

CONNECTION

Gridiron great

Football Player of the Year
Tucker Kyne honored

CELEBRATING
MEMBERS

BEAUTY
BENEATH



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

Supporting the Universal Service Fund

For more than 100 years, America has embraced the belief that everyone should have reliable access to reasonably priced communications services. Today, the federal Universal Service Fund, known as the USF, continues its vital role in this mission. The fund helps rural consumers access services comparable in price and quality to those in urban areas, making services more affordable for low-income families. It also supports critical connections important to schools, libraries, health care and businesses.

As we work with NTCA members daily, we see the good the USF does for rural America. We proudly support the continuation of the USF even as new broadband programs expand access to unserved areas. Simply, it makes a practical difference.

Consider, for example, the economic value of broadband, which exceeds \$1.5 trillion annually. It sustains hundreds of thousands of jobs and adds billions of dollars to local economies. With the growing demand for broadband, the USF supports the advanced, sustainable services rural businesses need to compete globally.

Similarly, fast and reliable broadband access helps narrow health care disparities between rural and metropolitan communities. The USF expands the reach of medical services through telehealth and fosters improved patient communication as well as the adoption of electronic health records.

Join us in support of the USF and its essential mission to provide broadband access to all rural residents. I encourage you to learn more about the critical role of the USF by visiting ntca.org/universalservice. 📄



Help may be a click away

Thanks to telehealth services, a trip to a physician’s office isn’t always necessary, and when you’re fighting a winter bug, that convenience counts. Here are a few tips to make your telehealth visit as productive and easy as possible:

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPOT: Find a quiet, well-lit space for your telehealth session. It’s not a Broadway audition, but good lighting helps your doctor see you better. Eliminate background noise as much as possible — you don’t want the family pet stealing the spotlight during your appointment!

HAVE YOUR INFO READY: Make a mini cheat sheet with your symptoms, questions and any medications you take. It’s easy to forget things during a virtual visit. Plus, it makes you look like a pro patient!

DRESS APPROPRIATELY: Pajamas might be comfy, but consider saving them for bedtime. Dressing appropriately can not only help your doctor assess your physical condition but also put you in the right mindset for a serious health chat.

BE HONEST AND OPEN: Telehealth works best when you’re open about your symptoms and concerns. Don’t be shy. Doctors can only help if they know the whole story. 📄

Illustration by A.barks/Adobe Stock



Tugging at your purse strings

Online romance scams can break more than just your heart

Falling in love can make anyone vulnerable. Shady cybercriminals know this and are all too eager to steal hearts and much more.


According to the FBI, a romance scam occurs when someone creates a fake online profile and fakes romantic interest to gain trust to steal the victim's money or personal information. Also known as "catfishing," romance scams can be devastating, both financially and emotionally.

Nearly 70,000 people reported being the victim of catfishing in 2022, and losses hit a staggering \$1.3 billion, according to Federal Trade Commission statistics. But actual losses are likely much higher — romance fraud is grossly underreported due to its sensitive nature.

Romance scammers often prey on older people, who may be divorced or widowed. Online dating apps are just one place they lurk. They also reach out through popular social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. They target victims' insecurities and work to develop intimacy as quickly as possible — a practice known as "love bombing." Scammers attempt to make the victim feel special or like they're the "only one who gets" the culprit.

Sometimes a scammer will ask for a short-term loan to get out of a bad situation and start a new life with the victim. Or, they'll say access to a credit card would smooth the way to a relationship. Other gifts include asking for money to cover the customs charges for an expensive gift, or a crypto investor who wants to help the victim cash in on the trend.

Despite the warning signs, victims are often too lovestruck to realize it's a swindle.

Romance scam victims can be male or female, young or old. Their only common denominator is that they believe in true love, and they feel they have found it. 

Follow your head, not your heart

- Allow relationships to develop slowly and naturally.
- Set up a video chat to verify the identity of the person you are messaging.
- Research the person you are messaging.
- Conduct a reverse image search to make sure the person you are talking to is really the person in the photo.

If you've been scammed

Falling victim to a scammer can happen to anyone. Talking about your experience can lessen feelings of shame and help protect others from being victimized.

- Immediately contact your bank or financial institution.
- Report it as soon as possible to the FTC at reportfraud.ftc.gov.
- Alert the FBI's fraud division — the Internet Crime Complaint Center — at ic3.gov. Be prepared to share any records of your communication with the scammer.
- Contact the platform where the scammer first contacted you, so it can prevent others from being victimized.

