

CONNECTION



DTC Player of the Year

Blake Waldorf
wins honor

MUSIC
GRANT

LOYAL
MEMBERS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

An Ongoing Mission

NTCA supports rural broadband

As we begin a new year, our NTCA members are on my mind, specifically how they do so much to create a better tomorrow by deploying and sustaining reliable broadband networks that connect rural communities to the world.

We've come a long way since the creation of NTCA in 1954, and I wanted to start 2025 with a reminder—or possibly an introduction—to who we are and how we serve the people who work so hard for you.

We represent about 850 independent, family-owned and community-based rural telecommunications companies. Without NTCA members, many communities would continue to be left behind by larger, national internet providers. So, we strive to advance policies that help these companies close the digital divide. This includes supporting programs like the Universal Service Fund, which helps rural consumers get and stay connected to high-quality, affordable internet.

I'm proud to note how well our NTCA members do their jobs. The robust and reliable broadband they provide enables businesses to connect to customers, doctors to patients and teachers to students. And the work they do in their communities goes beyond providing internet service. Many host digital literacy classes, sponsor STEM and esports initiatives at schools, support economic development initiatives and so much more.

In short, NTCA members are dedicated to improving the communities they serve.

As we enter a new year, we continue to support our members as they work to make your lives the best they can be. 🗨️

HIDDEN CONNECTIONS

BROADBAND NETWORKS SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

Your fast, reliable internet connection connects you to the internet, bringing you a seemingly endless number of services. Whether you enjoy streaming entertainment, gaming, video calls and more, this essential service adapts to your needs.



Did you know, however, that same network may also underpin a range of other services essential to your community? While the specifics may vary from place to place, fast internet networks create a foundation for rural America.



PUBLIC SAFETY

The communications systems serving first responders often rely on broadband-speed internet.



EDUCATION

School systems send large amounts of data and offer classrooms access to online resources.



GOVERNMENT

From informational websites and apps to the computer networks and databases needed to operate, local governments require excellent connectivity.



HEALTH CARE

Whether transmitting medical records or for telehealth visits, medical providers increasingly rely on digital tools.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Fast broadband networks provide a community resource attractive to both businesses and homebuyers, creating a keystone for growth.

A Safe Place to Stay

Isaiah House provides comfort for foster children



Photo courtesy of Corey Paulson

Television host Mike Rowe, center, surprises Isaiah 117 House co-founder Ronda Paulson and her family for a taping of his Facebook show “Returning the Favor.”

Story by MELANIE JONES

When Ronda and Corey Paulson met their first foster child at the back door of the Carter County, Tennessee, Department of Children’s Services, he was wearing too-small pajamas. The clothes he was wearing when he was removed from his unsuitable home were filthy, and DCS was unable to provide any that fit him properly.

The 9-month-old was fortunate the couple could come get him quickly. Some foster children spend hours—if not days—at overwhelmed and understaffed DCS offices, sometimes sleeping on the floor.

That situation has begun to change, however, thanks to a far-reaching program the Paulsons were inspired to establish in 2018. Thanks to word of mouth and a 2020 feature by “Dirty Jobs” host Mike Rowe on his Facebook page, their effort is spreading nationwide.

When the couple took the baby boy, Isaiah, home they lavished him with love and everything else an infant could need. But the Paulsons couldn’t stop thinking about something they learned in their

foster-parenting classes—the DCS office is usually the only place for a child to go on removal day.

They thought of little Isaiah. And they started studying the Bible’s book of Isaiah, including part of one verse in particular, Isaiah 1:17, which calls on people to “take up the cause of the fatherless.”

Then they thought, “What if there was a home?” Corey says.

BUILDING A MOVEMENT

So, that’s what they set out to create. Ronda put together a board and worked with the local DCS office to come up with a workable concept. They raised money, bought a house and renovated it to DCS specifications. They painted the door red, and they called it Isaiah 117 House.

The house provides space for DCS workers who now bring children there instead of an office building. Children and teens have access to baths and showers. They get brand-new clean clothes and

toys. They have beds to sleep in if the placement takes more than a few hours. Volunteers cook them nutritious meals and comfort food.

That was 2018, and it was supposed to be one and done. “Clearly, we’ve learned that God had other plans,” Corey says.

Word of mouth spread. Soon neighboring Tennessee counties wanted their own Isaiah 117 Houses. Then, in 2020, Ronda and the Isaiah 117 House were featured on Mike Rowe’s Facebook show “Returning the Favor.” Two million people saw that episode on March 9, 2020. Then the calls really started coming in. Corey says they heard from people in 41 states and four countries wanting to start their own Isaiah 117 Houses. Now about 30 are open and more are in the works across 12 states.

