



VTX1 Companies

MAY/JUNE 2022

# COMPASS

VOL. 3, NO. 3

**SUPPORTING  
YOUNG READERS**

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**GAME ON**

## **Cheers to Texas**

**Toast to the Loan Star  
State at Seguin Winery**



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## A partner to support RURAL AMERICA

The Foundation for Rural  
Service makes a difference

Our members work hard to serve our nation's rural communities, but they do not do it alone. I'd like to shine a spotlight on an organization whose work I respect, appreciate and support.

The professionals of the Foundation for Rural Service, known as FRS, deserve praise for all the benefits they provide to thousands of people. Established as a nonprofit in 1994, they have made a positive difference for nearly 30 years.

Many of you may know their efforts to help educate young people in rural communities through scholarships and the popular Youth Tour trip to our nation's capital. FRS also annually takes key congressional staff out into our communities to see the challenges faced when deploying broadband.

In particular I want to give a special nod to the annual FRS Community Grant Program designed to benefit communities served by NTCA members. The goal is to support local efforts committed to improving and sustaining rural America. The grants have four areas of concentration: business and economic development, community development, education and telecommunications — the last is a chance to highlight a local plan to support broadband resources for telehealth, education and more. For more information about these programs, visit [www.frs.org](http://www.frs.org).

Just like the NTCA member serving you, a remarkable community partner where you live, FRS combines the resources and visibility of all NTCA members to benefit communities like yours across the country. 📩



# Get your free annual credit report

## Spot scammers early

A free credit report is one of the quickest ways to spot identity theft — someone taking your name, date of birth, address, credit card or bank account information, Social Security or medical insurance numbers.

Scammers can quickly drain a bank account, run up charges on a credit card, get a new credit card in your name and more.

### What is a credit report?

A credit report is a summary of your personal credit history, including identifying details such as an address, date of birth and information such as whether bills were paid on time or someone has filed for bankruptcy.

Three national credit bureaus — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — collect and update this information.

### The credit bureaus must:

- ▶ Make sure the information they collect about you is accurate
- ▶ Give you a free copy of your report once every 12 months
- ▶ Give you a chance to fix any mistakes

**How do I order my free annual credit reports? The simplest solution is to visit [AnnualCreditReport.com](http://AnnualCreditReport.com). It's fast and easy.**

# Cryptocurrency 101

## A beginner's guide to the new currency

For many people, the idea of cryptocurrency, or digital money, is downright mysterious. Still, cryptocurrency has been around more than a decade, and a growing number of people are starting to use and invest in the world of virtual coins and tokens.

But what, exactly, is it? How does it work? And how do you get it?

### CRYPTO BASICS

Put simply, cryptocurrency is digital money. There are no physical coins or paper dollar bills you can pull out and put in a billfold. But it's also not backed up by any asset. According to [bitstamp.net](https://bitstamp.net), cryptocurrencies are a tradable asset in and of themselves. Their price is determined by demand and the supply available.

Like gold, cryptocurrency's value is in its scarcity and its uses — or potential uses in crypto's case, according to an Investopedia article in December 2021. Bitcoin, which is the most valuable of the different cryptocurrencies, is limited to a quantity of 21 million bitcoins. And while gold is often useful for industrial applications and in valuable jewelry, crypto might be of service in a number of retail transactions one day.

### HOW TO GET IT

Most people buy it online and store it in a virtual wallet. The easiest way to buy cryptocurrency is through one of many centralized exchanges that come up on an online search. There are several types of cryptocurrencies, including the three top ones: Bitcoin, Ethereum and Tether.

### CRYPTO AND TAXES

The banking system and the government do not oversee cryptocurrency transactions. Instead, these transactions are supported by blockchain, a technology that tracks who owns what. But that doesn't mean cryptocurrency isn't taxable. In fact,

the Internal Revenue Service taxes cryptocurrency as either property, investment or earned income. Because of this, crypto dabblers should keep careful records of all their transactions.

### UPS AND DOWNS?

Cryptocurrency is known for its volatile market. In one day in 2021, Bitcoin dropped by 30% — a huge fluctuation in any other trading market. As a new currency that's not legal tender and which any government can issue, crypto can move wildly up or down based on just about anything — perceptions, news articles or, most notably, a tweet from tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

### RESEARCH AND START SLOW

To find out more about cryptocurrency, make sure to do your research. Seek out sources crypto advertisers or others with vested interests in particular products aren't backing. Those determined to try it out should invest conservatively while learning more about the market along the way. 🗨️

## Crypto lingo

Knowing more about cryptocurrencies requires learning new words and phrases. Here are a few that are sure to pop up frequently:

**FUD** — FUD is an acronym that stands for "fear, uncertainty, doubt." In the crypto world, FUD is negative information that can deter investors.

**HODL** — HODL is an acronym for "hold on for dear life," but internet lore jokes that its origins came from a typo for the word "hold." Either way, cryptocurrency investors use it to caution others against selling when the market is volatile.