A life well lived in 2024

DO THE HARD THINGS IN 2024

Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th president of the United States, once stated, “Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty ... I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well.”

His words encapsulate the essence of a life well lived, marked not by ease but by effort and resilience in the face of challenges. As we enter 2024, let’s explore the importance of doing the hard things, both for personal fulfillment and for the greater good.



CHRIS TOWNSON
Chief Executive Officer

THE WEIGHT OF ROOSEVELT’S WORDS

Roosevelt’s declaration resonates deeply because it speaks to a universal truth — the most rewarding aspects of life often come from our hardest battles. It’s a reminder that character, tenacity and purpose are forged in the crucible of difficulty. His words challenge us to embrace hardships, not as burdens, but as opportunities to grow and excel.

LIVING LIVES OF SUBSTANCE

History and everyday life are filled with examples of individuals who have led lives of significance through their endurance and perseverance. From teachers and first responders to military personnel, pastors, parents and beyond, these individuals embody the spirit of doing hard things. They impact us through their character, sacrifice and wisdom — qualities honed by confronting and overcoming adversity.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND INFLUENCES

Reflecting on those who have influenced us personally, like parents, siblings, teachers and mentors, reveals a common thread — their ability to endure and thrive in difficult circumstances. Their lives serve as testaments to the power of resilience and dedication. Such reflections encourage us to consider how our actions and choices can similarly inspire and support others.

The founders of DTC Communications exemplify Roosevelt’s spirit. They established a cooperative to connect isolated communities, overcoming skepticism and technical challenges. Their determination to provide essential services like voice and long-distance communication, TV, security and broadband internet in areas previously unserved speaks volumes about their commitment to doing hard things. Their legacy is a powerful reminder of how perseverance can create meaningful, lasting impact.

2024: A CALL TO ACTION

As we look forward to 2024, DTC Communications will work hard to serve you well as we continue this mindset of embracing challenges. The call to do hard things is a call to live intentionally, to face our fears and to lead lives of purpose and impact. Whether it’s in our personal endeavors, professional pursuits or community involvement, DTC joins you in committing to overcome difficulties and make meaningful contributions — and a few meaningful connections along the way, too. Here’s to a life well lived in 2024! 📞

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DTC Communications is a member-owned telephone cooperative established in 1951. The cooperative supplies communication, entertainment, and security products and services to residential and business customers primarily throughout Middle Tennessee.

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The 2023 DTC Football Player of the Year honor goes to Tucker Kyne, a Cannon County High School senior. See story Page 13.

Photo courtesy of Bridget Simmons of Cannon Sports

APPLY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS NOW!

FOUNDATION FOR RURAL SERVICE SCHOLARSHIP

DTC is pleased to partner with NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association to award a Foundation for Rural Service Scholarship to an eligible senior.

Local high school students have the opportunity to win a \$2,000 scholarship from the Foundation for Rural Service. DTC Communications will add \$500 for a \$2,500 scholarship total. Applications for the FRS scholarship are available through school guidance counselors or online at frs.org. Applications are due to FRS by Feb. 16.



615-273-2451

DTC SCHOLARSHIP

DTC is now accepting applications for the 2024 DTC Scholarship in Memory of McAllen Foutch. High school seniors who are active members of DTC, or whose parents or guardians are active members, are eligible to apply. Applications are due by the close of business on Feb. 16. Applications are available at dtccom.net/about-us/scholarships or in the guidance counselor offices of all area high schools. Deliver completed applications to a DTC office in Alexandria, Gordonsville, Smithville or Woodbury, or mail them to:

DTC • Attn: Scholarship Program • P.O. Box 247 • Alexandria, TN 37012-0247

JAMES L. BASS LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP

The James L. Bass Legal Scholarship will be awarded to a student entering the first year of law school who has an interest in rural communities.

The scholarship is named for Bass who, over the course of a 70-year career, helped secure funds for rural telephone systems to bring modern telephone service to rural areas. He was pivotal in the creation of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, serving as one of the organization's earliest presidents. Bass continued his leadership with service for more than 50 years as legal counsel, guiding NTCA through many challenges and opportunities.

Recognizing Bass' impact on the industry and his passion for the legal profession, the NTCA board established a scholarship in his honor. The scholarship will be at least \$5,000. Apply online at frs.org by Feb. 16.

FIND YOUR NUMBER AND WIN A PRIZE!

A prize may be waiting for you in this issue! We have randomly selected the telephone numbers of 10 lucky DTC members and hidden them throughout this publication.

