

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021



VTX1 Companies

# COMPASS

VOL. 2, NO. 1

## ANIMAL ADVOCATES

Vet clinic cares for  
creatures big and small

## VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS

Broadband keeps San  
Perlita students learning

## KEEP THE RHYTHM

Wireless internet connects  
musical creators



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## To expand broadband access, we must protect our supply chains

We at NTCA are encouraged to see rural broadband take center stage as people talk about how to improve our nation’s infrastructure. While grappling with a pandemic, more people than ever — especially in Washington, D.C., and in the policy arena — are realizing that robust and reliable broadband is essential for people to work and learn from home and for our country to move forward. It has been encouraging to see federal and state resources being put toward addressing gaps in broadband coverage.

However, the job is only beginning when the funds start to flow. While NTCA member companies are eager to keep building broadband networks, lead times for fulfillment of orders of telecom supplies are approaching deeply concerning levels. One member recently received a quote that projected an eight-month delay for fiber, and another was told it would take one year for fulfillment of a fiber order. We’re hearing stories of delays of several weeks or months for routers and other gear.

These supply chain delays could have real implications on American consumers — and they could present real problems when it comes to provider compliance with things like buildout deadlines and performance testing obligations.

It’s terrific that resources are being made available to ensure every American has access to sufficient broadband. But it’s going to be equally important that policy-makers pay attention to whether the supply chain can keep up and consider what steps must be taken to ensure that happens. 🗨️

# BROADBAND: Connecting your life



### Telehealth

Broadband connects you with doctors and health care services



### Work From Home

Broadband connects you with servers and applications to work remotely



### Remote Learning

Broadband connects your children with their teachers and study resources



### Shopping

Broadband connects you with grocery stores, restaurants and retailers for pickup and home delivery



### Family & Community

Broadband connects you with your people over video calls and social media



### Small Business

Broadband connects your business with customers and suppliers



How did your broadband connection help you through 2020? How will it support you in the new year? Share your story with the hashtag **#MyBroadbandStory**.



# Don't ZOOM into trouble

## Do learn the secrets to a great virtual meeting

There are some gaffes co-workers never forget. And with the likes of Zoom, GoToMeeting and FaceTime bringing business gatherings into many homes, the potential for memorable pitfalls only increases.

“Don't take your phone with you to the bathroom during a video call” should most likely be the first rule to remember for any team shifting to virtual gatherings. A quick search on YouTube will show you the wisdom of that policy.

While there's potential for unintentional blunders during video calls, the tools also offer an indispensable resource for teams. In many cases, productivity would grind to a halt without the ability to connect virtually through broadband.

### So, here are a few “Dos” and some “Don'ts” to consider before your next virtual meeting:

**DO** dress fully. A work shirt on top and running shorts or pajamas on the bottom can prove embarrassing if you forget to turn off the camera before standing up. It happens, often.

**DO** take a few minutes before the meeting to confirm you know how to turn the microphone and camera on and (likely more importantly) off in the software you're using. It's also a good policy to stay muted unless speaking.

**DON'T** leave your notifications turned on when screen sharing during a meeting. Otherwise, everyone attending might see the message from your hungry spouse regarding the takeout lunch you promised to deliver.

**DO** have a clear, detailed agenda and stick to it. The attention of participants can wander, and a well-paced plan can keep everyone focused.

**DON'T** ignore the background. People will judge you on the contents of your bookshelves. Also, if there's a forgotten not-safe-for-work bit of kitsch visible on a shelf or wall, don't expect your co-workers to spare you embarrassment. They may just enjoy the humor.

**DO** consider lighting. Everyone looks better with good lighting, and a great presentation can not only set the tone for how others perceive you but also boost your self-confidence.

**DON'T** forget to take the time before the meeting to get a glass of water or cup of coffee.



**DO** jot down any notes about points you wish to cover, and keep a pen and paper handy. Know the steps you need to take to help you be more present during the meeting, and repeat the formula every time.

**DO** remember to inform other household members you're joining a video call. More than one relative or friend has taken an unintended star turn during a serious discussion.

**DON'T** leave the cats and dogs free to wander. Disembodied voices may draw their attention, usually at the most inopportune time. While a stray tail or untimely howl might add levity to a meeting, know your audience and prepare accordingly.

**DO** remember that the most important thing of all is to laugh. Isolation and, often, stress can counterbalance the freedom of remote work. Every meeting, take a moment to appreciate your co-workers, share a joke, smile and laugh. Enjoy the virtual time together. 🗨️

**That's a formula for a great, productive meeting.**

# Resolve to master streaming TV in 2021

Each year at this time, I find myself looking ahead to the promise of the new year. Many of us will consider resolutions to improve ourselves as the calendar turns to 2021.

After the year we've all just been through, I think we could likely use a fresh sense of optimism. As admirable as it is that we will resolve to lose a little weight or get organized, it's unfortunately predictable that many of us will drop those exercise regimens or organizational systems by Spring.



**DAVE OSBORN**  
Chief Executive Officer

That's why I have suggested a resolution for many of our members that can be accomplished with very little effort.

If you are one of the roughly one in four Americans who hasn't tried streaming video service platforms like Netflix, Hulu or Amazon Prime Video, I would urge you to consider resolving to give it a try in 2021.

According to researchers at Nielsen, many mature viewers did just that in 2020. Spurred by a hunt for programming while staying home during the pandemic, these viewers account for 26% of all streaming minutes viewed, up from 19% a year ago, according to Nielsen data.

While there is a bit of a learning curve on these new platforms, the amount of content to watch On Demand is outstanding.

While Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Hulu are the dominant providers, new streaming services such as Disney +, Peacock and HBO Max have debuted in the last 18 months. Paramount +, due out this year, promises to offer an immense catalog of shows from CBS and other Viacom networks, as well as decades worth of hit movies produced by Paramount Studios. The Summer Olympics alone are expected to provide hundreds of hours of programming for NBC's Peacock.