**NFT** — NFT stands for non-fungible tokens. NFTs are pieces of digital content linked to the Ethereum blockchain. Non-fungible basically means that the digital content is unique and cannot be replaced. Because of this fact, NFTs make digital works of art and other items into one-of-a-kind assets.

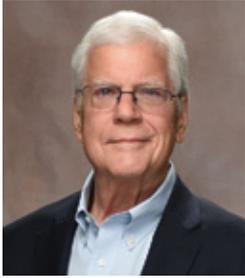
**Sats** — Short for Satoshis, sats are the smallest fraction of a bitcoin that you can send — 0.00000001 of a bitcoin. Hardcore bitcoin traders look at sats, not the dollar amount of bitcoin. Note: Satoshi Nakamoto is the made-up name of the person or people who created bitcoin.



# Congratulations, graduates

## A bright future awaits

Throughout our community, young adults are experiencing a milestone — they're about to begin their first post-high school summer. Graduation — it's a moment that deserves celebration, a cap on the 12 years of hard work and accomplishment.



**DAVE OSBORN**  
Chief Executive Officer

If you're like me, your high school years have been in the rearview for a while. Despite that, the memories they evoke can still seem very vivid. This time in life is often filled with excitement, hope and the lure of freedom. Each of these graduates will soon make choices, many of which have been years in the making. Some of them will continue onto higher learning, while others may breathe a sigh of relief to leave school behind. Some may enter the workforce, start families or explore countless other possibilities. All graduates must choose to carve out their own distinct path.

Some of our youth have already taken on adult tasks, working jobs and carrying responsibilities that, in an ideal world, would have waited until they were older. Life isn't always the same for everyone and bears many challenges. VTX1 appreciates the circumstances for each high school graduate are unique and we hope we can offer one consistent thread of support to those members and customers we serve.

That key thread is VTX1's communications network — our fast, reliable broadband service in particular — which can open doors that didn't exist just a few years ago. Online learning, work-from-home jobs and online tools and resources are now so readily available. No matter how rural the address, VTX1 offers an immediate connection to the resources needed to thrive in a modern world. The playing field is more level than ever between cities and rural towns where these graduates reside.

One example of success is that graduates finishing high school today have a link, not only to the online world, but also to unheard of real-world resources. Now moving away for school or a job isn't so hard on the heart, when one can link to a video call to connect with mom and dad. No matter how far our graduates roam, there's a convenient link to those who have supported them along the way.

VTX1 believes that helping the community goes beyond the services we provide, and we know many of local business share the same belief. Giving back to our community through our VTCI Scholarship program is one way we work to help students continuing their education.

While this is a time of celebration for the Class of 2022 and their families, I believe it's also a time for us to celebrate as a community. Many of these graduates will go on to become part of the fabric of our communities, and others will venture away, carrying the values and lessons they learned with them for the rest of their lives.

I wish to congratulate all 2022 graduates and their families. Thanks to you, the future is bright and filled with possibilities.

Sincerely,

Dave Osborn  
CEO, VTX1 Companies



VTX1 Companies

**Contact Us: 1-844-GET-VTX1**  
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**Hours of Operation:**

- Business Offices:  
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- Customer Service:  
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- Technical Support:  
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On the Cover:



Visitors to Michael and Melissa Poole's Blue Lotus Winery and Texas Mead Works in Seguin can sample the tastes of Texas.  
*See story Page 12.*



# WHAT IS WI-FI 6?

Simply put, Wi-Fi 6 is the sixth — and latest — generation of wireless communications technology. The Wi-Fi Alliance, the organization that names Wi-Fi technologies, recently simplified the system so consumers can better match their devices to compatible Wi-Fi technology.

## Why is it better?

- **SPEED** — A single device connected to a Wi-Fi 6 network should be about 40% faster than if it were running on a Wi-Fi 5 router. Latency — the time it takes for information to travel from Point A to Point B — is also lower on Wi-Fi 6 networks, a huge upside for gaming and virtual reality applications.
- **BACKWARD COMPATIBILITY** — Don't worry, all your family's devices haven't suddenly become obsolete. Wi-Fi 6 routers will work with Wi-Fi 5 devices, as well as many older devices.
- **MORE DEVICES** — Wi-Fi 6 networks can support more devices at once than previous generations. Rather than waiting their turn while other devices access the internet, as was the case with older generations of Wi-Fi, Wi-Fi 6 networks are more efficient, serving multiple devices simultaneously.
- **SECURITY** — All Wi-Fi 6 devices require the most secure encryption standard, known as WPA3. Some earlier devices offered WPA3. However, by making it mandatory, Wi-Fi 6 networks are harder to infiltrate.
- **BATTERY LIFE** — Using a process called Target Wake Time, Wi-Fi 6 networks better control how often devices wake up to send or receive data, significantly reducing battery drain on mobile devices.



## SHOW US YOUR *snapshots!*

We'll soon be accepting entries in the VTX1 Companies Calendar Photo Contest. Grab your camera, head outside and start snapping!