Find your number and call 615-683-1010 to claim your prize!



Telephone directory update

Valley View Veterinary Services, 3525 John Bragg Highway, Woodbury, TN 37190, 615-563-3535, was not included in the 2023-24 DTC telephone directory.



Foundation for Rural Service Youth Tour

DTC Communications will send two high school students from within its service area to the Foundation for Rural Service Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.

Set for June 3-7, the Youth Tour is an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. It provides students from rural areas with a firsthand look at the telecommunications industry, legislative and governmental processes, and historical sites. Participating students will meet peers from rural communities across the country and form friendships that will last a lifetime.

To be eligible, high school students must live in the DTC service area and be 15, 16 or 17 years old at the time of the tour. FRS will not accept any student 18 or older. No exceptions will be made. Applicants must maintain an overall B average, be claimed as a dependent on the tax return of a DTC customer or its affiliate, and receive active telecommunications service from DTC Communications or its affiliate.

Applicants must submit a 500- to 1,000-word essay. Essays will be judged on the clarity of the message, projection of ideas, depth, originality, organization, references and grammar. Topic and application can be found at dtccom.net/about-us/scholarships.

The application, typed essay, transcript of grades and resume that includes academic achievements and honors, leadership experience, extracurricular and community activities and work experience must be submitted to Anita Patrick by close of business Feb. 16.

For questions about the FRS Youth Tour or essay contest, contact Anita Patrick at 615-464-2271 or by email at apatrick@staff-dtc.com.

Cumberland Caverns
near McMinnville,
Tennessee

BEAUTY LIES BELOW

Area caverns contain
links to the past

Story by KATHY DENES

Bones and footprints of prehistoric jaguars and their prey are preserved within many caves across the Southeast, but that's just the beginning. There are also works of art, as well as artifacts and writings of indigenous peoples — from the ancients to those who would face a Trail of Tears. There are even tools left behind by those who mined saltpeter used in multiple wars.

There are colonies of bats, ever-growing stalactites and stalagmites, as well as flowing underground waters. Some caves are easily found, offering entry through a vast visible gash in a mountainside. Others remain hidden until their accidental discovery, perhaps by a passerby on a hot day who notices cool air seeping out through a wall of rock. They range in size from shallow squeezes to soaring cathedrals, and their passages can stretch for hundreds of miles.

KENTUCKY



Kentucky's Mammoth Cave is the world's longest known cave system, with over 400 miles of its corridors mapped and surveyed. Within a short drive of Mammoth are numerous other caves with their own claims to fame, making the Park City area one of the most popular cave tour destinations in the country. Popular neighboring attractions include Diamond Caverns, a World Heritage Site and International Biosphere Reserve that has offered public tours for more than 160 years. A good resource for learning more about these and other notable caves across the state is worldofcaves.com/the-best-list-of-caves-in-kentucky.

Photo courtesy of Cumberland Caverns

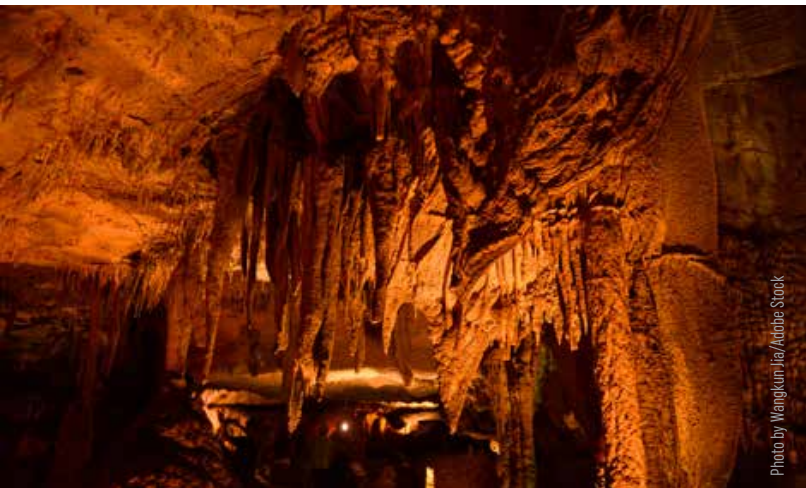


Photo by Wangkun Jia / Adobe Stock



Photo by K.A. / Adobe Stock

In Kentucky's Mammoth Cave, stalactites create a memorable natural spectacle.

The National Park Service manages Mammoth Cave.