Thanks to our continual work and maintenance of VTX1 Companies broadband network, this vast world of programming is available right in your living room via the capabilities of streaming this content over our internet service.

Here are my suggestions to begin:

- 1. Visit our [vtx1.net](http://vtx1.net) site** – You will find a banner at the top of our [vtx1.net](http://vtx1.net) site that asks "Need a Recommendation for Streaming TV Service?". By double clicking on the banner, you will be prompted to answer a few questions about your TV viewing habits. In return, a tailored solution will be proposed to you about TV Streaming service options available to you.
- 2. Start small** – Most streaming platforms offer a free trial of up to 30 days. Beyond that, basic plans for Disney +, Hulu and Netflix are priced under \$10 per month so you can try the service without a huge financial commitment.
- 3. Know your starting point** – Your TV may already have some streaming applications built in to get you started. If not, you will need a Roku, Apple TV, or Amazon's Fire TV Stick connected to your TV and Wi-Fi to get you started.
- 4. Ask for help** – Whether it's a friend, family member or one of our friendly VTX1 Support Team members, don't hesitate to reach out and ask for advice on navigating this exciting new world of streaming video.

I wish you a prosperous 2021.

Dave Osborn  
CEO, VTX1 Companies



VTX1 Companies

Phone: 800-446-2031

Hours of Operation:

- Business Offices:  
Mon.-Fri. • 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Customer Service:  
Mon.-Fri. • 8 a.m.-7 p.m.
- VTCI & Fiber Tech Support:  
Mon.-Fri. • 8 a.m.- 9 p.m., Sat.-Sun. • 10 a.m.-7 p.m.
- Wireless Tech Support:  
Mon.-Sun. • 24/7

**Raymondville Corporate Office**

881 E. Hidalgo Ave. • Raymondville, TX 78580

**Dilley Office**

1489 W. FM 117 • Dilley, TX 78017

**Falfurrias Office**

300 N. St. Mary's St. • Falfurrias, TX 78355

**George West Office**

510 Bowie St. • George West, TX 78022

**Jourdanton Office**

511 Main St. • Jourdanton, TX 78026

**Seguin Office**

3547 N. Hwy. 123 Bypass • Seguin, TX 78155  
830-379-0660

**San Antonio Office**

6884 Alamo Downs Pkwy • San Antonio, TX 78238  
888-651-6080

**Board of Directors:**

- Chief Executive Officer – Dave Osborn
- District 1 – J.T. Mayo Jr. (Port Mansfield & San Perlita)
- District 2 – George Bennack (Stillman)
- District 3 – Matthew Kiefer (Lasara)
- District 4 – Margie Pollock (Encino & Hargill) – SECRETARY
- District 5 – VACANT (San Isidro)
- District 6 – Idalia (Dolly) Villarreal (El Sauz & McCook) – PRESIDENT
- District 7 – Charles Fred Hillje (Annarose & Artesia Wells)
- District 8 – John Barnes (Fowlerlton & Millett)
- District 9 – James Mann (San Miguel & Tilden)
- District 10 – Frank Weaver (Concepcion & Miranda City) – TREASURER

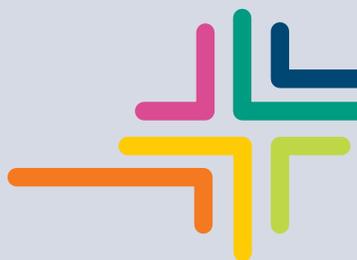
Produced for VTX1 by:

**WORDSOUTH**  
A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY

On the Cover:



Bear, a Pomeranian, had a date with the groomer during a recent visit to Live Oak County Veterinary Services in George West.  
See story Page 12.



# Lifeline Service

Lifeline is a government assistance program that provides monthly discounts on eligible telecommunications services. The federal discount is applied to qualifying voice or broadband services, while the state Lifeline discount may be applied to qualifying voice services only. Customers who are eligible for voice Lifeline service are also eligible for toll blocking at no charge. Your cooperative offers reduced rates to eligible low-income residential customers through Lifeline.

#### ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for the federal Lifeline discount, a household's annual income must be at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines, or someone in the household must receive benefits from at least one of the following programs: Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Veterans Pension or Survivors

Benefit, or Tribal Programs set forth in 47 C.F.R. Section 54.409(b).

To be eligible for the state Lifeline discount, a household's annual income must be at or below 150% of the federal poverty guidelines, or someone in the household must receive benefits from at least one of the following sources: Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, health coverage under the state Children's Health Insurance Program, National School Lunch Program's free lunch program or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

#### HOW TO ENROLL

If you have qualifying telecommunications service, participate in one of the programs listed and are not receiving the Lifeline service reduction, please contact the Low

Income Discount Administrator, or LIDA, at 866-454-8387. If your household meets the low income standard, you can apply to receive Lifeline service by requesting a self-enrollment form from the LIDA. The self-enrollment form must be completed by the applicant and mailed to the following address:

#### LITE-UP Texas

**1779 Wells Branch Parkway, Suite 110B  
#357  
Austin, TX 78728-7022**

#### DISCOUNTS AND BENEFITS

Lifeline service is limited to one discount per household. A household is everyone who lives in the home, including children and people who are not related to the customer, and shares income and household expenses. A customer with Lifeline service may not transfer the Lifeline benefit to any other person.

*You're invited!*

**VTX1 Companies will host several member and annual meetings in March.**

- San Isidro Member Meeting  
March 13
- Tilden Member Meeting  
March 27
- Hebronville Member Meeting  
March 20
- Raymondville Annual Meeting  
March 30

Find details at [vtx1.net](http://vtx1.net).

## Apply for a free trip to Washington, D.C.

Eligible students ages 16 and 17 may qualify for the 2021 Foundation for Rural Service Youth Tour, which brings students together from across rural America to visit Washington, D.C. This year's tour is scheduled for June 5-9.

