

West Carolina Tel

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2016

CONNECTED

METAL MAN

Pat Tafta is
forging a legacy

THOMAS AND SON STORE

A family tradition
of good service

CHILLY MEANS CHILI

Fill up your bowl and stay
warm with hearty recipes





With the help of your telco, NTCA charts a course for 2016

By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

With so many issues impacting the future of telecommunications, it is important that our nation's independent and cooperative providers speak with a unified voice to lawmakers and regulators. NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association has long been that voice in Washington, D.C.

As 2015 drew to a close, NTCA's board of directors created a strategic plan to help guide us through 2016 and beyond. This plan reaffirms our vision and mission, and sets goals that reflect a desire to continue our outstanding grassroots efforts to shape public policy, to build on and improve our top-notch programs and, of course, to communicate with member telcos like yours about changes that affect their company, our industry and ultimately, the service they provide you.

Your telco had a voice in this process, and that means you had a voice, too. I therefore wanted to share a few parts of our strategic plan with you, in order to highlight the focus and commitment to

excellence that your telco and its partners demonstrate as they work hard to bring quality telecommunications to rural America.

MISSION

Our Core Purpose

The mission of NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association is to promote and sustain advanced communications services in rural America by supporting the viability and vitality of our members.

VISION

Our Picture of the Ideal Future

To be widely recognized as the premier national advocate and essential partner for small, rural, community-based communications providers.

GOALS

Outcomes on the Path to Achieving Our Vision

ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP

Lead and shape industry change for the

benefit of rural telecommunications providers and consumers.

COMMUNICATION & EDUCATION

Broaden the scope of education and communication opportunities to our membership.

MEMBERSHIP VALUE

Sustain, market and expand benefits to our membership.

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES

Enhance operational efficiencies for opportunities to maximize the organization's ability to be more flexible and nimble.

In the coming months, NTCA will implement steps to achieve these goals. I will continue to keep you updated on industry activity at the national level, which may impact you and your community. As I do, know that your needs and concerns are at the forefront of NTCA's work as we continue to represent the collective voice of telcos like yours. ☎

LIFELINE



Landline phone OR cell phone

NOT BOTH!

Do you qualify for the federal Lifeline program? If so, you need to know that the credit, which helps you pay for a phone connection, can only be applied to one service at a time.

You can apply for the Lifeline credit on your home landline or your cell phone — but not both.

If you receive the Lifeline credit on your home phone and decide to move it to your cell phone, the credit will stop appearing on your home phone. If you decide to move it back, the process could take a few months, and you will not receive your credit during that time.

Before moving your Lifeline credit to another phone, please contact your local telephone company where you have your credit now.



More questions about Lifeline?

Contact us at the phone number listed on Page 4.

Age does not matter

'Cyber-Seniors' shows technology's power to connect generations

BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY



Photo courtesy of Cyber-Seniors.

The film "Cyber-Seniors" drives home the point that senior adults can use technology — whether it's emailing, video chatting, streaming videos or even taking selfies.

The documentary film "Cyber-Seniors" follows the effort to connect generations through technology. The film's success created a campaign to encourage seniors to better use the Internet and social media. For director Saffron Cassaday, a Toronto native, the project was both personal and informative.

Q: What was your link to the topic, and why did you choose to make this film?

A: When my two younger sisters were in high school, they started a community service project called Cyber-Seniors. It was small-scale, just them and a few of their classmates visiting a local retirement residence a couple of days a week to teach computer lessons. They got the idea because our grandparents were 80 years old when they learned to use the Internet for the first time. It changed their lives and our relationship with them.

Q: Going into the project, what was your goal?

A: In the beginning, we thought of it almost as a social experiment. What happens when you put these two groups, seniors and teenagers, together in front of a computer? What we found was that a program like this can really positively impact the lives of senior citizens.

Q: How long did it take before the technology started to click?

A: Right off the bat, we could already see magic starting to happen. In the first few lessons, we witnessed a series of "ah ha" moments. The seniors' eyes would light up, and they would lean in close to the computer screen with awe each time they discovered something new.

Q: It's striking how quickly some seniors embraced the technology, particularly Facebook. How did you move beyond that?

A: The introduction to YouTube really brought some of the seniors out of their shells; we even witnessed a few sing-alongs. As the lessons continued, we began to see the generation gap narrow and friendships develop.