“On March 13, the world shut down,” Corey says of the COVID-19 pandemic. “But our mission kept growing. We say Mike Rowe and Jesus are building houses for children.” 📺

LEARN MORE

Interested in learning more about Isaiah 117 House or how to establish one in your area? Visit isaiah117house.com.

Necessary Ending

As we step into a new year, many of us reflect on the past and look toward the future with fresh hope and optimism. January 1 may simply be the day after December 31, but there's something about the turning of the calendar that feels significant—a natural opportunity to consider where we've been and where we're headed. Time marches on relentlessly. Both in our personal lives and in business, it's essential to acknowledge this forward momentum. We can't slow it down or stop it, but we can choose how we respond.



CHRIS TOWNSON
Chief Executive Officer

At DTC Communications, we embrace this passage of time with a sense of purpose, guided by our commitment to evolve as technology advances and our members' and customers' needs change. Since our founding in 1951 as DeKalb Telephone Cooperative, our mission has been to connect our community. Over the decades, we've gone from offering basic telephone service to delivering advanced broadband solutions that are vital in today's digital world. This transformation reflects not only technological progress but also our dedication to meeting the needs of each era.

In his book "Necessary Endings," Dr. Henry Cloud writes about the importance of knowing when to let go of the old to make room for the new. He argues that progress often depends on ending certain things to create space for new growth. For DTC, this concept has been instrumental in our journey. We've had to let go of outdated technology and processes to embrace new solutions that keep our communities connected in more meaningful ways. These changes are not merely technical upgrades. They represent our ongoing commitment to enhance the lives of the people we serve.

As technology continues to reshape the world around us, DTC is focused on ensuring our members and communities have access to reliable, state-of-the-art connectivity that enables them to engage in work, education, health care and connection in ways that weren't possible just a few years ago. While some things in life may feel uncertain, our dedication to this mission remains steadfast.

Like Dr. Cloud's reflections on the necessity of endings and new beginnings, DTC recognizes that each phase of our growth is part of a continuous journey. With every new year, DTC renews its commitment to adapt and innovate, driven by the belief that connectivity is fundamental to opportunity, growth and the quality of life for our members.

As we move forward into the new year, let's embrace both the opportunities and the challenges that come with change. DTC Communications is excited to help make those transitions a little easier, a little faster and a lot more meaningful for everyone we serve.

May God bless you all in 2025 and beyond. 📧

The DTC Connection is published by DTC Communications, © 2025. It is distributed without charge to all members of the cooperative.



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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Blake Waldorf, a sophomore at Watertown High School, earned the title of DTC Football Player of the Year. See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of DTC

HELP AFTER HURRICANE HELENE

DTC Communications sent two teams to North Carolina in October to help sister cooperative SkyLine/SkyBest get back up and running after flooding from Hurricane Helene wiped out much of its service area. Many in the region were without communication until teams restored phone and broadband lines.

"Our guys are the best," CEO Chris Townson says. "They volunteer when our neighbors need it the most. I am thankful for their hard work. I am also thankful for our Board of Directors for their leadership in allowing us to serve others."



DTC team members who answered the call to help are, from left, Peyton Taylor, Brady Smith, Caleb Anderson, Ethan Beasley, Adam Cunningham and Austin Miller.

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 2-6, the all-expenses-paid trip provides students from rural areas with a firsthand look at the telecommunications industry, legislative and governmental processes and historical sites.

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. Applicants must maintain an overall B average, be claimed as a dependent on the tax return of a DTC member or its affiliate and receive telecommunications service from DTC or its affiliate.

Applicants must submit a 500- to 1,000-word essay investigating the economic impact on local communities of the Tennessee Economic and Community Development grants DTC Communications was awarded. Essays will be judged on clarity, projection of ideas, depth, originality, organization, references and grammar.

The application, typed essay, grade transcript and resume of academic achievements and honors, leadership, extracurricular and community activities and work experience must be submitted to Anita Patrick at the email below by close of business on Feb. 14.

For questions, call 615-464-2271 or email apatrick@staff-dtc.com.

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Foundation for Rural Service Scholarship

DTC is pleased to partner with NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association to award a \$2,000 Foundation for Rural Service Scholarship to an eligible senior. DTC Communications will add \$500 for a total award of \$2,500. Applications are available through guidance counselors or at frs.org. The deadline is Feb. 14.