Interested students should speak with their guidance counselor or visit [frs.org](http://frs.org) to apply. Completed applications must be submitted online by March 5. For more information, go to [frs.org](http://frs.org).

## Attention, seniors!

Valley Telephone Cooperative Inc. will award as many as 20 scholarships of \$3,000 to students whose parents are cooperative members.

The awards are renewable for up to three additional years or until the completion of a bachelor's degree. And the scholarship will increase by \$250 annually if the student maintains a 3.0 grade point average or better in the prior year of college. Additional rules do apply.

Scholarship America administers the scholarship program, including the selection of the recipients. The application deadline is March 18. Visit [scholarshipamerica.org](http://scholarshipamerica.org) for additional information.

# BEHOLD THE UNIVERSE

## The nighttime fascination with stargazing

Story by ANNE P. BRALY

The stars hold a mysterious fascination for us humans. From the time Galileo first mapped the heavens to the recent splashdown of SpaceX's Crew Dragon Endeavour watched by millions of cheering people, earthlings have looked to the starry skies in wonder.

As cities have grown and light pollution has become an issue, the stars have appeared to dim — if they're visible at all. But visit Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, one of four International Dark Sky parks in the Lone Star State, and the heavens come back to life.

The International Dark Sky Park designation is for areas with an exceptional quality of starry nights and a nocturnal environment that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational and cultural heritage, as well as public enjoyment. Enchanted Rock checks all the boxes. In fact, the area is a Gold-Tier level park — an honor reserved for the darkest of skies. "This means our skies have less interference from the light glow of metro areas ... so more stars are visible," says Doug Cochran, park superintendent.

As one enters the gates of Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, a massive pink granite boulder — more of a mountain than a rock — creates the centerpiece of the 1,643-acre park. That boulder inspired the park's name. It's a hard but rewarding climb to the top. On a clear night, you can see forever from its peak and easily spot

the Milky Way, painted across the massive Texas sky with the Hill Country spread out below.

The park is open year-round, but only until 10 p.m. So, Cochran notes, the best time to visit is during the winter months when it gets darker earlier. He also suggests renting a campsite and staying the night.

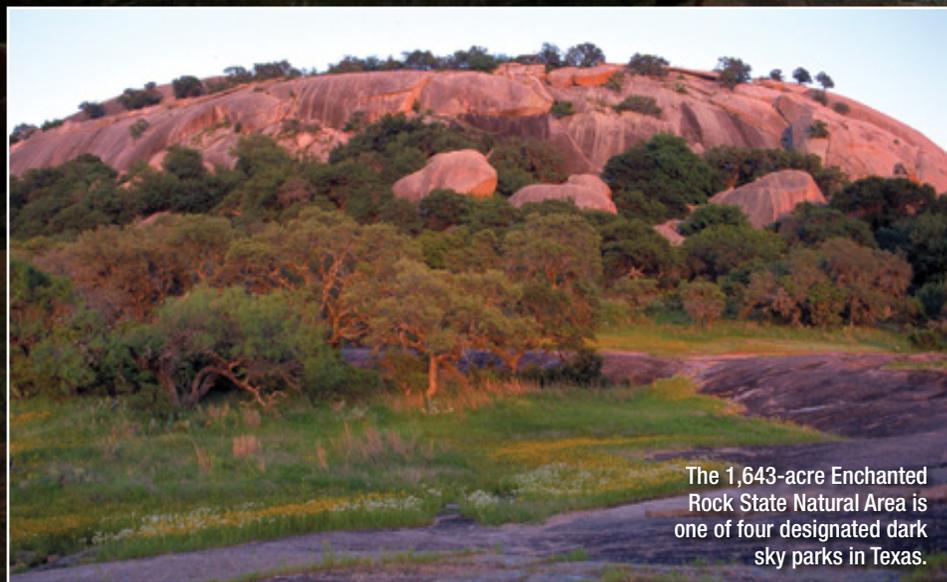
Katie Raney is an amateur stargazer but knows enough to share her knowledge about the stars and train the park staff. She says her favorite time to stargaze is right as the sun goes down. "I like to watch as stars, planets and satellites appear in the sky one by one," she says.

At the urging of former first lady Lady Bird Johnson, the giant pink dome, rising

425 feet above the Big Sandy River, became a designated historic landmark, thereby protecting an area once considered haunted by the Tonkawa Indians. It's now under the guardianship of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. And they take stargazing seriously.

With city lights encroaching from Fredericksburg, Austin and other nearby towns, a dark-sky monitor has been installed to measure the relative darkness of the sky above the park. The monitoring station posts readings on the internet ([tpwd.texas.gov](http://tpwd.texas.gov)) every 15 minutes during the night. The meter is not active during daylight hours.

The celestial patterns we witness in the dark skies have inspired exploration and discovery for millennia. They've helped us set calendars and navigate the seas. "Stargazing," Raney says, "offers us a look at a universe that's bigger than us." 



The 1,643-acre Enchanted Rock State Natural Area is one of four designated dark sky parks in Texas.

# CELESTIAL NAVIGATING

## Five-star apps

- ★ **SkySafari** lets you hold your phone to the sky to identify planets and other heavenly bodies.
- ★ **Star Tracker** is like a planetarium in your hand, showing you more than 8,000 deep-sky objects using a 3D compass.
- ★ **SkyView** — Point your phone at the sky, and the app will identify galaxies, stars, planets and more.
- ★ **NASA** isn't the best app for stargazing, but it has a photo library of images that the organization updates constantly, as well as live NASA TV.
- ★ **Google Sky** — Explore the far reaches of space through the eyes of the Hubble telescope, plus find out the location of the planets at any given time by typing in the name of the planet in the search box.