TENNESSEE



Tennessee's caverns are spread far and wide. Near McMinnville are Cumberland Caverns, open daily year-round, and Big Bone Cave, named for the giant sloth bones found near where Civil War-era saltpeter vats remain. In the Chattanooga area, visitors can descend by elevator deep into Lookout Mountain to witness the beauty of Ruby Falls or can cross the interstate to visit Raccoon Mountain Caverns. A drive up I-75 brings visitors to Sweetwater, where boats glide across The Lost Sea in artifact-rich Craighead Caverns, open every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas. Continue toward the Great Smoky Mountains to find the Forbidden Caverns of Sevierville and impressive Tuckaleechee Caverns in Townsend. Read about some of these and more at explorationjunkie.com/caves-in-tennessee.

ALABAMA



Alabama is home to hundreds of caves stretching along the Appalachian foothills. Of those, six are touted by onlyinyourstate.com as among the very best and included in its Alabama Cave Trail. These renowned subterranean destinations include Russell Cave, Neversink Pit, Sauta Cave, Cathedral Caverns, Rickwood Caverns and Majestic Cave, formerly called DeSoto Caverns. Find information about these and other popular Alabama caves at enterthecaves.com/best-caves-in-alabama. 📍

DIG DEEPER

- » cavern.com/directory
- » worldofcaves.com/the-ultimate-list-of-caves-in-america
- » abackpackerstale.com/best-caves-in-the-united-states
- » Also, visit tripadvisor.com and search for "caves" to find options in your area and beyond.



TO SAVE A CAVE

Protecting the fragile ecosystems and histories of caves large and small is the mission of Southeastern Cave Conservancy Inc. The nonprofit has worked since 1991 to acquire and sustainably manage endangered caves. Through cave purchases and its EduBat and Project Underground programs, among others, SCCi has preserved historic Cherokee syllabary, written characters serving as an alphabet, found on cavern walls and created compelling curriculum and educator workshops. Check out the group's ongoing projects at saveyourcaves.org.



Photo courtesy of Cumberland Caverns

Cumberland Caverns near McMinnville, Tennessee, offers unique adventures, including a lantern tour.

One of the BEST DAYS OF THE YEAR

DTC honors customers with 50 or more years of service

Story by LISA SAVAGE

As a young girl in the 1940s, DeEtte Shelton helped her mother run the switchboard from their home. The family lived in the communities of Liberty and Doweltown, and every time they moved, the switchboard moved with them.

DeEtte's father, George Gibbs, and his brother owned the switchboard which, at the time, was the only means of communication in the rural area.

DeEtte's sisters, Alma Montgomery and Jewel Ponder, remember emergencies during the night. "If someone didn't have a phone and there was an emergency, to reach them someone would call the switchboard and one of us kids would go get them and they'd have to come back to our house to take the call," says Alma, the youngest of nine children.

DeEtte, Alma and Jewel reminisced

about the switchboard operations during this year's DTC Customer Appreciation Luncheon, held to thank cooperative members who have been part of the DTC family for 50 years or more.

George Gibbs' efforts came before DTC was established, and by the time his daughters had phone service of their own, the cooperative was bringing much-needed telephone service to the area.



615-765-7981

TELEPHONES AND TECHNOLOGY

The telephone service revolutionized communication in rural Middle Tennessee, allowing members like Dorothy McCullough to thrive, even today as fiber internet takes center stage.

After retiring from the manufacturing industry, Dorothy now sells fruits, vegetables, jams and jellies she cans herself and homemade fried pies at craft fairs throughout the region. She also takes orders for fried pies. "I couldn't do that without my phone," she says. "People call me to place their orders and I couldn't do it without that."

Judy Sandlin lives in Alexandria now, but growing up in Liberty her family had a telephone. "Not everyone had telephones back then," she says. Judy married when she was 20, and she and her late husband, Kenneth, got their first phone in about 1962. She still has a landline in her home, as well as fiber internet.

Judy streams her television shows and keeps her iPad connected to Wi-Fi. She stays in contact with out-of-state family members and often uses FaceTime or other platforms to talk to her kids and

DTC CEO Chris Townson chats with members at the Customer Appreciation luncheon, an event held each year to honor the members with service for 50 years or more.

615-286-2600



About 200 members attended the DTC Customer Appreciation luncheon in October.

grandkids. “To have fiber in our rural area, we are fortunate,” she says.