DTC Scholarship

DTC is accepting applications for the DTC Scholarship in Memory of McAllen Foutch. High school seniors who are members of DTC, or whose parents or guardians are members, are eligible. Applications are available at dtccom.net or in guidance counselors' offices of local high schools. Deliver applications by Feb. 14 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

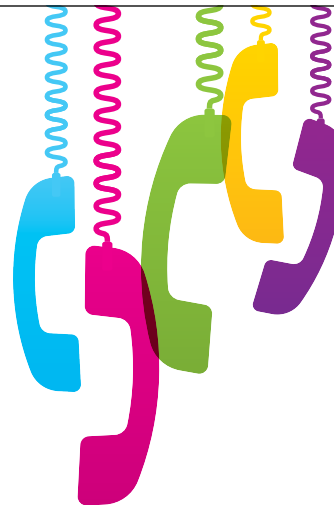
James L. Bass Legal Scholarship

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. James helped secure funds for rural telephone systems. He was pivotal in the creation of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association. The scholarship will be at least \$5,000. Apply online at frs.org by Feb. 14.



FIND YOUR NUMBER!

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 through this publication.



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

Roll Out the Red Carpet

Fans play key role in film festivals' success

Story by KATHY DENES

The new year brings film fans front-row access to the latest—possibly greatest—in movie entertainment. Surprising plot twists, emotional turbulence, enlightenment, wild outdoor adventures, horror, invasions from space and even close encounters with celebrities are all in store. The 2025 film festivals are ready for their close-up.

These festivals in communities large and small offer great destinations. There's something for everyone. For example, the Lookout Wild Film Festival is a staple in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

“Our festival has always been about the films, but to thank our audience, we’re

trying to bring in more of the festival aspect,” says Steve Rogers, event director for Lookout Wild Film Festival. “It’s about creating a welcoming and inclusive festival culture. You get to be in a room where every person around you shares a love for adventure and the craft of storytelling. Exploring amazing locations, cheering for stunning visuals and tearing up at touching moments become shared experiences that stay with you long after the credits roll.”

FAN FOCUS

Almost every film festival relies on fan participation. Screenings and special events are typically open to the public.

Fans at film festivals often rub elbows with industry insiders, filmmakers and actors as they get an inside look at the movies and topics that will shape the entertainment scene in the coming year. They also get to see impactful projects that



Festivalgoers pack a Chattanooga venue for the Lookout Wild Film Festival.

REGIONAL FESTIVAL FARE

The Lookout Wild Film Festival, Chattanooga, Tennessee: The festival season in the Southeast starts out on the wild side when this returns to Chattanooga, Jan. 16-19, for its 13th year. The festival welcomes guests to its new venue, The Signal at the historic Choo Choo complex, to screen films capturing the thrill of outdoor adventures and the importance of environmental conservation. Live music is thrown in for good measure before screening sessions and during intermissions. Find details on the festival focused on "wild places and the people they inspire" at lwff.org.

The Chattanooga Film Festival, named after its host city: The festival is June 21-28 at the historic Read House. The films are a treat for fans of horror, and the festival touts itself as a summer camp for cinephiles. Actor and producer Elijah Wood won the Moonstruck MoonPie Eating Contest back in 2015.

The Southern Fried Film Festival, Huntsville, Alabama: This festival combines independent film, music and technology.

The Lindsey Film Fest, Florence, Alabama: The University of North Alabama hosts the Lindsey Film Fest, Feb. 27 to March 1. Created in 1988 by George "Goober" Lindsey of "Andy Griffith Show" fame, the festival is free.

The Beaufort International Film Festival, Beaufort, South Carolina: The festival returns Feb. 18-23 for its 19th run. Last year fans saw actor Gary Sinise receive the Pat Conroy Lifetime Achievement Award as the festival celebrated the 30th anniversary of "Forrest Gump." Beaufort served as a backdrop for the film.

Cosmic Holler Film Fest, Ashland, Kentucky: An out-of-this-world experience is guaranteed. This one-day fall film festival at the Paramount Arts Center is a celebration of all things science fiction. Last year's festival kicked off with a visit from Capt. Kirk himself, William Shatner.

may never make it to their neighborhood theaters. But beyond that, fans meet people with similar interests, making the festivals social events involving much more than just cramming in as many screenings as possible.

Finding a great festival to attend is easy—they are plentiful. One great resource for starting your search is filmfreeway.com.

HIT THE MARK

A festival's website is the best resource to find everything from ticket availability to screenings info, schedules, parking and even lodging. Online ticket sales for the public often start well in advance, and popular festivals can sell out quickly.

A great option for the adventurous film buff is to sign up as a festival volunteer. Many festivals are staffed by volunteers, and even the largest festivals rely heavily on volunteer workers. Duties range from greeting patrons and taking tickets to helping at evening parties. Volunteers often reap the rewards such as free admission and sometimes even access to industry professionals.

Another option is to become a member of the organization putting on a festival, which can bring year-round benefits. Some festivals also offer members the option of in-home streaming of films throughout the year, while others have affiliations that provide discounts at movie theaters throughout the country.