## What is the Bortle Scale?

Astronomer John Bortle created a scale in 2001 to help amateur astronomers determine the darkest skies for stargazing.

The scale ranks areas around the world from 1 to 9, the former being the darkest skies available on Earth and the latter being city skies offering little, if any, stargazing opportunities.

Here are the parks in Texas with 1 to 3 rankings on the Bortle Scale. More parks with Bortle Scale ratings can be found online at [tpwd.texas.gov](http://tpwd.texas.gov), along with links to find each park's Clear Skies chart showing an astronomer's forecast for the park. It's a handy chart, as cloudy skies do not make for good stargazing.

### Big Bend Country:

- ★ Big Bend Ranch State Park (1)
- ★ Barton Warnock Visitor Center (2)
- ★ Balmorhea State Park (2)
- ★ Devils River State Natural Area (2)
- ★ Indian Lodge (2)
- ★ Seminole Canyon State Park (2)

### Hill Country:

- ★ Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area (2)
- ★ Kickapoo Cavern State Park (2)
- ★ Colorado Bend State Park (3)
- ★ Enchanted Rock State Natural Area (3)
- ★ Lost Maples State Park (3)
- ★ South Llano River State Park (3)

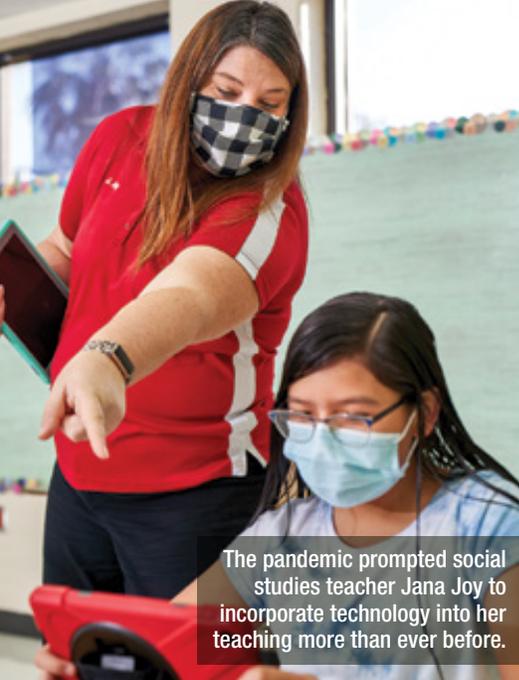
## Five Tips

**Amateur astronomer Katie Raney offers tips for a successful stargazing experience:**

- ★ Get there a little early and find a place away from any lights. Sit back, relax and wait for your eyes to adjust to the dark.
- ★ Don't look at your phone or any other white lights.
- ★ Though you'll be amazed at what you can see with the naked eye, a pair of binoculars will allow you to see more and are much easier to transport than a telescope.
- ★ Pack a flashlight or headlamp with a red light so that you can see where you're going. Red lights will not damage your night vision.
- ★ Bring along a blanket or chair and patience. It may take up to 45 minutes for your eyes to adjust to the dark.

A gigantic pink boulder is the centerpiece of Enchanted Rock State Natural Area in Texas.





The pandemic prompted social studies teacher Jana Joy to incorporate technology into her teaching more than ever before.



Seventh grader Tyler Brown.



Superintendent Albert Peña helps sixth grader Isai Vasquez with an assignment.

# A ZOOM WINDOW ON THE WORLD

## San Perlita students learn about life in other countries

Story by ANDREA AGARDY | Photography by DAVID PIKE

Some people just have a knack for finding the silver lining in difficult situations. Jana Joy, a social studies teacher in the San Perlita Independent School District, is definitely one of those people.

When the pandemic moved learning online, Joy used Zoom and her own network of friends and colleagues to give her sixth-grade world cultures students a firsthand perspective on what life is like around the globe.

“I came to the realization that few of our students have ever left Texas, and very few of them have any common knowledge of things outside of our state,” Joy says. “If I can get them interested in life outside of San Perlita, I’ve opened up a wealth of information for them and so many opportunities for them to see the world. That’s what we want all of our kids to do is have their horizons broadened.”

The guest speakers included one of Joy’s former colleagues who was working as a math teacher in China when the pandemic began. Another was an educator who had spent time in Africa. “She came in to talk to my kids about the continent, because she has been able to travel and work all over Africa,” Joy says. “Seeing her videos of being at Victoria Falls or on a safari where the lion was chasing the truck that she was in, my kids were able to compare and contrast life here in San Perlita with other areas of the world. I think it opens their eyes to possibilities and what could be out there for them.”

Joy had wanted to invite her friends to share their experiences with her students for a long time, but the logistics were problematic. Once videoconferencing became commonplace, the path was clear. “My classes were meeting daily on Zoom, and I was like, ‘Well, I see my friends on Zoom all the time, so let’s just bring them into my classroom,’” Joy says. “It was an opportunity. All of a sudden everybody was on Zoom, so it was much easier to get everybody onboard with it and connect people around the world.”

Whether the students are back in her classroom or learning online, Joy plans to continue using the school district’s fast and reliable broadband connection from VTX1 Companies to show them the world.



Seventh grader Heaven Guitierrez.