The winning photos will be featured in our 2023 calendar. VTCI members and VTXC customers are encouraged to submit their favorite travel photos from across the globe while traveling the great state of Texas or another destination on a far away continent.

Additional details and the complete rules for this year's contest will be announced soon. For the latest updates, follow VTX1 on our social media platforms listed on this page or check our website, [vtx1.net](http://vtx1.net).

## GET SOCIAL WITH VTX1

Keep up with the latest news and join the conversation at ...

 @VTX1Companies

 @VTX1Companies

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 vtx1companies



# Memorial DAY

VTX1 offices will be closed on Monday, **MAY 30**, in observance of **MEMORIAL DAY**.

# THE JOY OF SUMMERTIME

Whether you're looking for thrill rides or family time, there are theme parks that dot the Texas coast and deliver a day — or even more — of fun.

Going to an amusement park is an adventure for the whole family. Some may go for the thrills of dropping down from the sky while others may enjoy the chills of a haunted house. Still others might go for the food. There's an assortment of fun and fare to be had, and Texas offers a boatload of it.

"The waterfront along Texas' coast offers amusement parks with picturesque views, engaging midway games, live entertainment, fantastic food and seaside thrills on roller coasters stretching over the Gulf of Mexico," says Tim Fennell, director of Travel Texas, an office responsible for promoting Texas as a premier travel destination. "These family-friendly parks are a fun, nostalgic way to enjoy the scenic Texas coast and make a captivating addition to any itinerary."

Here are some parks that offer thrilling rides, good food and family fun, so head to the coast and prepare yourselves for the action. 🎢

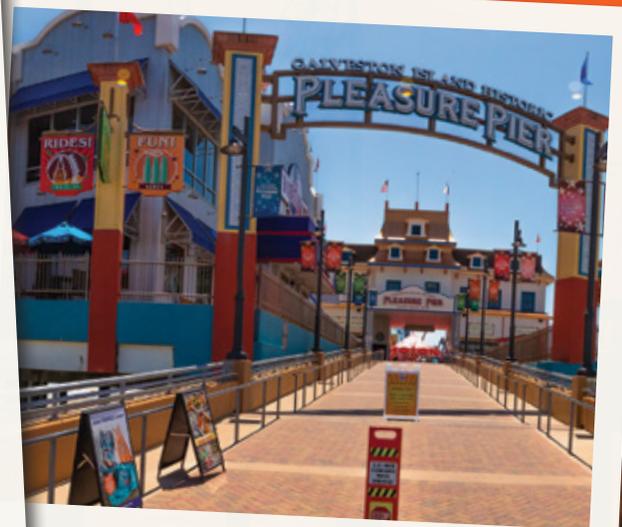
## PLEASURE PIER, GALVESTON

Pleasure Pier is an iconic piece of Galveston's history that has entertained Texans since it opened in the 1940s. At that time, admission was free, and there was a ballroom for dancing, along with carnival rides, a movie theater and more that drew thousands to the Gulf shore annually. Hurricane Carla destroyed much of the pier in 1961, but it reopened for a few decades until it met the wrath of Hurricane Ike in 2008. Today, though, it has reopened with a new look that has retained the charm it had when it opened almost a century ago.

Now parkgoers can experience thrilling roller coaster rides, an aerial high-swing, carnival games, shops and food, giving it the nickname: "Coney Island of the South." Swing your way up 220 feet on the Texas Star Flyer, loop your way around the park on the Iron Coast Roller Coaster with a magnificent, death-defying vertical drop or take a slower approach to Pleasure Pier on the carousel. The 5-D Theater Ride will blow your mind as it takes you on a heart-pounding ride deep down a mine shaft or puts you face-to-face with a prehistoric Megalodon. There are 17 rides at Pleasure Pier, plus an area where you can test your gaming skills at ring toss and other games.

All-day ticket prices are \$19.99-\$26.99. Family packs start at \$89.99 for two adults and two children. For more information, log onto [pleasurepier.com](http://pleasurepier.com) or visit the park's Facebook page.

History meets fun at Pleasure Pier in Galveston, where there's a little adventure for everyone. Rides, games, food and more create a classic destination on the Gulf of Mexico.



## KEMAH BOARDWALK, KEMAH, TEXAS

Race across Galveston Bay in a giant speedboat or test your bravado on the Boardwalk Bullet, a one-of-a-kind wooden coaster, as it loops and plunges its way around its track. Or try the Drop Zone with its 140-foot drop that will make your heart race. It's all part of a day spent at Kemah Boardwalk just 20 miles south of Houston.

Many consider the boardwalk, lying along the shores of Galveston Bay and Cedar Lake, one of the best in the country. Spread over 60 acres, it has everything you'd want for an exciting getaway to the coast. Not only does it boast incredible rides, it's a megaplex filled with restaurants and shopping venues.

There are rides appropriate for the little ones, such as a double-decker carousel; a ride aboard a replica of the famous 1863 C.P. Huntington train; or the Wonder Wheel, a pint-size version of a Ferris wheel. Pack bathing suits and let the kids frolic in dancing water fountains. There's also an arcade and playground on-site.