Once at the festivals, attendees can easily navigate their many options through schedules continually updated on the event's website or even through an app. Take, for example, the Sidewalk Film Festival, which will take over the Historic Theatre District in downtown Birmingham, Alabama, Aug. 18-24. Spread across about a dozen venues, it offers more than 200 film screenings, plus educational and Q&A sessions. To help attendees stay on track, the festival's website, sidewalkfest.com, has maps and an interactive schedule. 📱



Outdoor adventure gets top billing at the Lookout Wild Film Festival.

Photos courtesy of LWFF

For the Love of the Game

Watertown's Blake Waldorf is DTC Football Player of the Year

Story by MELANIE JONES

Ask DTC Communications Football Player of the Year Blake Waldorf why he loves the sport so much and his answer is simple: "It was born in me."

The Watertown High School sophomore quarterback, who first took the field when he was 5, followed his older brothers, Brady and Braxton, to play for the Purple Tigers.

Coach Gavin Webster credits Blake's family support and his natural abilities for giving him an edge. "He's got a great support cast around him," the coach says. "He's eager to learn, he's a natural leader and fun to coach." The young quarterback's mom, Trina Hammondtree, and dad, Nathan Waldorf, are at every game, along with the rest of the family.

As DTC Player of the Year, Blake receives a trophy from DTC, and in his honor, Watertown High School wins \$500.

Blake says he isn't sure whether this season's game against Sequatchie County or Community was his favorite. "I completed a lot of passes and was consistent in both," he says. But his favorite play of the year is clear. "I'd say when I threw the game-winning touchdown against Grundy County."

That was a highlight of the 3-8 season for a team with much room for improvement, Blake says. "It wasn't what we wanted," he says. "But we just have to work hard and come back better."

And working hard is what he and his teammates are all about. "We're a brotherhood," he says. "We're always just working to improve."

Blake's love of football has only grown through the years. "I've been playing all my life," he says, without much exaggeration. In that time, the teen has been able to avoid serious injuries. "I've been

shaken up a little bit," he says, but nothing serious.

Like family, faith is important to Blake. He plans activities around church on Sundays and says God inspires him on the football field, as well. "It drives me to keep going, knowing I can do all things through him."

As a sophomore, Blake hasn't begun talking with college coaches yet, but he hopes to major in business and play football at the University of Tennessee. With a 4.3 grade point average, he's keeping up the grades to make that happen.

His intelligence, talent and love of the game have certainly made an impression on his current coach.

"He tries to soak up as much as he can," Gavin says. "He's very passionate about the game."

And that will serve him well into the future. ☑

Photo courtesy of DTC



615-286-2221

DTC Communications' Justin Mauldin, right, presents a check for \$500 to Watertown High School football coach Gavin Webster, left, and DTC Football Player of the Year Blake Waldorf.

Photo courtesy of George Page/Main Street Media of Tennessee



Blake runs with the ball during a 2024 game.