MEMORY LANE

The state-of-the-art technology DTC members enjoy today is a far cry from the days when many members shared a single phone line, known as a party line. “We did a lot of eavesdropping,” Judy recalls.

“How many in this room had a party line,” DTC CEO Chris Townson asked as he welcomed members to the luncheon. Almost everyone raised their hand.

Chris told an old family story about his great-grandparents who had a party line and ran a local store in his hometown in Alabama. When the cooperative there started replacing party lines with private phone lines, his great-grandmother called to complain about losing a valuable source of insight into her customers’ wants and needs.

“It’s been said that my grandmother made her one and only call to the general manager then,” he says. “She told

him, ‘You’re ruining our business. Now we won’t know what we need to keep stocked in our store.’”

DTC has come a long way since the days of party lines, Chris says, referencing a map of the DTC service territory that shows a fiber optic network nearing completion. “That copper network would not do what we needed it to do any longer,” he says.

Now, DTC’s fiber optic network is doing so much more than the copper network did when DTC was established in 1951.

“Just like in ’51, we have worked to address the needs of our members,” he says. “We are establishing a fiber network that will make our kids and grandkids want to live here. So we thank you, our members, who have been with us for 50 years and longer. We couldn’t be doing what we’re doing today without all that you’ve done. It has prepared us to be here for the future.”

615-683-0957



DTC employee Jannie Mulaski visits with members.



Sisters, from left, Jewel Ponder, Alma Montgomery and DeEtte Shelton reminisced about the switchboard they helped their mother operate back in the 1940s.

IN THE GAME

Esports growth offers students community and opportunity

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

The Texas Wesleyan esports program started with a 2017 conversation that wasn't about video games at all. Eugene Friar, who was then working in student affairs and is now director of esports and gaming, approached the vice president of his division to talk about what the university could do to be a fun and exciting option for prospective students.

"I was hoping he'd give me some answers, but he flipped it on me and was like, 'Bring me some ideas, and we'll discuss it,'" Eugene says. "I wasn't thinking esports at all, even though I've been a gamer since the Commodore 64 days."

While brainstorming, Eugene came across fledgling esports programs at places like the University of California, Irvine, Missouri's Maryville University and Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania. Groups of students were coming together to compete in multiplayer games like Overwatch, Super Smash Bros. and League of Legends.

Today, the National Association of Collegiate Esports, or NACE, recognizes more than 240 schools with competitive esports teams. The experience not only opens doors in the gaming industry but can also help students develop skills for a variety of careers.

Texas Wesleyan's esports team evolved from a group focused primarily on competition to one that welcomes anyone from casual hobbyists to hardcore gamers. For Eugene, it's an important community that supports students who might not share other interests on campus. But it's also a

Trojan horse for helping them find their path through school and beyond.

"We tell our recruits early in the process my job is to trick you into learning," Eugene says. "If you want to try out for one of our teams, hopefully we'll go to the stadium and play. But what's your major? What are you going to do after you graduate? How is this going to help you get there?"

LEVELING UP

As access to high-speed internet expands from urban centers to rural areas, competitive gaming's popularity has soared. A study by Pew Research Center found that about 70% of college students say they play video games at least once in a while.

While the Texas Wesleyan Rams have teams for the squad-based shooter game Overwatch 2 and the fighting game Super Smash Bros., it's also important for Eugene to appeal to that larger audience. When the program was more focused on competitive gaming, he found that some students with a casual interest in gaming felt like they didn't belong. That's why the



The Texas Wesleyan University Overwatch team reviews video for a match.

Photo courtesy of Eugene Friar



ABOVE: University of Kentucky students enjoy competing in the school's new esports lounge.

RIGHT: Students try out the gaming lounge at the University of Kentucky's Latinx Open House.

club includes a team that creates, edits and streams content for platforms like Twitch and YouTube, as well as groups for fans of anime, Dungeons & Dragons and more casual gaming.

Eugene says overall participation increased by slightly deemphasizing competition and offering more ways to participate with casual gaming clubs, a social media team and an event team. "We went from having seven competitive teams to two, and the number of students in our program has actually gone up a little bit because there's more ways for people to get involved," he says.



Bryce Edwards, a junior, received a scholarship to help run the esports program and became captain of the school's Smash Bros. team. He says the social and leadership skills he learned in that role will be invaluable as he pursues a career in marketing.

For Kelvin Coker, a senior criminal justice major and wrestler, it's been a new way to connect with people. "People need a place that allows them to be themselves and interact with people of different backgrounds so that they can develop the skills necessary to go through life," Kelvin says. "It was a different vibe than wrestling, which was extremely refreshing. It felt good to be among people who shared interests in things outside of sports."