Q: Aside from friendship, what were the seniors getting out of this program?

A: In the beginning, we didn't know how easy it would be for seniors to learn this new skill. We didn't know how it would benefit them, or what kinds of things they would be drawn to online. Seniors who were in the habit of learning new things had an easier time catching on, and we started to realize how important lifelong learning is to health and vitality in one's older years.

Q: Having access to all the information the Internet has to offer must be empowering. What were the reactions of the seniors?

A: When you can't move around as much as you once did, the Internet can be used to make day-to-day tasks like banking and shopping easier. But, the No. 1 motivator for most of the seniors was the ability to connect with family and friends around the world. ☺



For resources to help introduce technology to seniors or for more information about the documentary, visit <http://cyberseniorsdocumentary.com>.

Georgia on our minds

Jan. 1 is such a great day. We all look forward to the promise the new year holds. It's exciting for me to do that both personally and for West Carolina Telephone. One major project has me particularly excited for 2016.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

Under the direction of our board of directors, WCTEL has taken steps to begin expanding our fiber network into Columbia County, Georgia. And while this may come as a surprise to many members, I can assure you it's not a decision we have made lightly. Businesses, residents and public institutions in Columbia County have asked for West Carolina to expand our network to their communities for years.

It's an important reminder that the network we have in Abbeville, McCormick and southern Anderson counties is something special — the type of network that communities around the country are still wishing they had.

Through a newly formed subsidiary, WCFiber LLC, WCTEL is strategically growing our footprint across the Highway 28

bridge for two reasons:

- 1) The expansion will continue to strengthen WCTEL's financial standing and longterm fiscal health, and,
- 2) Serving these new communities gets back to WCTEL's founding cooperative mission of connecting Freshwater Coast communities to the outside world when larger, profit-hungry corporations won't.

The Evans area of Columbia County is growing, and so the communities' demand for broadband is also growing. Ultimately, WCTEL believes the new area will increase revenue for WCFiber and benefit the cooperative and our members.

As a not-for-profit cooperative, WCTEL has advantages unavailable to corporately owned telcos and broadband providers, which often must make short-term choices to appease shareholders. Instead, cooperatives like WCTEL are created and owned by local residents who know the importance of a reliable communication network. Being member-owned means a commitment to serving our members that is unique in our industry.

But in order for us to continue our mission, we must make smart business decisions and seize promising opportunities when they present themselves.

I firmly believe this is one of those times.

Beyond the business side of the equation, we've seen firsthand the benefits of a fiber network for education, government services, commerce and quality of life. Communities forced to rely on slow, unreliable Internet service lag in today's competitive economic environment. I believe that keeping communities in our area from falling behind strengthens our entire region.

Our expansion into Columbia County is only one of the exciting things WCTEL has planned for 2016. We will continue to expand our home automation and security service. We will also work with local industries to help them capitalize on South Carolina's first gig-certified network.

It's going to be an exciting year, and I thank you for trusting WCTEL to keep you connected — no matter which side of the lake or state line you're on. ☎

The West Carolina Tel Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by West Carolina Telephone, © 2016. It is distributed without charge to all members/owners of the cooperative.



is a member-owned cooperative dedicated to delivering advanced telecommunications technology to the people of Abbeville, Anderson and McCormick counties.

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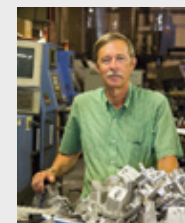
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Produced for West Carolina Tel by:



On the Cover:



At his shop in Donalds, Pat Tafta and his crew make everything from topiary frames to hot rods.
See story Page 12.



NOTES FROM THE BOARD

The WCTEL Board was busy in 2015, guiding the cooperative through an evolving industry. The new year looks just as exciting, and the board is pleased to serve the cooperative members once again.