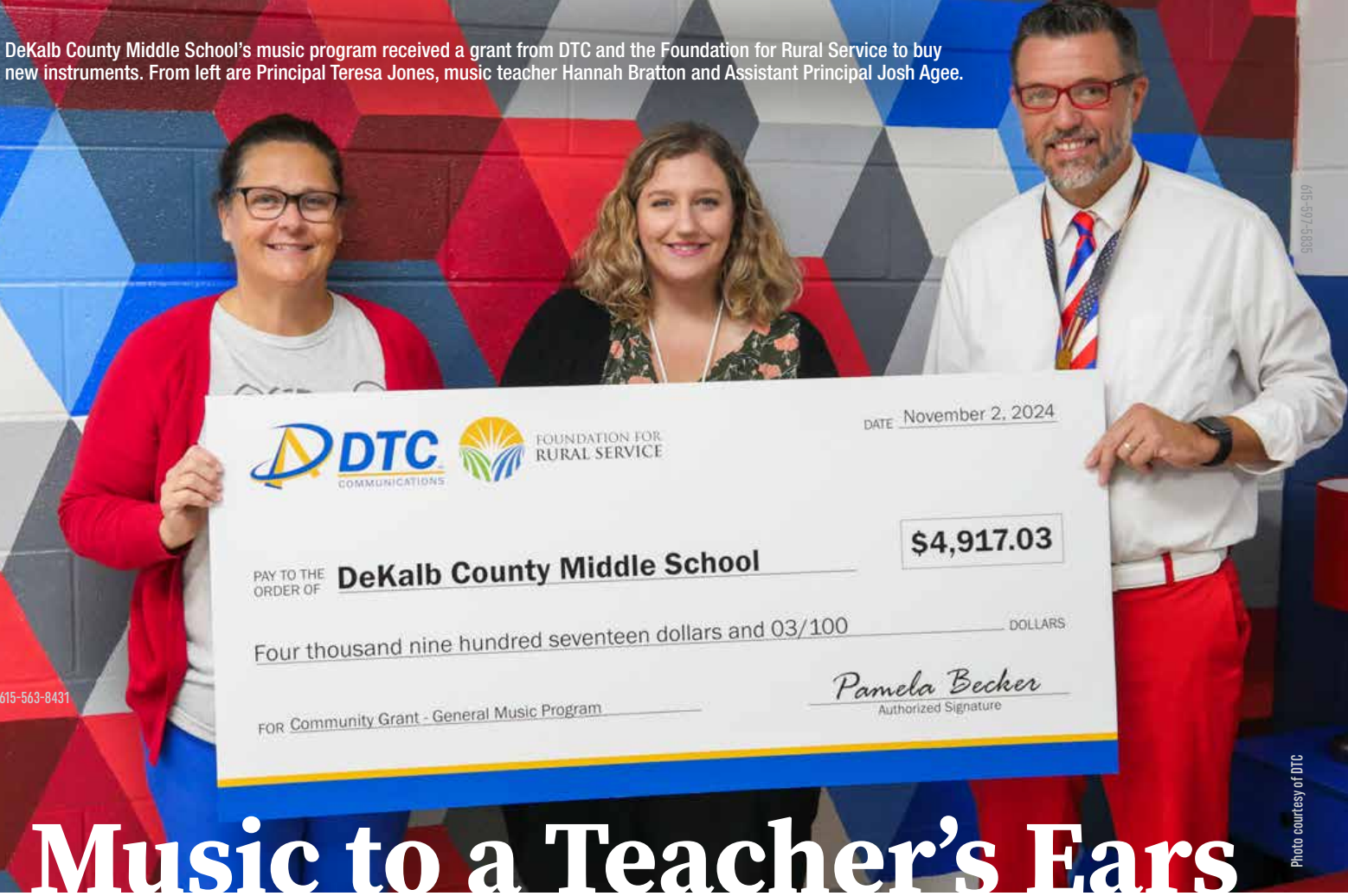
Photo courtesy of DTC



Blake says he was born into football.

615-273-3448

DeKalb County Middle School's music program received a grant from DTC and the Foundation for Rural Service to buy new instruments. From left are Principal Teresa Jones, music teacher Hannah Bratton and Assistant Principal Josh Agee.



615-563-8431

5835-L05-919

Photo courtesy of DTC

Music to a Teacher's Ears

DTC, FRS Foundation award grant to middle school

Story by MELANIE JONES

What would life be like without music? No percussion sounding out the rhythm. No brass and woodwinds carrying the tune. No strings helping the sound soar.

The students at DeKalb County Middle School won't have to find out, thanks to a \$4,917.03 grant from DTC Communications and the Foundation for Rural Service. Music teacher Hannah Bratton was awarded the grant to buy new classroom instruments and instructional materials to enhance the school's music education resources.

ENCOURAGING BUDDING MUSICIANS

When Hannah took the job at the middle school this year, there weren't enough instruments to go around. She borrowed some from the high school, but that still wasn't enough. "Every student has an instrument," she says. "Every student has a part."

The kids were thrilled when they heard the music program won the grant. "I think the thing they're most excited about are xylophones," Hannah says. Xylophones have wooden bars that range from a soprano all the way to a bass bar, which means the instrument can get big. "To the kids, that's exciting."

The instruments, however, won't be limited to xylophones. "I just can't wait to see their faces when they walk in and there's an entire instrumentarium," she says.

DTC Communications is almost as excited to provide the grant as the children are to receive it. "At DTC Communications, we believe that investing in our local schools and students enriches our entire community," CEO Chris Townson says. "This partnership with FRS reflects our shared commitment to empowering young learners to explore the arts and reach their full potential."

All 600 students at the middle school go through the general music education class, so the grant will touch many young lives, allowing them to learn rhythm, how to understand and read music and how to write their own songs.

The middle school program focuses mostly on folk music, and Appalachian folk music at that, so parents may hear students singing and performing songs they remember from their childhoods like "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" and "Skip to My Lou."

"Folk music is important because it's who we are, not just as Tennesseans but as a nation. The music that built our country was folk music," Hannah says. "It was music that their ancestors sang that they brought over here from England, Scotland, Africa. It's all important. It's part of who we are. It's basically the history of us." 📌

A SMOLDERING SITUATION

Volunteer fire departments face dwindling numbers, aging workforce



Illustration by Adobe Stock

Story by MELANIE JONES and JEN CALHOUN

When a crisis strikes in a rural community, the first people on the scene are usually friends and neighbors who sacrifice their time and safety because they want to help, not to draw a paycheck. They put out the fires. They drive the rescue vehicles. They save lives.