Dining options range from seafood at Landry's to Tex-Mex at Cadillac Bar and steaks at Saltgrass, among a dozen other eateries. Individual ride tickets are \$5-\$20 while all-day passes are \$18.99-\$24.99 and are available for unlimited excitement on every ride except for Boardwalk Beast, Iron Eagle and Stingray Reef. Want to make a weekend of it? Book a room at the only hotel on the boardwalk, Boardwalk Inn, with 58 rooms overlooking Galveston Bay.

**For more information,** visit [kemahboardwalk.com](http://kemahboardwalk.com) or search Facebook.

The Kemah Boardwalk, only 20 miles south of Houston, creates a unique experience. It extends across 60 acres with rides and experiences perfect for visitors of any age.



## GRAVITY PARK, SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

Defy gravity at Gravity Park on The Rocket, the tallest reverse bungee jump in the world, or take a nerve-wracking ride on the Skycoaster, a giant swing that'll hoist you 110 feet into the air. But the real thrill comes when you pull the ripcord and plummet back to terra firma. There are go-kart tracks for both kids and adults, a 60-foot Ferris wheel, a trampoline ride, an arcade, mini golf and a climbing wall. What the park may lack in size it makes up for in family fun.

Individual ride tickets for kids' rides are \$8. Prices for adult rides, golf and go-karts are \$10-\$25 with senior discounts for golf available.

**For more information,** jump on over to [gravitypark.squarespace.com](http://gravitypark.squarespace.com) or visit the park on Facebook.



# Telling a



## South Texas Literacy Coalition works to give all kids the keys to success

Story by ANDREA AGARDY

Through community festivals, interactive programs and other initiatives, the South Texas Literacy Coalition works tirelessly to help children build reading and comprehension skills to unlock a world of opportunities.

“Literacy affects every aspect of our lives, whether we’re going off to college or joining the workforce,” says Jonathon Vasquez, the coalition’s CEO. The coalition came about in 2008 through former Congressman Ruben Hinojosa. During his tenure, he met with education officials in countries with higher graduation rates than his home district. “In South Texas, we’re known for some of the lowest graduation rates in the nation. It’s a big issue down here,” Jonathon says. “Congressman Hinojosa learned a lot from his travels about how other countries intervene by focusing on early literacy skills.”



The coalition often visits schools, providing students with new books they can take home.

The congressman returned home and organized the group that became the South Texas Literacy Coalition. “In 2010, the census said the literacy rate was 58% down here, which meant 42% were at some level of illiteracy,” says Ida Acuna Garza, the coalition’s CEO emeritus. “He said, ‘We need to get a book in the hands of every child.’”

### PROGRAMS

All of the coalition’s programs share a common goal — to provide children and families with the resources and support they need to make literacy a priority. The coalition found that while parents want their children to become strong readers, obstacles like financial constraints, the language barrier and work obligations often get in the way.

“Poetry, music, dramatic plays and that kind of thing are part of the Hispanic culture. There’s an appreciation for the art of communication,” Ida says. “But one of the barriers for parents down here, especially if they’re from Mexico, is they don’t understand the public education system in the United States. They value



The coalition’s staff and volunteers are dedicated to putting books in children’s hands.

Photography contributed by South Texas Literacy Coalition

education. They just don’t know how to get involved.”

Through its South Texas Reading Initiative, the coalition has given away more than 2 million free books to families — many of whom couldn’t have afforded them otherwise and can’t easily access libraries. Once a child has a book in hand, the coalition encourages parents to spend time with their child interacting with the book — whether that be reading together, asking questions about the story or making up their own tales based on the pictures. “Not only are parents developing imagination, social-emotional learning



“If you can teach a child to love

# new story

and that bond with their child, but they're creating a positive experience with books," Jonathon says. "That experience lets the child see reading and writing as something fun, memorable and enjoyable. If you can teach a child to love reading, you can teach them pretty much anything."

## NEW APPROACHES

While the practice of distributing books at school and community events and its own literacy festivals has been successful, the coalition is always looking for new ways to hook kids on reading. They recently partnered with Little Free Library in an effort to place small, weatherproof boxes filled with books throughout low-income areas.

StoryWalk is another new endeavor. Based on a similar program in Vermont, the coalition's StoryWalk reprints pages of children's books by local authors onto large signs, which then go up along a walking trail. Families can read the story, one sign at a time, as they spend time together walking the outdoor path. Community day events mark the opening of StoryWalk installations, and books go to attendees. There are games and activities, and other local nonprofits can do their own outreach. After several weeks, the signs move to a new location.

The coalition also hopes to launch Page Masters this year, a program aimed at third and fourth graders. Over the course of several weeks, the students will write their own books with the help of volunteer experts. For example, a local artist may visit to help with illustrations, and Jonathon is working with a local professional wrestling league to get wrestlers to explain how they developed their characters. At the end of the program, the coalition will print the kids' books using Amazon Publishing, and the children will be published authors before they even start middle school.