Heath Price, associate vice president of partnerships at the University of Kentucky, found the same enthusiasm when he first met with an informal esports club on his campus in 2018. With school resources behind it, the UK Esports Club has grown to include hundreds of members who enjoy the university's recently completed gaming lounge, along with approximately 70 students who play competitively.

"What we've seen is that the idea of a gamer just being someone who might be interested in building games is kind of a misnomer," Heath says. "A lot of these

young people have varying interests. I think as much of a career builder as anything is giving people some of those opportunities for exposure and to do things in the community."

TAILOR MADE

Eugene takes a similar approach at

Texas Wesleyan. Whether it's a student who wants to start a clothing line designing the school's esports jersey or a mass communications major building the team's content roadmap for the year, he always looks for ways the program can help students pursue their larger goals.

"The content team isn't about making funny content. It's about project management," he says. "The student organizations aren't just about talking about the things you love. They're leading a meeting and organizing people."

With the gaming landscape constantly changing, that may even mean meeting students somewhere other than esports. Texas Wesleyan's teams currently compete in the second division of the NACE Starleague, the biggest collegiate esports league in North America.

The Rams had a national championship-winning team for the FIFA soccer game series. Today, that team doesn't exist because the game no longer exists. Earlier this year, Electronic Arts, publisher of the FIFA series of games, ended its branding partnership with global soccer organization FIFA. That left some competitive players out in the cold and highlights a unique challenge for esports.

"You don't win a national championship in football and a few years later it's like, 'Remember when we used to have a football team?' So when the publishers get involved it's tricky," Eugene says. "It wouldn't surprise me if the esports part of what we do goes away in time and you see the more content creation and pop culture things last. It's about meeting the students' needs and matching their interests in a really positive way."



The Texas Wesleyan University Super Smash Bros. team prepares for a competition.

Celebrating service

DTC employees honored with annual awards

Each year, DTC Communications recognizes two employees for their service and dedication with the Employee of the Year and Chester Patterson awards.

John Hale received the Chester Patterson Award, nominated by his co-workers, and Johnathon Puckett was named Employee of the Year, an honor voted on by the senior management team.



John Hale, center, accepts the Chester Patterson Award from CEO Chris Townson, left, and Benny Curtis, Board of Directors president.

CHESTER PATTERSON AWARD

Chester Patterson, better known as Mr. Pat, was DTC's first employee and continued working there until his retirement at age 94. He passed away after his 99th birthday. The recipient of the Chester Patterson Award must have a minimum of 10 years of service with DTC.

"This honor is bestowed in loving memory of Mr. Pat, whose legacy of dedication set a benchmark for all employees at DTC," says CEO Chris Townson.

Award recipient John Hale embodies the spirit of Mr. Pat's dedication. "As a member of the DTC family, John has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to excellence, consistently delivering productivity and fostering a supportive workplace environment," Townson says. "His tireless work ethic and cooperative nature have contributed significantly to DTC's success and earned him the high respect and admiration of his peers."

Hale has proven his merit over two decades of exceptional service. "His deep understanding of our cooperative's mission showcases his unwavering dedication to our members and customers," Townson says. "John's contributions are a living example of what it means to be a consummate fellow employee — always eager to assist, lead and inspire. His leadership qualities and commitment to the cooperative and the community we serve are invaluable assets that shine brightly within our corporate family.

"Congratulations, John, and thank you for upholding the legacy of dedication that is the cornerstone of DTC Communications," Townson adds. "We are thankful you are part of our team and look forward to your continued influence on our organization's pursuit of service excellence."

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Johnathon Puckett, an outside plant technician, was chosen as Employee of the Year for 2023.

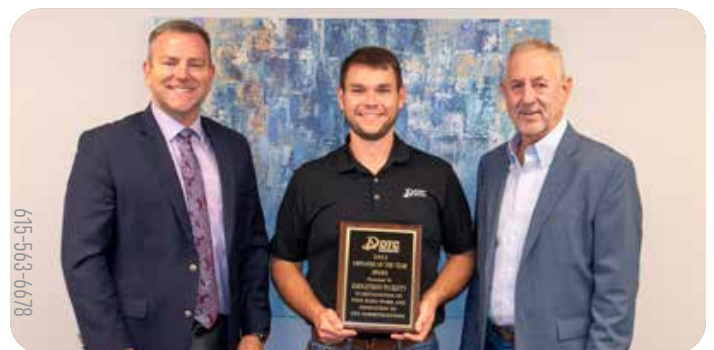
This accolade reflects Puckett's unwavering commitment and exemplary service, qualities that resonate deeply with the cooperative's mission. He has distinguished himself as an employee whose professionalism is lauded by both peers and managers alike.