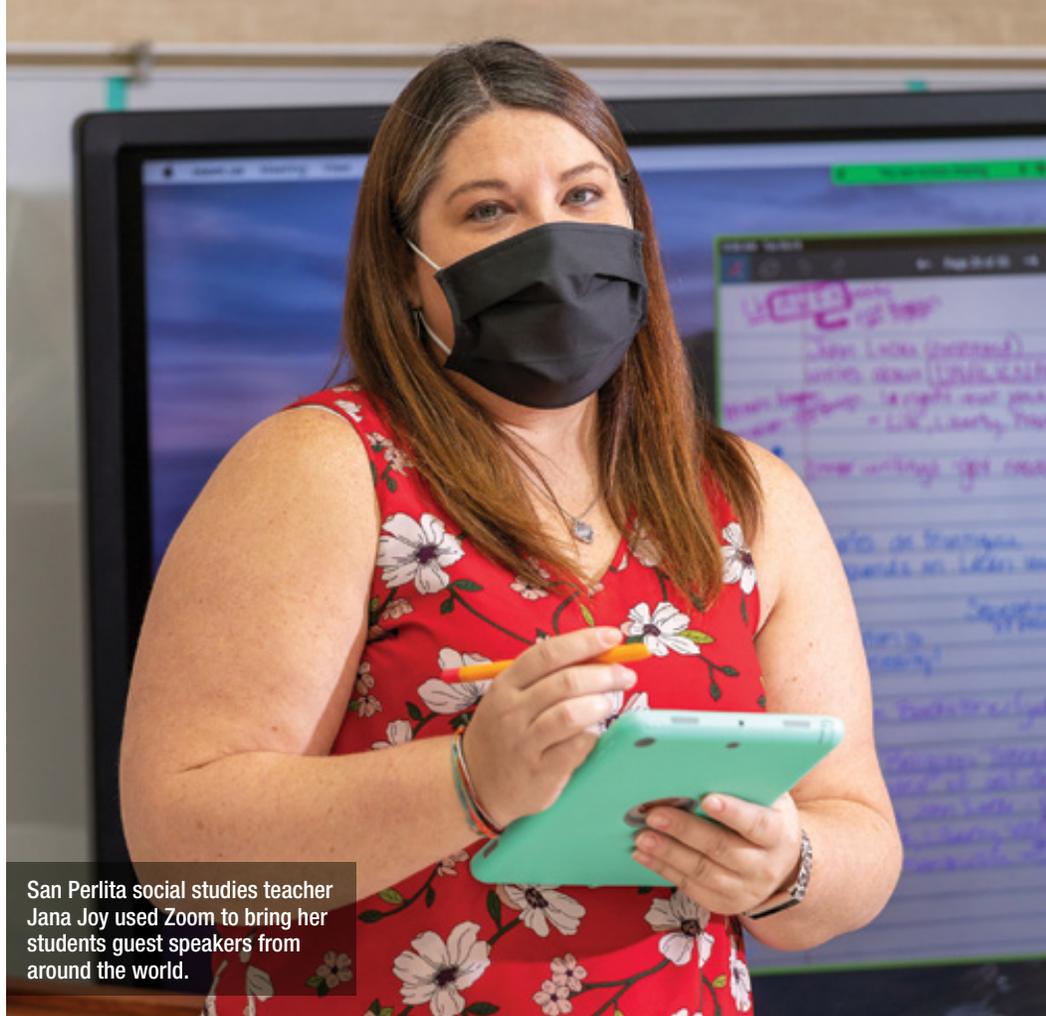
“We’re now for sure in a generation that is extremely technologically motivated,” she says. “If we don’t adapt as a school to those changing needs of our students, then we’re going to be left behind, and they’re going to figure out other ways to be educated.”

## ONLINE LEARNING

San Perlita students began returning to classrooms in mid-September, six months after the transition to distance learning. The return to school was done in phases, and parents who preferred to keep their children learning from home were permitted to do so. Wireless hot spots were provided to those students without internet access at home. Teachers continued to conduct lessons online, with students in the classroom following along on their devices.

The district was well-prepared for the change, technologically speaking. All of the approximately 235 students in the district receive a device to use in school and at home. High school students have Chromebooks, while elementary and middle schoolers are given iPads. “We were set up from the standpoint of having devices in kids’ hands,” says Superintendent Albert Peña. “We were set up from the standpoint of teachers having a little bit of training. But they really had to learn on the fly during the spring semester.”

The faculty pivoted quickly. Some



San Perlita social studies teacher Jana Joy used Zoom to bring her students guest speakers from around the world.

teachers, like Joy, made the transition with relative ease, while others had a tougher time. “We have some teachers that are very good. They use Zoom and Google Classroom. They use prerecorded lessons, Khan Academy and Seesaw. They’re using all kinds of stuff,” Peña says. “And then some of them are struggling. A lot of that depends on the teacher and their level of comfort with the various platforms and the age level of the students.”

Joy acknowledged that maintaining motivation can be tough for teachers when they can’t feed off the students’ energy in the room. “That’s been the challenge, but overall, whatever it takes to keep our kids safe is what needs to happen,” she says. “The fun part is at least I’m still teaching. At least I’m still seeing my kids and able to have conversations with them. I’ve hopefully used this time to figure out ways to bring higher-level thinking and ways to connect with them.”

Lessons weren’t the only aspect of school life to move online. Students gave virtual presentations, and class and club officer elections were held online. The

administration relied even more heavily on the district’s communication platforms and social media pages to keep parents informed and the school community connected.

When the 2020-21 school year began, there was a clear intention of mitigating the “COVID slide,” the loss of academic progress from the extended time away from the classroom. “We approached this school year with a more aggressive approach, because we knew what we were facing,” Peña says.

“The expectations on school districts are so much higher this year,” he says. “We’ve got to make up for any learning loss that happened during the last 10 weeks of the last school year and make sure that we start making up that ground and that there are no further achievement gaps.”

The San Perlita school community learned a lot of valuable lessons during the pandemic. But Peña says one stands out from the rest — “Never say, ‘I’ve seen it all.’” 



# Come together

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Broadband brings together musicians across the world

As the pandemic stretched on last year, drummer Mike Kosacek and other members of the band Cosmic Singularity started kicking around the idea of recording a second album. With most music venues shut down and more time to write, it was a familiar story for bands and musicians across the world. But there was one key exception: Kosacek has never actually met any of his bandmates in person.

“Without high-speed internet, we just couldn’t do this,” he says. “I live in Round Rock, Texas. The keyboard player lives in Florida. The bass player is in Utah, and at the time, our singer and guitar player was living in Scotland.”