"This project is a nontraditional approach to reading and writing," Jonathan says. "That helps the kids on so many levels, not just with literacy. There's the confidence of 'If I can write



a book, I can do anything.' We're hoping that this program will benefit them on so many levels and bring more awareness to this approach."

## SUPPORTING THE CAUSE

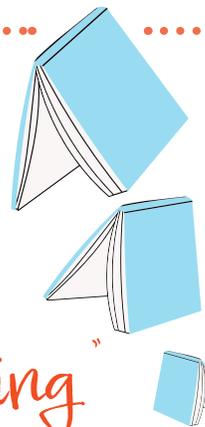
None of the coalition's efforts would be possible without the support of volunteers and community-minded sponsors like

VTX1 Companies. VTX1 was proud to sponsor the coalition's literacy festival in Mirando City, a small community about 35 miles east of Laredo. "We really appreciate it when organizations like Valley Telephone and other socially responsible foundations and organizations sponsor events like this because every penny that we get stays in the South Texas area," Ida says.

There is no simple answer to why literacy rates are as low as they are in South Texas. Everything from poverty, employment opportunities, health conditions, language barriers, lack of resources and more plays a role. Complex problems require long-term solutions, and the South Texas Literacy Coalition is in it for the long haul. "It seems like it's a cycle that's developed over time in our area, and there's just never been a break in the cycle on a larger scale to fix these issues," Jonathon says. "By intervening, the hope is to get kids to love learning and break out of that cycle. This is a long-term goal because we won't see the effects anywhere in the next five years. It's a lifelong process." 

## Get involved!

To learn more about the South Texas Literacy Coalition, including how to volunteer or make a donation, visit the organization's website, [southtexasliteracycoalition.org](http://southtexasliteracycoalition.org).



©banier/AdobeStock

reading, you can teach them pretty much anything"

- Jonathon Vasquez, CEO, South Texas Literacy Coalition





# Make the **CONNECTION**

The video game industry remains scorching hot, and not just because people turned to a virtual distraction during the pandemic. Certainly, they did. However, the trajectory of the gaming industry continues a yearslong trend of increased popularity.

Nielsen, a company tracking how various audiences use media, provided some insight last year into video game usage.

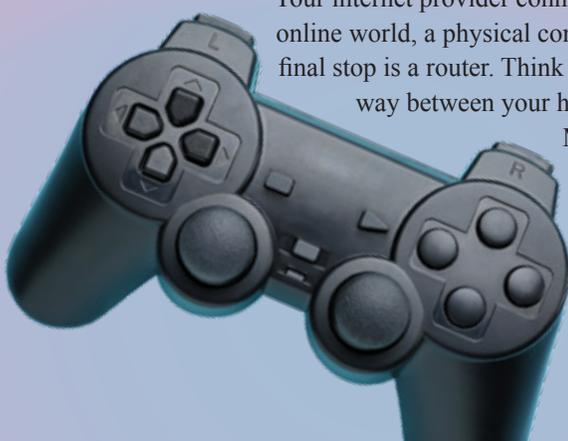
At one point during the pandemic, 55% of U.S. consumers reported playing video games. In fact, people were buying games at a fast clip, with sales rising about 14% during 2020.

There's a twist with modern gaming, too. People use it to connect with each other. The game Fortnite became famous for in-game live events, and more and more people began using services like Twitch to watch others play games, according to Nielsen.

Simply, gaming goes beyond, well, just a game. It's an experience, one made possible by fast, reliable internet.

But are you maximizing your connection for how you experience gaming?

## THE CONNECTION



Your internet provider connects your home to the online world, a physical connection where the final stop is a router. Think of this as the gateway between your home and the internet.

Most modern routers allow two types of connections: Wi-Fi and Ethernet.

## BENEFITS OF WI-FI

Wi-Fi uses radio waves to connect the router to your devices, eliminating the clutter of cables. Devices ranging from televisions to refrigerators can use this technology to connect online.

### Gaming-related benefits of Wi-Fi include:

- Convenient for mobile games on phones and iPads.
- The ability to connect multiple devices without cables.
- Most devices, including computers, set-top boxes and more, have Wi-Fi connectivity. The same can't be said for wired Ethernet connections. Even some laptops lack the option for an Ethernet connection.
- For watching streaming content such as Twitch, Wi-Fi wirelessly takes devices ranging from TVs to tablets online.

## BENEFITS OF ETHERNET — WHEN GAMING GETS SERIOUS

An Ethernet connection is a physical link between your device and router. With modern online gaming, success can depend upon how fast the twitch of a finger on a controller can be translated into actions in an online world living on a faraway computer server.

### When speed matters, an Ethernet is often the right option.

- Consistency: Unlike Wi-Fi signals, which can be affected by walls or even signals from other devices, the wired connection's speed should remain consistent with that provided by your internet service.
- Lower latency, which is the time it takes a bit of data to leave your device, reach its online destination and then complete the round trip. With gaming, lower latency is critical, and Ethernet is a difference-maker.
- Simple and secure: Connect an Ethernet cable to your device and to your router and get playing. It's that simple. Unlike with Wi-Fi routers, you typically do not need to enter a password to connect.
- The downside is that cable clutter is real. Serious gamers in particular, though, will benefit from devices connected via Ethernet.