According to the National Volunteer Fire Council, nearly 19,000 of the nation's 29,452 fire departments are all-volunteer, and the number of volunteers has been shrinking. In 2020, the number of volunteer firefighters reached a record low. On top of that, more than half of those volunteers in smaller departments are aged 40 or older, and 34% are 50 and older.

That doesn't mean older firefighters can't get the job done, says Steve Hirsch, NVFC chairman. At 62, Steve is the training officer of the fire department in Sheridan County, Kansas. He recalls a man once asking him the age of the oldest firefighter in his department. He told the man 93. The man laughed and said, "No, I mean the age of your oldest firefighter that's still responding to calls." The man was shocked when Steve again replied, "93."

"But you know, that was out of a station that might get one or two calls a year," he said. "He'd grown up in that area his entire life. He knew where every hole and every gate was in his neighborhood. He wasn't out there pulling hose or doing entry, but he was able to drive a pickup. It worked out nice."

A HEALTHY MIX

Steve doesn't believe older firefighters are a bad thing. He sees the importance of having all ages.

"We can't let the fire department get all old," he says. "Nothing wrong with a good mix. That's pretty important. But we still have to have young people to get out there and do the work. Is there a safety factor in having everybody that's older? Probably, because

the older we get, the more likely we are to have heart attacks and other health issues."

Depending on the state, county or even the fire district, firefighters may not have to meet physical requirements. "A lot of places, they're hard up enough for people that if you've got a pulse, you're probably qualified," Steve says.

Not all volunteer fire departments are having trouble recruiting younger volunteers, however. The Vincent Volunteer Fire Department in Owsley County, Kentucky, maintains a squad of 17 or 18 members between the ages of 25 and 55. That's not too bad for a small, unincorporated community in a county of about 4,000 people.

"It's hard to find younger people, because a lot of times, the tradition just doesn't carry," says Capt. Billy Long, who heads the department. "There's just not a lot of involvement with it. But here lately, we've had a lot more involvement with the community. It's been good this past five, six, seven months."

BENEFITS AND SACRIFICES

Billy, who is 41, understands the benefits and the difficulties of becoming a volunteer firefighter. On the one hand, the job is rewarding, especially in a small town like Vincent. "You get to know everybody," he says. "Also, the involvement—it can open up other doors. I've been a volunteer firefighter since 2002, and I've also been an EMT for 12-13 years now."

But it's also a tough, time-consuming job. "I guess a lot of it is the time, the effort, the training," Billy says. "You've got to attend training every year. It's a lot of effort to do something without pay."

Steve says his best recruitment tool is his existing firefighters. He also says his department is probably the only one in a

“A lot of places, they're hard up enough for people that if you've got a pulse, you're probably qualified.”

—Steve Hirsch, chairman of the National Volunteer Fire Council

Photo courtesy of Steve Hirsch



National Volunteer Fire Council Chairman Steve Hirsch has been training firefighters for 25 years.

Photo by Adobe Stock/Teerapong23

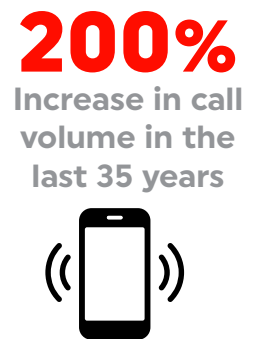
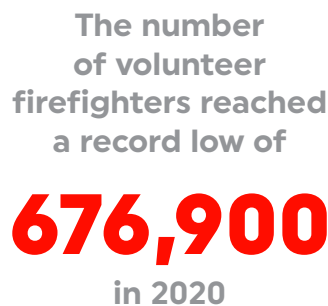


multicounty region that has an aerial ladder. Park that on the street, and people start coming in. Being active on social media is a good way to recruit younger people, he says. But having a good attitude is a big part of it.

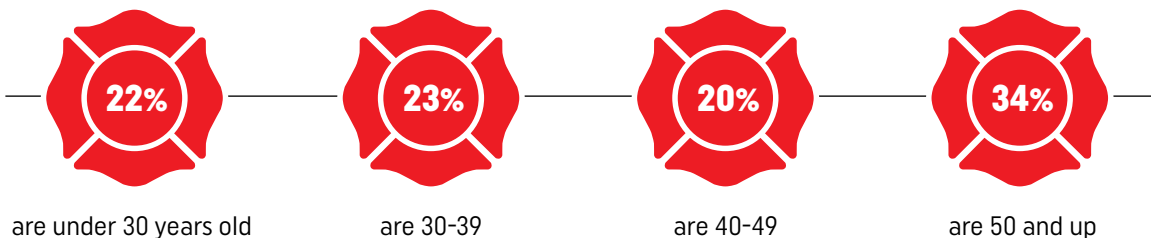
He hears a lot of negative comments about the younger generation, how they're always on their phones. “What I find is, most of the time, they're checking to make sure that I know what I'm talking about, and that's OK,” Steve says.