The globe-spanning collaboration would have been impossible just a decade ago. The songwriting process is a sort of musical relay. One member of the band will share a demo of a song he created, and the others will add their parts one by one.

“We’ll start stripping off the individual parts, and everyone will add in their own instruments to build up the song,” Kosacek says. “Once we’ve got all those parts, they’ll send it to me, and I’ll do the mixing in my studio.”

## A NOD TO THE DRUMMER

Kosacek built his home studio, DoubleDog Recording, in 2009. He had been recording in his bedroom for several years, but the situation wasn’t ideal.

“In terms of sound, that wasn’t optimal. Plus, I have a family, so the noise wasn’t optimal for them, either,” he says. “When I decided I really wanted to make money off of my music, it had to be better.”

The stand-alone, 475-square-foot recording space gives him room to play without driving his family from the premises and provides Kosacek the option of recording bands live. Normally, he estimates, about a fifth of his business would come from mixing and mastering recordings for live bands. The rest is his Studio Drum Tracks business, where he records drum parts for Texas-based groups and artists like Black Dirt Tango, ThemThatKnow and Mike Hamilton, as well as others from across the globe.



Broadband technology underpins drummer Mike Kosacek’s business.

“At least half of it is mind reading,” Kosacek says. “But for me, I find that a lot of it is just experience playing and listening to a lot of music. So, when someone sends me a song that needs drums, I have some idea of where to go with it. A lot of times, it’s right the first time, and people are wowed at the difference, which is, of course, my goal.”

These days, with bands unable to record in person, all of Kosacek’s work comes from the drum tracks business. But internet connections have come a long way since he started, making the transition an easy one.

“I actually saw an uptick in business, because people were stuck at home writing songs that needed drums,” he says. “Ten years ago we would have to mail CDs, DVDs, even hard drives back and forth, because sometimes it was faster and more reliable than internet transfers. Being able to do this digitally and share files online — that’s what makes it happen.” 📧

## Remote mastery

From his earliest memories, Serge Espitia was in love with music and how it comes together. He eventually moved to New York, where he had the chance to work as a producer with artists including James Iha of Smashing Pumpkins and Adam Schlesinger of Fountains of Wayne, as well as producers for artists like David Bowie, Beyonce and John Legend.

But in 2016, Espitia and his wife were tired of the city, so they moved to New Jersey. There, he set up his own home studio for mastering — the art of touching up songs to achieve professional sound quality.

“There’s a lot of fear of the mastering process, but it’s really about your personal taste and appreciation for music,” Espitia says.

His mastering business is completely online, and that’s the way Espitia likes it. Operating remotely allows him to work faster compared to in-person sessions with artists that can take hours longer. The key, he says, is making a human connection with artists to better understand what they want.

“A lot of people I work with are very sensitive, so they have a good understanding of their musical influences and what they want to draw from,” Espitia says. “So, that part of the business really hasn’t changed.”



## Home schooling

- ▶ **Education** — Books, magazines, online tutorials and more are available to help developing artists learn their trade. Online collaboration groups can also provide a supportive community and opportunities to hone your craft.
- ▶ **Know what you want** — Understand what kinds of sounds you want to create for yourself or others. These preferences will guide the type of recording environment you need and the equipment you use.
- ▶ **Learn your tools** — Having the best gear isn’t the be-all and end-all. Whether you’re using GarageBand or Pro Tools, knowing how to use what is at your disposal effectively and efficiently is crucial.
- ▶ **Listen** — Spend a lot of time listening to music. The more you can develop a critical ear, the better you’ll be at identifying the sounds you want to create and others want to achieve.

Thinking of building your own home studio? Take some advice from the pros.

### *gear list* 🎙️

- **Microphone** — Beginners can get by recording on a smartphone, but serious musicians will want to invest in a quality mic.
- **Headphones** — Always opt for wired over wireless to prevent delays and unexpected interruptions to your connection.
- **Studio monitors** — These speakers play back unenhanced sound so you can be confident how your mix will sound on different systems.
- **Audio interface** — This converts the sound from your mic to digital sound on your computer.
- **Software** — There are many programs available to mix and export your music. GarageBand is free and a good starting place for beginners.
- **Soundproofing** — Keeping your sound in will make the neighbors happy. Keeping their noises out will make you happy.



# Caring for creatures great and small

## From horses to Yorkies, Live Oak County Veterinary Services helps them all

Story by ANDREA AGARDY | Photography by DAVID PIKE

**W**hat started as a one-man operation running out of a pickup truck has grown into a thriving and bustling veterinary practice where family pets and livestock alike receive attentive and compassionate care.

Born and raised in Three Rivers, Dr. Tyler Lurthinger, founder of Live Oak County Veterinary Services, graduated from the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine in 2012. He worked at practices across the Lone Star State for several years before heading back home to hang out a shingle of his own.



Lauren Lee, a veterinary technician, and Dr. Tyler Lurthinger perform surgery on a pig.

### BUILDING A PRACTICE

“I grew up around large animals in a small town and decided at a young age that a career in veterinary medicine was something that interested me,” Lurthinger says. “Live Oak County has had several veterinarians over the years, but not a consistent one in the last decade. I decided to move back because it seemed like the business was here and the community needed a permanent veterinarian.”

Lurthinger started seeing patients in 2015 out of his half-ton Chevy pickup that he equipped with a vet box. Starting his fledgling practice on wheels allowed him to keep his overhead expenses down while giving him the mobility to build a clientele. “Very seldom did patients come to me,” he recalls. “A lot of time was spent traveling from job to job. I intended all along to build a permanent office, but I had to start somewhere.”

These days, Lurthinger and the rest of the LOCVS staff work out of a custom-designed facility in George West where they treat animals ranging from cats to cattle. Lurthinger built the clinic, which has three exam rooms, a surgery room and outdoor pens for large animals, with an eye toward the future.