# Raise a glass <sup>to</sup> the *Lone Star State*

Sample the tastes of Texas at Blue Lotus Winery

Story by ANNE BRALY

**M**elissa and Michael Poole appreciate the craft that goes into creating a good drink. The couple loves to travel and sample the local wines at each of their destinations as they crisscross the globe. Consider their shared interests, Michael's knowledge of beer brewing and what Melissa learned about agriculture while growing up on a South Dakota farm, and it's no surprise that the Pooles are now among the leading producers of wine and mead in the Texas Hill Country.

The couple opened Texas Mead Works in Seguin in 2011 and launched a sister company, Blue Lotus Winery, the following year. "We decided to join the winery fray in the Texas Hill Country to expand our exposure to Texas wine consumers," says Michael, Blue Lotus' head winemaker. In 2012, the winery served its first bottle — a 2011 Carmenère from grapes from a New Mexico grower. The couple even designed the label themselves.

The Pooles had to clear some hurdles to establish themselves as winemakers and sell the fruits of their labor to the

public. The first challenge was locating the perfect piece of property with just the right climate for growing grapes. They found their vineyard in the beautiful Guadalupe River Valley, just outside Seguin.

Navigating the processes to obtain the necessary licenses was another high-priority item on the to-do list. "Then there were the costs involved in producing the wine — the tanks, barrels, pumps and other equipment," Michael says. "All that can get rather expensive."

## TEXAS PRIDE

Once the Pooles had all the pieces in place to launch their venture, they still faced a daunting task — changing people's perceptions about Texas wines.

In years past, many considered Texas wines mediocre, at best. But that perception started to change as Americans began appreciating and demanding higher-quality vintages. Texas winemakers responded, bringing in different varieties of grapes and blending them to create award-winning wines.

Now, the wine industry is raising a



The Blue Lotus Winery in Seguin offers a variety of wines and food items in its tasting room.

Photography courtesy of Blue Lotus Winery



toast to Texas, as the Lone Star State boasts more than 400 wineries and is the fifth-largest wine-producing state in the country. “In the past decade, Texas wineries have been producing fantastic wines,” Michael says. He credits the improvement to competition. The increased number of wineries in the state prompts winemakers to step up their game and produce a higher-quality product.

The Pooles planted their first vines in Seguin in 2005 and add more each year, testing different varietals to see how they grow. Small lots around the 12-acre vineyard each have between 50 and 100 vines, which the Pooles have chosen for their resistance to various diseases. Once such malady is Pierce’s Disease, which stems from bacteria that spreads vine to vine, blocking the plants’ internal watering systems. The result is yellow leaves and, eventually, shriveled grapes. “We recently planted a new variety called Camminare Noir,” Michael says. “This is a new-release grape from the University of California at Davis. It has increased disease resistance to Pierce’s Disease.”

Though they grow many of their own grapes, the Pooles also buy their main ingredient from other vineyards in Texas — but not from anywhere else. “We only produce Texas wines,” Michael notes.

After a decade in the business, Texas Mead Works and Blue Lotus Winery welcome guests to Seguin from around the Hill Country and as far away as Houston, Corpus Christi and Dallas. The

Pooles opened a second tasting room about 75 miles to the northwest in Hye, and they recently opened Blue Lotus Resort in Seguin, offering guests a relaxing getaway in their vineyard with a swim-up bar and sun deck for the ultimate relaxing escape.

Wine lovers are invited to join the Texas Mead Works and Blue Lotus Winery Wine Club, an ever-growing list of several hundred aficionados who appreciate the benefits that come with membership, such as discounts by the case and alerts when new vintages are available. “They’re benefits that have been widely accepted and appreciated,” Michael adds.

In addition to internet sales, the Pooles’ wines — red, white, sweet or dry — may be purchased on-site in the barrel-shaped tasting room with its never-ending views of the valley at Blue Lotus Winery.