Looking back over 2015, the WCTEL Board of Directors:

- ✓ Established business opportunities for increased revenue from selling services outside the service area to non-members through newly formed WCFiber, LLC in Columbia County, Georgia.
- ✓ Updated Bylaws to cover WCFiber, LLC operation.
- ✓ Bought a part interest in a cloud-based company called Cordero.
- ✓ Approved \$5,238,671 in net margins to capital credit funds to be allocated in the future to WCTEL members.
- ✓ Approved a capital credit distribution of \$1.6 million to the WCTEL members and \$900,000 to estate settlements.
- ✓ Updated the Strategic Plan, including a long-range financial forecast.
- ✓ Held Annual Meeting electing directors and reporting on company activity.
- ✓ Elected officers for 2015-2016.
- ✓ Received a clean audit opinion with no audit adjustments.
- ✓ Updated the Board Governance Manual.
- ✓ Started holding Board of Directors meetings at locations around the service areas including Savannah Lakes, Lowndesville and Donalds.
- ✓ Worked to educate state and local officials on affairs that affect WCTEL.
- ✓ Participated in board member training and an annual board evaluation.
- ✓ Conducted a chief executive officer evaluation.
- ✓ Approved 2016 budget.
- ✓ Oversaw contributions to community projects and supported the Abbeville County Strategic Plan Campaign.
- ✓ Monitored compliance with all board policy positions.



ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS!

→ **SENIORS:** WCTEL scholarship applications are now available! Each year, West Carolina Tel awards a scholarship to a member of the cooperative who exhibits a motivational drive toward accomplishing his or her future educational goals and is seen as a positive influence in his or her community. See your guidance counselor or call the WCTEL office for more details.

→ **JUNIORS:** Applications are now available for the 2016 FRS Youth Tour. Every summer, the FRS Youth Tour brings together high school students from across rural America to visit Washington, D.C., and learn about rural telecommunications. The tour provides a forum for teens to meet and interact with their peers from other rural communities, as well as key legislative, regulatory and government figures. Since its inception in 1995, the youth tour has hosted thousands of students. See your guidance counselor or call the WCTEL office for more details.

Video on Demand New Release Schedule

For a small rental fee, WCTEL's Video on Demand service gives you access to new releases as many as eight weeks before Netflix or Redbox (designated by an *). To access Video on Demand, press the "VOD" or "On Demand" button on the remote or press the "Menu" button and look for "On Demand."

January 5

- The Walk
- The Visit*
- The Green Inferno*
- Sicario

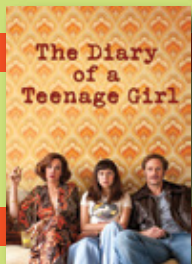


January 12

- Irrational Man
- Hotel Transylvania 2
- Sinister 2*
- Everest*

January 19

- Straight Outta Compton*
- The Diary of a Teenage Girl
- Learning to Drive



January 26

- Burnt
- Goosebumps

February 2

- Suffragette*
- Rock the Kasbah*
- The Last Witch Hunter
- Ladrones



February 9

- Crimson Peak*
- Love the Coopers
- By the Sea*
- 99 Homes
- Grandma

February 16

- Steve Jobs*
- Spotlight*

February 23

- My All American*
- Secret in Their Eyes*
- Legend*

THE ROAD TO EQUALITY

By Anne Braly

The civil rights movement has affected generations of Americans, and it continues today in cities across the U.S. But it all began in the South, where a road trip marches through cities where many put down their lives to achieve freedoms never before known. History is not always a comfortable ride through the ages. Oftentimes, it's met with uncomfortable truths. Here are four destinations that keep that history alive, lest we ever begin to forget.



Photo courtesy of National Civil Rights Museum.

Lorraine Motel marquee • Memphis, Tennessee

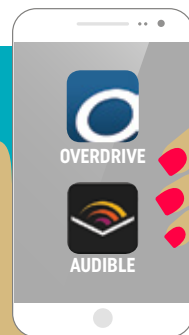
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Atlanta was in the heat of action during the civil rights movement. Like many large Southern cities, it saw its share of protests, marches and boycotts. Visitors to Atlanta can relive the moments that led up to equal rights for all by touring the International Civil Rights: Walk of Fame, walking “alongside” leaders of the movement. The outdoor passage features granite and bronze footprints of men and women influential in the struggle, such as Rosa Parks, Reverend Ralph Abernathy, former President Jimmy Carter, Justice Thurgood Marshall and dozens more. The walk is at 450 Auburn Ave., in the Sweet Auburn Historic District, a stretch of road that includes Martin Luther King Jr.’s birth home.



TECH-SAVVY TRAVELER:

Make the most of those hours behind the wheel and consider using audiobooks to learn about the history of wherever the road takes you. Books on tape are now books on mobile devices, thanks to apps like **Overdrive** and **Audible**. Download a book to your digital device over Wi-Fi at home and then take those stories with you on the road. Listening to “Death of a King” by Tavis Smiley would provide context before touring the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.