"His cooperative spirit, consistent kindness, proactive self-starting nature, helpfulness, drive for success and eagerness to learn and serve embody DTC's dedication to serving our members and customers with the best possible service," Townson says.

Puckett's daily contributions exemplify the integral role each DTC employee plays in the collective success of the cooperative.

"His approach to his work mirrors the cooperative spirit, while his approach to service is a testament to the cooperative ethos that drives DTC. His respectful and driven nature has not only made a significant impact on our operations but has also elevated the experience of our customers, ensuring that DTC remains a trusted and reliable partner in the community," Townson says.

"Congratulations, Johnathon, on this well-deserved honor, and thank you for your exceptional contribution to the DTC family and the communities we serve," the CEO continues. "Your dedication is a beacon of the excellence we strive for at DTC Communications, and we are honored to have you as part of our team. I appreciate your commitment to our members and the communities we serve." 📞



Townson, left, and Curtis, right, present the Employee of the Year award to Johnathon Puckett.

DTC Football Player of the Year

Cannon County's Tucker Kyne

Story by LISA SAVAGE



DTC Football Player of the year
Tucker Kyne.

When someone says Tucker Kyne is head and shoulders above the rest, it's not just a metaphor. The 6-foot-5-inch, 225-pound Cannon County High School senior is the 2023 DTC Communications Football Player of the Year after a standout season.

The tight end, who plans to continue playing at the collegiate level, had 33 receptions for 672 yards and seven touchdowns in the 2023 season. His stats as a defensive end are just as impressive, with 95 total tackles — 53 solo and 42 assists. Tucker also forced a fumble and recovered three fumbles, returning two of those for touchdowns.

Although much of Tucker's athletic ability comes naturally, he has the dedication necessary to consistently put in the work to get better, Cannon County Coach Matt Daniel says. "He worked really hard in the offseason," the coach says. "His work ethic has inspired his teammates to work even harder, too. He's doing what it takes to make himself better."

As a middle schooler, Tucker says, he was short and chubby. By his freshman year his height shot up to 5 feet, 11 inches, and a year later, he was 6-foot-2. "That's when I started on varsity, and I really started to love it," Tucker says. He began

615-765-1565



lifting weights and working out to increase his speed and agility. He hit the gym before school in addition to the regular team workouts.

His parents, Peter and Paula Kyne, recognized Tucker's passion for football and his desire to improve and signed him up with a trainer in Murfreesboro.

Now, with dreams of playing at the collegiate level, Tucker hopes to stay close enough to home so his parents and other family members can attend games. He has offers from several nearby colleges, including Tennessee Technological University and Tennessee State University.



Photos by Bridget Simmons of Cannon Sports



TOP AND ABOVE: Tucker Kyne rushed for 672 yards, seven touchdowns and 33 receptions in his senior season with the Lions.

LEFT: DTC Communications' Justin Mauldin, from left, presented Football Player of the Year honors to Tucker Kyne and Cannon County High School Football Coach Matt Daniel.

Players like Tucker are a coach's dream, Matt says. "He's very coachable, he puts his team before himself, and his teammates rely on him," he says. "He always has a smile, and you can't help but smile back."

Tucker has worked hard academically as well, and was chosen as a member of the DTC All-Star football team in 2023, which is based on academics as well as ability. He was also one of 100 players from across the state chosen to play in the Tennessee All-Star game in December.

In honor of being chosen as the 2023 DTC Football Player of the Year, DTC presented Tucker with a trophy and Cannon County High School with \$500.

"DTC does such a great job of covering sports in our communities," Matt says. "The production quality is second to none, and it feels like a Saturday, college-level game." 📺

When one pot hits the spot

Simple, delicious and easy

Meals you can make in one pot are ideal for today's busy cooks for two reasons. For starters, little time is wasted going from one pot to another, making sure everything is cooking together nicely. Secondly, you're cooking in one pot, so there's minimal cleanup.

As the name implies, one-pot meals are just that. They are the secret to getting dinner on the table in a jiffy. Generally, the vegetables and protein are cooked together in the same pot. If any other side dishes are needed, it's usually nothing more than a green salad with buttery croutons or a nice piece of crusty bread.