It's important to keep recruiting, he says, because we can't let the fire departments die.

“What is a community going to do when they don't have a fire department?” he says. “That's probably the newest, biggest building in that town of 80-some people. People use that fire station for all sorts of events in the community. A lot of our small towns have lost their school, they've lost their grocery store. A lot of them have lost their banks. Some of them don't have cafes anymore. So that fire department becomes the glue that binds that community together. And, you know, you lose one more glob of glue, and pretty soon, things just fall apart.” 📱



The volunteer fire service is an aging population. In communities under 2,500:



Source: National Volunteer Fire Council

FROM PAST TO

DTC celebrates longtime members

Story by MELANIE JONES

Hollis Blair doesn't remember a time without a telephone, but he knows plenty about the challenges and benefits of operating a telephone system. In 1922, Hollis' parents bought a telephone system and operated it for their community

War I, when he worked for Southern Continental, which built a telephone line all the way up to Somerset, Kentucky. "They worked six days a week and camped as they went," Hollis says. They set 100-foot poles without the use of cranes on that project. "On Sundays, he said they didn't have anything to do, so they'd climb those poles and see who could get back to the ground the quickest."

Southern Bell tried to buy his parents' phone operation over the years, Hollis says, but they didn't sell until the 1940s, and then not to Southern Bell. Hollis got his phone line through DTC in the 1950s. When he had a plant manager's job in the late 1970s, early '80s, he'd receive phone calls all hours of the night. "The first two numbers in the emergency directory were mine," he says. "Thank goodness, I was one who could go to sleep anywhere, any time. And when they'd call, I'd go right back to sleep."

At 91, Hollis is retired and likes to travel, driving to Chattanooga, Nashville and Kentucky to visit relatives or just to check out his favorite ice cream spot.

His family is spread out, so when he's not visiting relatives in



Hollis Blair, left, talks with DTC CEO Chris Townson.

out of their home. "The switchboard was right there in the house," he says.

The Blair family's experience illustrates the challenges of providing vital communications services to rural communities and underscores the importance of DTC's creation in 1951. Many members have had DTC's service for more than 50 years and can offer a glimpse of earlier times and the benefits of the co-op.

THE EARLY DAYS OF PHONE SERVICE

Hollis has vivid childhood memories about telephone poles. "Daddy bought a train carload of creosote poles," he says. "The tallest ones they had at that time were 30 feet high. Oh, my goodness! They put one beside the house. It was just a 20-foot pole. And I've seen Daddy walk right up a pole," Hollis says. His dad didn't use a safety belt when climbing poles.

Hollis' dad told him stories about the days before World



Dorothy Miller, left, has been a member of DTC Communications since 1966. She attends the luncheon with her daughter, Patsy Hirston.

PRESENT

person, he likes to use his DTC phone service to catch up with his kids and grandkids, who have successful careers. He likes to talk on the phone to say how proud he is of the many engineers, doctors and business owners in the family.

CONNECTING FAMILIES

Woody Adcock and his wife, Carolyn, got phone service through DTC for the first time in 1962. Woody was about 20 years old at the time, and although he says he wasn't too interested in having a phone in the house Carolyn wanted one, and he wanted to make her happy.

The biggest change in those 62 years of service? "We finally got rid of those party lines," he says of the phone lines formerly shared by customers. Party lines were a notorious source of gossip back in the day. "But when I was on a party line, it wasn't too bad. It was just me and my wife and her grandparents," Woody says. "I don't remember exactly when it was that we got rid of those, '63 or '64, something like that the best I remember."

Having a phone in married life may have been important to Carolyn because her family had one through DTC as early as the 1950s. Her dad was in real estate, she says, so it was important for him to have a phone. Business was conducted on a private line, but Carolyn remembers having a party line, too. "I never eavesdropped on a call," she says, "but Mother may have a time or two."

Phone service has been convenient, Woody says, though he doesn't recall ever using it for an emergency. "I got a lot of good news over the phone that wasn't true, about winning all these sweepstakes, you know," he jokes.

Carolyn and Woody now both have cellphones, but they've kept their landline. "I talk on it more than I do the cellphone," Carolyn says.

The Adcocks say their DTC service has been great over the years. "Haven't had a lot of trouble with it," Woody says, "but what little I have had, they've taken care of it."