MLK Walk of Fame • Atlanta, Georgia

Where to eat: Busy Bee Cafe (810 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive) is remembered as a gathering place for civil rights leaders in the 1960s and remains a favorite place for Atlantans to get their fill of some of the city’s best fried chicken, oxtails, broccoli casserole and collard greens.

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

160 miles from Atlanta via I-85

When seamstress Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery in 1955, she knew she was making a statement, but most likely had no idea it would help launch a movement destined to become one of the strongest campaigns for equal rights. The formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association, which chose a young Martin Luther King Jr. as its president, was spawned by Parks’ initiative. Today, visitors to Montgomery may tour The Rosa Parks Museum (252 Montgomery St.), which, through the use of visual effects, offers a glimpse of the energy and emotion of the bus boycott struggle, along with exhibits and a large auditorium that hosts lectures and performances.

Where to eat: Chris’ Hotdogs (138 Dexter Ave.) King used to come in, buy a paper and visit with the owners when he was pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. And it was a bus stop for Rosa Parks, so she would come in and buy hot dogs. African-Americans could not dine in, so they had to order it to go as this was a whites-only establishment at that time. Chris’ became one of the first restaurants to welcome blacks into its dining room following passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

92 miles from Montgomery via I-65

1963 was a watershed year for the civil rights movement in Birmingham. In April, Martin Luther King Jr. sat in jail. Protestors marched in the face of fire hoses turned on full force at Kelly Ingram Park. And on Sept. 15, four young black girls were killed in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church. Birmingham was a chaotic canvas splattered with strife and violence.

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (520 16th St. N) is where visitors can relive these moments in history. A replica of King’s jail cell, a robe from the KKK, a burned bus, as well as glimpses into the daily lives of African-Americans, especially during their struggle for equal rights, are features that can be seen. A stroll through Kelly Ingram Park, adjacent to the 16th Street church, is a ghostly reminder of the violence and hatred witnessed there.

Where to eat: Mrs. B’s on Fourth (328 16th St.), serving classic Southern fare cafeteria-style, is an easy stroll from the Civil Rights Institute. Favorites: fried chicken, collards, mac ‘n’ cheese and homemade banana pudding.

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

239 miles from Birmingham via I-22 and US-78

On April 3, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. gave what would be the last speech of his life at the Mason Temple. The next evening, as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel speaking to colleagues, he was shot and killed. King was 39 years old. Today, his room at the motel, one of just a handful of integrated motels in the late 1960s, has been preserved as a memorial to King. Blood stains mark the concrete balcony to this day. In 1991, the National Civil Rights Museum (450 Mulberry St.) was built around it and features “Exploring the Legacy,” an exhibit that includes never-before-seen evidence surrounding the King assassination. Newly finished renovations have increased the number of multimedia and interactive exhibits.

“We want people to understand what the movement was about. The people who fought for our civil rights were young and strived to make our lives and communities better,” says Faith Morris, director of marketing, governmental and community affairs at the museum. “And we invite our visitors to join the movement. To take a stand and be a part of social change.”

Morris says the museum brings the movement to life and helps give a focus of national and global understanding unlike any other museum of its kind.

Where to eat: The Four Way (998 Mississippi Blvd.). Nothing but legendary soul food is served here, and what makes it even more so is the fact that King dined here whenever he came to town. His favorite choices were the fried catfish and lemon meringue pie, and it’s still made and served just like it was in the 1960s. 🍷



Rosa Parks Museum • Montgomery, Alabama

Randy and Mike Thomas are the third generation of Thomases to work at the hardware store.



Building a family foundation

BY MATT LEDGER

At J.B. Thomas and Son Hardware, customers come in needing a wide variety of things on their shopping lists. And the Thomas family is happy to help — whether it's bags of seed, chicken wire or a 15-cent washer.

"We're just as happy with that 15-cent sale as one where we do \$300," says Helen Thomas, business manager at the store.

The shop has always been that kind of

place, and customers still congregate at the register, discussing the complexities of their projects and seeking advice from employees and other shoppers.

The ringing of the cowbell over the door and the intermittent beeping of a single cash register unveil a traditional hardware store where the inventory is modern, but the nostalgia of a family business is evident to every new customer. "When people move to the area, this is usually the first place that they come to since this is a one-stop shop," Helen says.