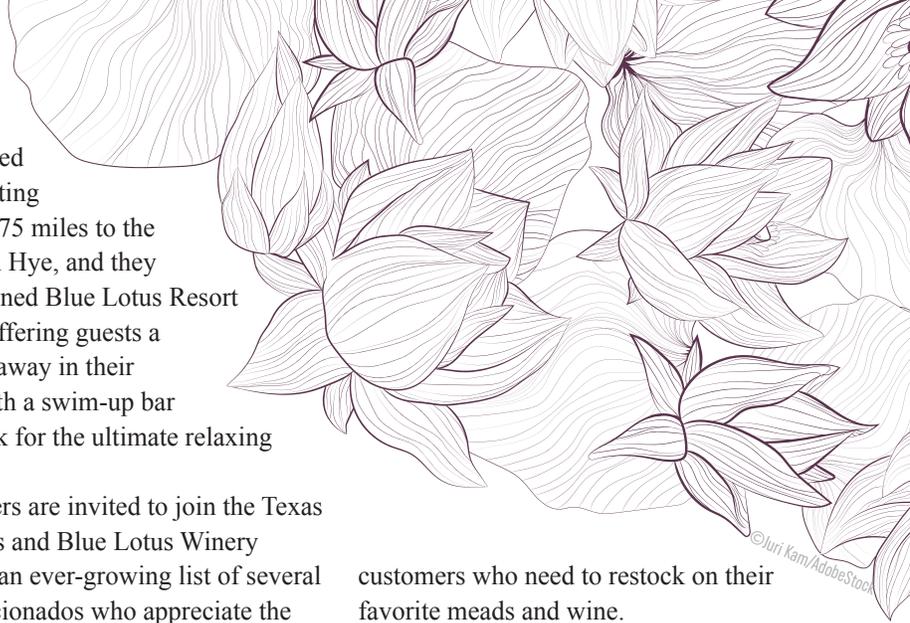
Their meads appear in liquor stores statewide, and their carbonated meads are served in restaurants and bars across Texas under the Saint Michael’s brand. Mead, a fermented beverage made of honey, water, yeast and various fruits and spices, is the world’s oldest alcoholic beverage. Sometimes called “honey wine,” Saint Michael’s meads are a gluten-free alternative to beer.

“We are the state’s largest producer of still mead,” Michael says. “We make traditional style meads as well as spiced and fruit meads.”

### GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

So, how do the Pooles spread the word throughout Texas and beyond? They do it with their internet service through VTX1. It’s helped the couple reach out to prospective guests looking to try something new, along with longtime

***Blue Lotus Winery  
& Texas Mead Works***  
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customers who need to restock on their favorite meads and wine.

And the couple uses internet for behind-the-scenes business operations. “In today’s interconnected society, it’s important to have reliable internet service,” Michael says. “We require very reliable internet service, thankfully we are supported by VTX1 broadband, to process our credit card purchases, operate our point-of-sale software, send and receive emails and many other necessary operations.”



# So *fresh* and so

## A unique technique locks more flavor in your veggies

The profusion of fresh vegetables coming our way this spring means it's time to learn a bit about blanching, a technique that brings out the beautiful flavors that only fresh produce can bring — a taste explosion.

Blanching can be a cook's best friend. It destroys enzymes that make green veggies turn brown and mushy, so it's ideal when you want to add green vegetables, such as peas and asparagus, to your risotto. Blanching also removes bitterness from some of our more bitter vegetables, like broccoli rabe. It's also a great way to skin tomatoes, as blanching loosens the skins without cooking the fruit, something that also works for peaches and plums. And if you're planning to prepare and serve a veggie platter, blanch the carrots, broccoli, pea pods and cauliflower. The veggies will retain their color, but your guests will find them much easier to chew.

Blanching is nothing more than boiling vegetables until they're just crisp-tender, then plunging them in an icy bath. It sounds like a simple process, and it is, but there are just a few steps to follow to bring out the best of spring and summer's bounties.

If you're a vegetable gardener, think ahead for the cold days of winter when the flavor of fresh vegetables is just a memory, that is, unless you've blanched in advance of freezing them. Not only does blanching preserve the color and texture of your vegetables, it will also preserve their nutrient content.

Now that you know why you should blanch, here's how:

In order to stop the enzyme action that breaks vegetables down, the food must reach 180 degrees.