Hollis and the Adcocks all enjoyed the luncheon DTC held in October to honor members who have been part of the cooperative for 50 or more years. "I saw a lot of people I hardly ever run into," Woody says. "Some of them you know a long time and some of them I hadn't known too long."



Carolyn Adcock says her husband, Woody, loves his DTC cap.

DTC staff volunteered to serve lunch to about 200 people in appreciation for their loyalty and commitment to the cooperative.

"We like to thank our longtime members," DTC CEO Chris Townson says. "They helped us lay the groundwork for the future. It's because of them we can offer fiber service to the next generation." 📞



All the Comforts of Home

Classic trio's widespread appeal endures

The definition of comfort food depends on your region. In the Midwest, it might be a bubbly hot dish just pulled from the oven. In the Southwest, comfort may come in the form of a steaming bowl of chili, while Southerners might look toward biscuits and gravy with a side of grits.

Three simple dishes, however, bring together the entire culinary country—tomato soup, a gooey grilled cheese sandwich and a warm slice of apple pie with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.



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CREAMY TOMATO SOUP

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 3 cups yellow onions, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 (28-ounce) cans tomatoes
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil or
1 1/2 tablespoons dried basil, plus
more to serve
- 1 tablespoon sugar, or to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black
pepper, or to taste
- Dash of Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Heat a nonreactive pot or enameled Dutch oven over medium heat. Add butter, then add chopped onions. Sauté

10-12 minutes, stirring occasionally, until softened and golden. Add minced garlic, and sauté 1 minute until fragrant.

Add crushed tomatoes with their juice, chicken stock, chopped basil, sugar, pepper and a dash of Worcestershire. Stir and bring to a boil then reduce heat, partially cover with lid and simmer 10 minutes.

Use an immersion blender to blend the soup in the pot or transfer to a blender in batches and blend until smooth—being careful not to overfill the blender with hot liquid—then return soup to the pot over medium heat.

Add heavy cream and grated parmesan cheese and return to a simmer. Season to taste with salt and pepper, if needed, and turn off the heat.

Ladle into warm bowls, and top with more parmesan and a sprinkle of basil.



GROWN-UP GRILLED CHEESE

Makes 4 sandwiches

- 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 yellow onions, diced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme or 1/4 teaspoon dried
- 2 teaspoons fresh rosemary or 3/4 teaspoon dried, divided
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar
- 8 slices artisan sourdough bread
- Mayonnaise
- 12 ounces Gruyere cheese, grated at room temperature
- 6 ounces sharp white cheddar cheese, grated at room temperature
- 4 thin slices Muenster cheese, at room temperature

Add 1 1/2 tablespoons butter and olive oil to a skillet and heat over medium-low heat. Add diced onions, salt, pepper, fresh thyme and 1 teaspoon of fresh rosemary to the hot skillet and saute about 10 minutes, stirring often, until onions are soft and

starting to brown. Stir brown sugar into the onions and cook another minute. Transfer onions to a plate.

For each sandwich: Spread one side of two pieces of bread with a little bit of mayonnaise.

To the same skillet, add remaining butter and rosemary and heat over medium heat. Add both pieces of mayonnaise-coated bread, mayonnaise side down, and cook until bread is golden brown and crunchy, 2-3 minutes.

As soon as you add the bread to the skillet, add a bit of cheese to the top of each piece. Once it starts to melt a little, sprinkle a couple tablespoons of the caramelized onions over the top of one of the pieces of bread.

When the bread is golden brown, sandwich the pieces of bread together and cook on low heat until the cheese is fully melted. Transfer to a plate and repeat with remaining slices of bread and ingredients.

GRANDMA'S SIMPLE APPLE PIE

- 1 double-crust pie pastry
 - 1 large egg, beaten
- Filling:**
- 6-7 cups apples, about 2 pounds
 - 1 tablespoon lemon juice

- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg



Preheat the oven to 425 F. Peel the apples and cut them into quarters. Remove the core and slice the apples 1/4-inch thick.


In a large bowl, combine the apple slices with lemon juice, sugar, flour, cinnamon and nutmeg. Toss apple mixture well and set aside.

Roll out half of the pastry dough into a 12-inch circle. Line a 9-inch pie plate with the dough and fill it with the apple mixture.

Roll out the remaining dough and cover the apple filling. Pinch the edges to seal, trimming any excess. Style the edges as desired by crimping or pressing with a fork.

Cut four to five slits on top of the crust to allow the steam to release. Whisk the egg with 2 teaspoons of water or milk and brush over the crust.

Bake at 425 F for 15 minutes, then reduce the temperature to 375 F and continue baking for another 35-40 minutes or until the crust is golden and the apples are tender.

Remove from the oven and let rest for at least 30 minutes before serving. Serve with vanilla ice cream, if desired. 



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