"And, they're usually calling us for phone numbers of contractors," Helen says, laughing. "We probably get 10 to

15 calls each day asking how you get in touch with somebody." Travelers and those relocating to the lake area are a reliable source of business. "Some are moving in or out; others are spending a weekend and need to fix something," she adds.

Knowing they've helped other good people helps make the job worthwhile for the Thomas family. "Most importantly, we've got a lot of great customers that believe in buying local," Helen says.

"They've got me working on a project on Barnes Station Road," one customer says. "Oh, God bless you," another customer jokes during a summertime visit to the store. The historic two-story Victorian farmhouse is a renovation by someone relocating to the area and is actually in surprisingly great shape, with the original staircase, hardwood ceilings and floors in tact. "That was the old Straton place," Helen says, offering a bit of local history to the conversation.

Their regular customers even discuss first experiences at the new restaurant in

town this past summer — Griff’s Gourmet Garage — which is a new business direction for the Thomas family, with Helen’s granddaughter, Griffin, grilling up the mac-n-cheese hot dogs that are a big hit around town.

FAMILY LEGACY

Walter Thomas, better known as Mr. Walt, moved back to Iva to buy the store as a business investment in 1949. He named the store for his father, John Bunyon Thomas, who worked for the previous owners. The store primarily served the needs of farmers in the area.

When she married Walt, Helen was a telephone operator for Starr-Iva Telephone — before it joined West Carolina Telephone Cooperative. Helen began working at the store in 1967, learning how to do the bookkeeping after a bale of cotton fell on Mr. Walt and broke his back. She’s been working there ever since.

“Back in the early days, we were 90 percent feed and fertilizer and would sometimes sell 36,000 tons a day,” Randy Thomas recalls. He and his brothers, Wayne and Mike, grew up on the family farm and have worked in the family store over the years.

In 2007, it was members of the community who would come to help after a fire



Randy Thomas helps customers find just the right piece of hardware.

claimed the 115-year-old building. “We had some people volunteer to help, and a lot of them donated,” Helen recalls. The store was moved to a temporary location that previously housed a rescue squad, before reopening at the prior location on Front Street in April 2008.

Mr. Walt worked in the family business for more than six decades, until he passed in 2013 at age 90. “He was up here every day, even in bad health the last three or four years,” Helen says. “His customers and responsibilities are what kept him going. It helps when you feel like you’ve done a good deed.”



The store has bins full of connectors for customers tackling plumbing projects.

“He loved to answer the phone,” Helen recalls. “After he died, it took me a long time to realize that I had to be the one to do that.”

Thomas and Son goes beyond just Thomases. As a kid, Seth Gray rode his bicycle to the hardware store on occasion. Mr. Walt would grab a wrench, fix the bike and mentor the boy through many conversations. “Then, we’d call some three or four hours later and tell his folks that he was on his way back,” Helen says. Gray has worked at the store for the past two years. “I love how they make me feel like family,” Gray says.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Aside from managing the hardware store, Mr. Walt had a lifetime of service, starting with the U.S. Army during World War II. He continued that civic pride serving as a school trustee, and as a board director with the Iva Rescue Squad, The Peoples Bank of Iva, Starr-Iva Water Company and the West Carolina Telephone Cooperative.

In 2014, Mike Thomas continued the family tradition upon being elected to his father’s seat on the WCTEL board. He says his dad served as an excellent example, both on the board and at the hardware store. Keeping customers satisfied and providing dependable service are of the highest importance to both businesses.

“He basically had the same attitude in both places,” Mike says. “He didn’t look at people as just being customers. If someone walked in his hardware store, he wanted to be sure they left with what they needed.” 📺



Seth Gray, who has worked at the Thomas and Son store as a full-timer for 2 years, says he feels like part of the family.

Cyndi Spivey

GRACE + BEAUTY

A Q&A with Cyndi Spivey, a blogger from Kentucky who inspires women over 40 to look and feel their best. Topics include makeup, skin care, fashion, faith and more.

Check out her blog
CYNDISPIVEY.COM



Q: What will readers find at your blog?

Cyndi Spivey: I share wearable fashions for women over 40, taking current trends and showing them how to wear them in everyday life. I also share makeup tips and encourage women to live a more healthful lifestyle. Most importantly, I share my journey with Christ and encourage women to know that true beauty begins on the inside.

Q: Why did you become a blogger and how has it changed your life?