“The priority for the new office was to build a current, clean facility that was inviting to customers and also efficient for me on a day-to-day basis,” Lurthinger says. “The other priority was to build an office that could accommodate additional veterinarians as the practice grew.”



Dr. Tyler Lurthinger finishes with stitches.

### ONE-STOP SHOP

As a full-service mixed animal practice, the clinic provides its clients with preventative, medical, reproductive and surgical care. Boarding accommodations are available, and the clinic recently began renting space to a groomer, so pet owners can now get their pups their vaccinations and a makeover all in one trip.

### A COMMUNITY OF CARING

The clinic provides its clients with around-the-clock care. After the office closes for the night, calls go to Lurthinger’s cellphone, and he sees patients after hours as circumstances demand. Worried pet owners have appreciated that level of care and attention.

“A lot of times, those calls are from people who can’t get ahold of their vet, so they call us,” says Lauren Lee, a veterinary technician who’s worked with Lurthinger since 2016. “There are times when he sees people who aren’t clients already, but when he takes the time to see them, normally they stay with us because he did take the time to come in after hours for an emergency.”

With clients traveling from as far away as San Antonio and Corpus Christi to have their animals treated at LOCVS, it’s clear Lurthinger and his staff are building a strong rapport not only with their four-legged patients, but with their patients’ owners, too.

“We don’t ever take it for granted,” Lee says. “Especially when you have someone drive from that far and you know they have other vet clinics they could go to, it means a lot. Since I’ve worked for Tyler, I don’t know of anyone who had a bad experience and didn’t come back. I try to go out of my way to make sure everyone is taken care of, and I know everybody else here does too.”

“I’m thankful every day,” Lee adds. “I might work a lot of hours and I might be tired sometimes, but I love what I do. This is what God has set for me to do, and I found it.”

## BROADBAND MAKES IT BETTER

The strong and reliable broadband service VTX1 Companies provides to the clinic plays a vital role in building relationships with clients.

“The internet is the backbone of our communications here at the office,” Lurthinger says. For example, the practice’s management software is cloud-based, allowing the staff to access vital information from anywhere, and some of the diagnostic equipment relies on the internet to communicate with that software.

The practice has its own website and social media accounts to keep patients up to date on the latest developments, and there’s even an online pharmacy. “We really wanted to do that for the convenience,” Lee says. “People are busy, and they want to be able to order it and have it shipped to their house.”

Last summer LOCVS launched PetPro Connect, an app that allows users to book appointments, keep track of their animals’ vaccinations and more. The staff keeps the app open on their desktops all day long to book appointments and respond to messages as they come in.

“VTX1 internet has made connectivity easy with everything being done via internet,” Lurthinger says. 📧

*If you go...*



Live Oak County Vet Services  
121 County Road 314, George West  
361-449-5440

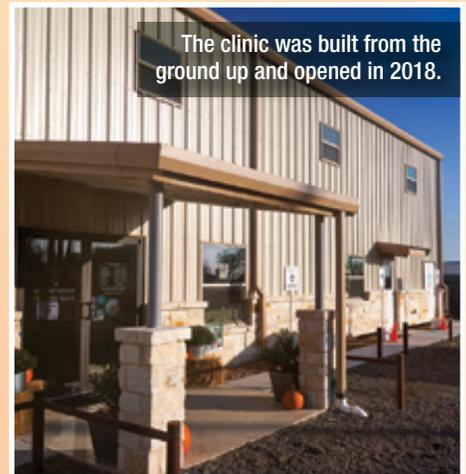
To learn more about the clinic, visit [locvsclinic.com](http://locvsclinic.com) or search for @LOCVS15 on Facebook.



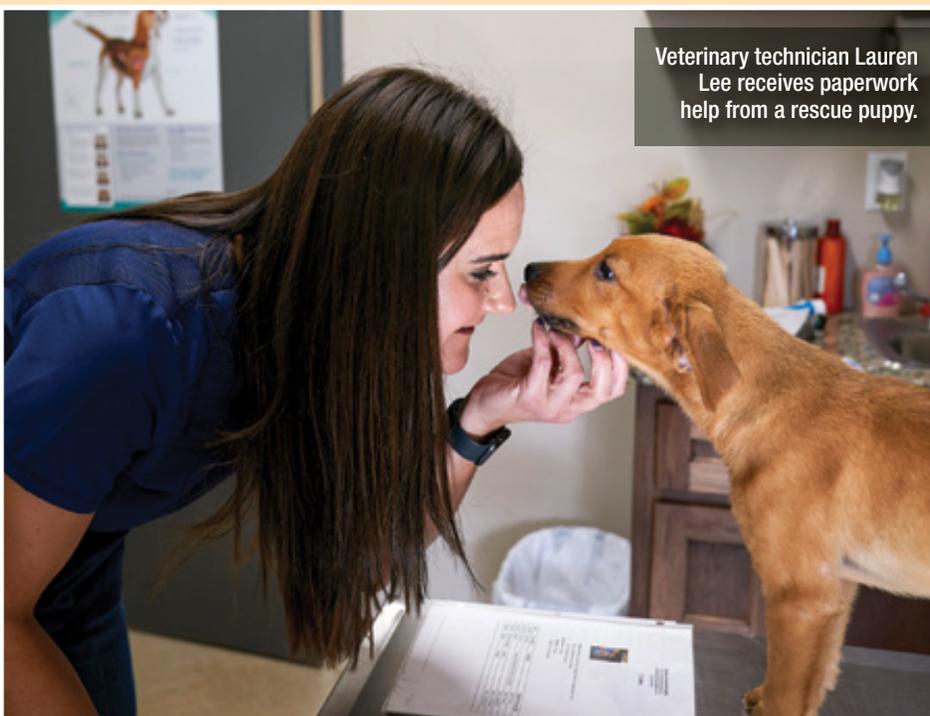
Lauren Lee examines a puppy.