One-pot meals are filled with comfort, something we all yearn for like a big, cozy blanket on a chilly winter's night.



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is a native of
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Tennessee.**

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

CHEESEBURGER PASTA

This is the perfect easy wintertime one-pot meal. It's like having a cheeseburger and spaghetti at the same time, and the kids will love it!

- 1 yellow onion
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 pound ground beef
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 2 cups beef broth
- 8 ounces pasta shells, uncooked
- 4 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 tablespoons pickle relish
- 2 green onions, sliced

Finely dice the onion. Add the onion, olive oil and ground beef to a large deep skillet, and saute over medium heat until the beef is fully browned and the onion is soft and translucent. Drain off any excess fat, if needed.

Add the flour to the skillet and continue

to stir and cook for 1 minute more. The flour will begin to coat the bottom of the skillet. Be careful not to let the flour burn.

Add the tomato sauce and beef broth to the skillet and stir to dissolve the flour off the bottom of the skillet.

Add the uncooked pasta to the skillet and stir to combine. The liquid in the skillet may not fully cover the pasta, but that is OK.

Place a lid on the skillet, turn the heat up to medium-high, and let the liquid come up to a boil. Once it reaches a boil, give it a quick stir to loosen any pasta from the bottom of the skillet. Replace the lid, and turn the heat down to low. Let the pasta simmer, stirring occasionally (always replacing the lid), for about 10 minutes, or until the pasta is tender and the sauce has thickened. Turn off the heat.

Add the shredded cheddar to the skillet and stir until it has melted into the sauce. Stir the relish into the sauce, then top with sliced green onions. Serve warm.



FIVE-HOUR BEEF STEW

Delicious smells will fill your home as this stew cooks slowly in the oven.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 1/2 pounds chuck roast, cut into bite-size pieces 1 cup celery, chunked 4 carrots, chunked 2-3 medium potatoes, chunked 1 onion, sliced or large dice 1/2 cup fresh bread crumbs 1 large can tomatoes 1 cup red wine, optional 1 tablespoon salt 2 tablespoons sugar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-5 tablespoons minute tapioca 2-3 generous splashes of Worcestershire sauce |
|---|---|

Do not brown the meat. Combine all ingredients in a large baking dish with a tight-fitting lid or cover securely with foil. Bake in a 250 F oven for 5-6 hours. Do not hurry this stew. The slow oven is the key to success.



ONE-PAN CHICKEN PASTA

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1/4 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon minced garlic, divided
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 1/2 cups crushed tomatoes
- 8 ounces penne pasta
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large broiler-safe skillet over medium-high heat. Add panko and 1 teaspoon garlic. Cook, stirring, until the panko is golden brown, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl and set aside. Wipe out the pan.

Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil in the pan over medium-high heat. Add chicken, Italian seasoning, salt and the



remaining 1 tablespoon garlic. Cook, stirring frequently, until the chicken is no longer pink on the outside, about 2 minutes. Add broth, tomatoes and penne. Bring to a boil and cook, uncovered, stirring frequently, until the penne is cooked and the sauce has reduced and thickened, 15 to 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, position an oven rack in the upper third of the oven. Preheat the broiler to high. When the pasta is cooked, sprinkle mozzarella over the penne mixture. Place the pan under the broiler. Broil until the mozzarella is bubbling and beginning to brown, about 1 minute. Top with the panko mixture, Parmesan and basil.



ONE-POT PRIMAVERA

- 4 skin-on, bone-in chicken thighs
- 1 pound small red potatoes, halved
- 1 pound Brussels sprouts, trimmed
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, or as needed
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 (1-ounce) package of ranch dressing mix
- 6 slices bacon, chopped

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place chicken thighs in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish.

Toss potatoes, Brussels sprouts and garlic together with olive oil in a bowl until vegetables are lightly coated. Add vegetables around and between chicken thighs in the baking dish. Season with salt, pepper and thyme. Evenly pour the entire packet of ranch seasoning over the chicken and vegetables. Sprinkle chopped bacon on top.

Bake until chicken is no longer pink at the bone and the juices run clear, 30 to 35 minutes. An instant-read thermometer inserted near the bone should read 165 F.

Set an oven rack about 6 inches from the heat source and preheat the oven's broiler. Place the baking dish under the broiler, and cook until chicken skin becomes golden brown and crisp, 2 to 3 minutes. 🍴



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