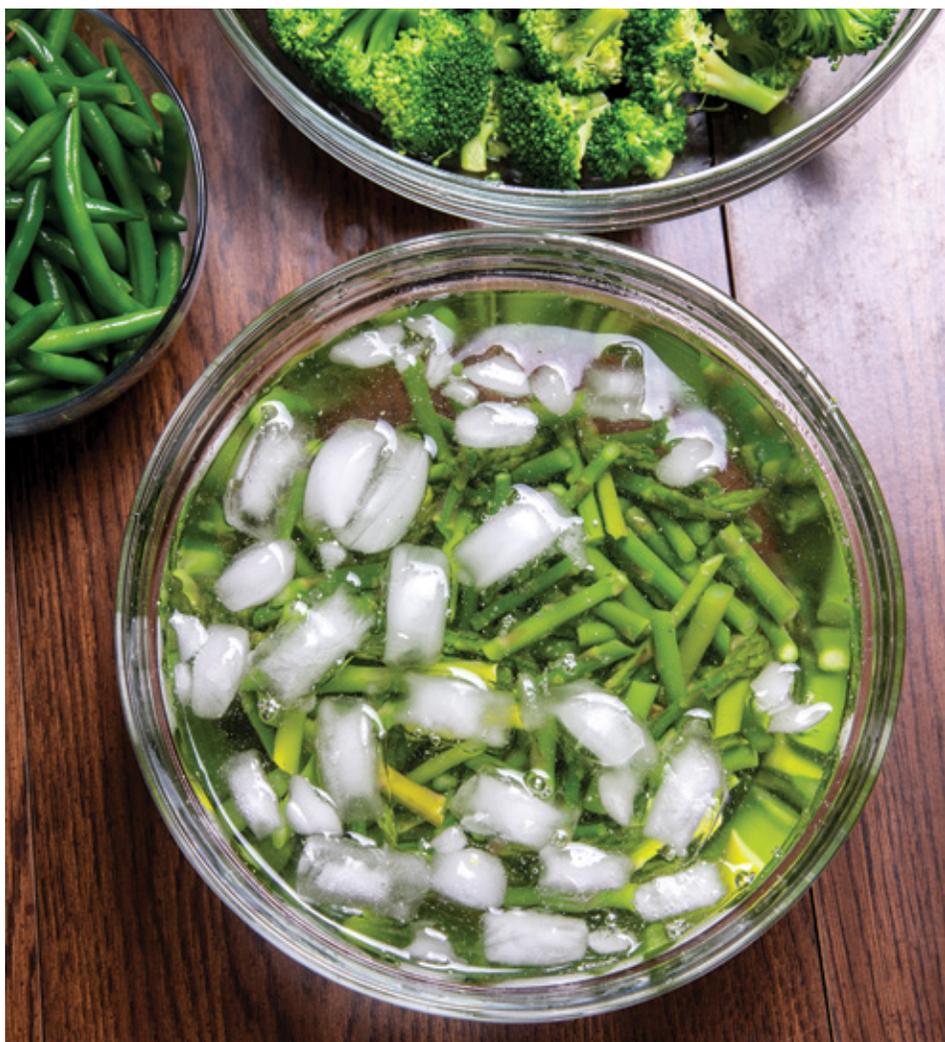
The time spent in boiling water and time spent in ice water should be roughly equal. If you're not able to prepare a cold immersion for your vegetables, putting them in a colander under cold running water will work.

Adding salt to your boiling water will help make green vegetables even greener. Steer clear of lemon juice or other acids, though; these will react with the

chlorophyll and turn your greens brown. And don't use baking soda — it will damage the nutrients found in vegetables.

Use 1 gallon of water for each pound of food to be blanched. If you overload the water with vegetables, it will lower the water's temperature and slow the cooking process, defeating the purpose.

Once the vegetables are crisp-tender, move them from the boiling water and into a large container of ice water. This will stop the cooking process. Then you're ready to bag them for freezing or use them right away in your spring and summer meals. 🍷



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

# clean

## SALAD NICOISE

- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- 1/2 pound of small potatoes
- 1/2 pound of green beans, blanched
- 1/2 head of green lettuce, washed and torn into bite-sized pieces
- 1 (7-ounce) can of tuna fish
- 4 ounces of tomatoes, diced, or cherry tomatoes
- 10 black olives
- 2 tablespoons of capers
- 1/2 cup of vinaigrette dressing (your favorite)

Cook the potatoes until tender and let cool.

Build each salad starting with a layer of lettuce, then add half the vegetables, including potatoes, tuna, eggs and olives to each plate. Sprinkle with capers. Serve with vinaigrette dressing. Makes 2 servings.



## RISOTTO WITH BLANCHED ASPARAGUS

- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed, cut into 2-inch lengths
- 5 cups canned or homemade chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1 1/2 cups arborio rice
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 3/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (about 3 ounces)

Blanch asparagus pieces in a large pot of boiling, salted water for 2 minutes. Drain. Rinse asparagus under cold water. Drain asparagus well.

Bring chicken broth to a simmer in a small saucepan. Reduce heat to low and keep broth hot. Heat olive oil in a heavy large saucepan over medium heat. Add chopped onion and saute until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add rice and stir for 3 minutes. Add dry white wine and cook until liquid evaporates. Continue cooking until rice is tender but still slightly firm in center and mixture is creamy, adding chicken broth 1 cup at a time and stirring almost constantly, about 20 minutes. Add blanched asparagus pieces and stir until heated through, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Add 6 tablespoons butter and stir until incorporated. Stir in grated Parmesan cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Makes 4-6 servings.

## WALNUT BROCCOLI SALAD

- 2 pounds broccoli florets
- 1/2 cup toasted walnuts
- 1/2 cup jumbo mixed raisins
- 8 strips bacon cooked and crumbled
- 1/2 red onion thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Bring a big pot of water to a boil and season it liberally with salt. It should taste like the ocean. Add the broccoli florets to the water and cook for 60 seconds, until they're bright green in color. Immediately drain the broccoli florets, then rinse with cold water for 2 minutes or place in an ice-water bath until the broccoli has cooled down.

Transfer the broccoli to a salad spinner, and spin the broccoli dry or drain well if you don't have a spinner. Then blot dry further with a kitchen towel to prevent any excess water from diluting the dressing.

Combine the broccoli with the toasted walnuts, raisins, bacon, onion, mayonnaise, vinegar and salt and black pepper, to taste. Stir well. Chill for at least 30 minutes, preferably an hour, before serving to allow the flavors to marry. Makes 6 servings.



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