The clinic treats pets and livestock.



The clinic was built from the ground up and opened in 2018.



Veterinary technician Lauren Lee receives paperwork help from a rescue puppy.



## TUSCAN WHITE BEAN SKILLET

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 8 ounces brown mushrooms, sliced
- 1 1/2 cups diced yellow onion (about 1 large onion)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2/3 cup drained and chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes
- 2 (14.5-ounce) cans fire-roasted diced tomatoes
- 2 (14.5-ounce) cans drained and rinsed cannellini beans
- 2 (14.5-ounce) cans quartered artichoke hearts, drained
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- Parsley for garnish

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil until shimmering in a 10-inch, cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add the mushrooms to the pan in a single layer. Brown for 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer to a bowl and repeat with remaining mushrooms.

Add the remaining tablespoon of oil to the pan. Add the onions and saute until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and sun-dried tomatoes and cook until fragrant and softened, another 2 minutes.

Add the diced tomatoes to the pan, along with the beans, artichoke hearts, salt, pepper, oregano, thyme and sugar. Cover the pan and turn the heat down to medium. Let cook for about 10 minutes, until hot. Return the mushrooms to the pan and cook for another 1 to 2 minutes to warm them up.

# Healthy & hearty

## Beans are perfect for cold days

**W**ith the holiday season behind us and winter in full swing, it's time for a bit of comfort. And there's perhaps no better way to create a feeling of warmth than with a steaming bowl of bean soup, or chili with beans, or, for that matter, any type of bean dish.

Beans can also pull double duty, offering wonderful taste and texture while being a delicious meat substitute.

Whether they are black, red, white or brown, beans are a great source of fiber, protein, iron, B vitamins, potassium, magnesium and many other beneficial nutrients. And if you choose dried beans over canned, you'll save money as well as reduce your sodium intake. If you do use canned beans, be sure to rinse them to reduce excess salt.



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

To serve: Spoon the bean mixture into bowls and garnish with chopped parsley, if desired. Be sure to serve with plenty of crusty bread for sopping up the tasty juices.

## BLACK BEAN ENCHILADAS

- 2 large portobello mushroom caps
- 1/2 medium red onion
- 1 orange bell pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1/2 cup vegetable broth or water
- 3 cups red enchilada sauce, store-bought or homemade
- 1 1/2 cups guacamole, store-bought or homemade
- 12 (8-inch) corn tortillas

**For the garnish:** 1 cup thinly sliced romaine lettuce; 1 to 2 radishes, julienned; 2 tablespoons minced red onion; and torn cilantro or parsley  
Sour cream or Greek yogurt, optional

Preheat the oven to 400 F.

Remove the stems from the mushroom caps and thinly slice the caps. Thinly slice the red onion. Thinly slice the bell pepper.

In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium high heat. Sauté the sliced veggies for 6 to 7 minutes until tender. Add the drained and rinsed black beans, garlic powder, cumin, onion powder, paprika, kosher salt, lime juice, and vegetable broth or water. Cook for 2 minutes until the liquid is thickened into a sauce.

Spread 1 cup of the enchilada sauce in the bottom of a large baking dish.

Brush both sides of each tortilla lightly with olive oil. Heat a large griddle to medium-high heat. Cook the tortillas in batches for 15 seconds per side until lightly browned.



Fill each tortilla with 1/4 cup of the vegetable filling and about 2 tablespoons guacamole, running in a line down the center. Roll it up and place it in the baking dish, seam side down. Once all of the tortillas are in the dish, pour the remaining 2 cups of enchilada sauce over the top.

Bake for 5 minutes until warmed through. Top with garnishes and serve.

## NUTTY WHITE BEAN, WILD RICE SOUP

- 1/2 cup cashews
- 1 medium yellow onion
- 2 celery stalks
- 3 medium carrots
- 8 ounces baby bella mushrooms
- 6 cloves garlic
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 8 cups vegetable broth
- 1 cup wild rice (not a wild rice blend)
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 (15-ounce) cans white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup water
- 2 teaspoons dried sage
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce, tamari or liquid aminos

Place the cashews in a bowl and cover them with water. Leave them to soak while you make the recipe.

Dice the onion. Thinly slice the celery. Cut the carrot into rounds. Slice the mushrooms. Mince the garlic. In a Dutch oven, heat the olive oil and sauté the onion, celery and carrots, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes or until lightly browned. Add the mushrooms and sauté for 2 more minutes. Add the garlic, thyme and oregano and stir for another 2 minutes.

Add the broth, wild rice, 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt and black pepper. Bring to a simmer and cook, uncovered, for 20 minutes. Add the drained and rinsed beans and continue to simmer, uncovered, for 30-35 minutes more, or until the rice breaks open.

Using a liquid measuring cup, carefully remove 2 cups of the hot soup, including broth, veggies and rice, and put it in a blender, along with 1 cup of water. Drain the cashews, then add them and the dried sage to the blender. Blend on high for about 1 minute, until creamy. Pour the creamy mixture back into the soup. Add the soy sauce. Taste and, if needed, add the remaining 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt. Adjust seasonings as desired. Garnish with freshly ground pepper. 📄



881 E. Hidalgo Avenue  
Raymondville, TX 78580

Presort STD  
US Postage PAID  
Permit #21  
Freeport OH

Your clients and customers deserve  
**THE BEST!**

*Connect with*  
**VTX1 HOSTED PHONE SERVICE**

- » Digital connection
- » Call recording
- » Conferencing
- » Desktop sharing
- » Multiplatform mobile applications



*Help your business today!*

**VTX1 Companies**

Call 1-800-446-2031 or visit [www.vtx1.net](http://www.vtx1.net) to get VTX1 Hosted Phone Service.