the bananas. Repeat 1-3 times, depending on the size of your dish.

Spread the remaining whipped topping on top of the pudding. Cover and chill for at least 4 hours but overnight is best.

Crush a few Nutter Butters on top of the whipped topping immediately before serving. 🍪



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