CS: I was introduced to blogging in 2009 by my mom. She started following a few blogs and then encouraged me to start my own blog. My mom passed away in September 2009, and my blog is dedicated to her. I was a dental hygienist by profession but quit at the beginning of this year to become a full-time blogger. I love that I can make money doing something I'm passionate about.

Q: Now that you're in your 40s, how has your style evolved since you were in your 20s, from your clothes to your makeup and hair?

CS: I'm a product of the '80s, so as you can imagine, my style has changed a lot. I think I've evolved because I have learned what clothes look best on my body type. I take better care of my skin and try to

use chemical-free makeup and skin-care products. And my hair is definitely not as big as it was when I was in my 20s.

Q: What is the biggest mistake women make with their makeup as they age?

CS: As we age, our makeup needs to change, too. Some women wear the same makeup they did in their 20s! As we age, we should stay away from anything that shimmers — it will show your fine lines, and dark lipstick — it ages you. Also, make sure you fill in your eyebrows. I use a dark brown eye shadow to help make them look more natural.

Q: Is there a certain age where women should transition into more "mature" clothing, or is a "you're-only-as-young-as-you-feel" philosophy OK?

CS: I wouldn't call it mature clothing, but I do think it's important as we age to have a good basic wardrobe that is classic and timeless. These are clothes that I will spend a little more money on: a good-fitting pair of jeans, a classic pump, a blazer and a white-collared blouse, just to name a few.

Q: Your blog is all about feeling good inside and out. Can a positive outlook on life make us look better?

CS: Absolutely. A positive outlook can

help us feel better, but for me, it's more than a positive outlook. Inner beauty begins with my relationship with Christ. I have more than a positive outlook; I have hope in Jesus Christ. ☺

OTHER FASHION BLOGS YOU MIGHT LIKE:

► WWW.LIFEWITHEMILYBLOG.COM

This blog will give you ideas on how to put together great outfits, even on a budget. The Greensboro, North Carolina, blogger also writes about do-it-yourself projects, including turning last year's clothes into this year's fashions.

► WWW.GLITTERANDGINGHAM.COM

Here you'll find a blogger from Lexington, Kentucky, who makes her way through life one outfit at a time — and she loves to accessorize them. Her endless ideas will make you sparkle.



Using the phone to **market your business**

BY RIEVA LESONSKY

With more and more customers contacting companies online, it may seem as if your business phone no longer matters. But if you aren't taking advantage of the many ways your company's phone can be used as a marketing tool, you're selling your business short. Try these tips for using your phone to market your business.

► GET A TOLL-FREE PHONE NUMBER

No one wants to spend money calling a business. If you serve customers outside your local area code, a toll-free number makes them more likely to call you. Toll-free numbers also create the impression your business is professional and successful, even if you only own one location.

Obtaining a toll-free number that spells out a relevant word is less important than it used to be, but it still helps. Depending on your industry and brand, it can also inject humor and reflect personality — such as junk removal company 1-800-GOT-JUNK.

► USE ON-HOLD MESSAGING CREATIVELY

Don't let customers sit in silence when on hold. Create on-hold messaging that

educates customers about your business, products and services, as well as entertains them. Search online and you'll find many companies that can script, record and produce custom on-hold messages for your business, interspersed with a wide range of music.

Here are some ideas for what to include:

- Tips related to your business: A landscaping service could offer seasonal tips for garden care. For example: "Spring is here, so don't forget to aerate your lawn — or have Spring Green do it for you!"
- Information about new products or services: "Are you trying to save water? Spring Green now offers a full line of water-wise plants, plus xeriscape design services."
- Answers to frequently asked questions: For example, if prospects frequently call you for price quotes, offer general information, such as, "Our weekly lawn-care service starts as low as \$79 a month."
- Special offers, sales or events: "Our yearly Annuals Extravaganza is here! During the month of April, save 25 percent off all annuals."

- Interesting, funny or surprising facts: "Did you know the world's biggest dandelion grew 14 feet high? Keep your weeds under control with our weekly service."
- And always include a call-to-action. "Ask about our..." or "Make an appointment to..."

Don't overwhelm customers with too much information. Think in terms of quick "sound bites." Record a three- to six-minute on-hold message loop, long enough that customers don't end up hearing the same thing over and over.


Keep your brand in mind. The music, tone of voice and information used in your on-hold messaging should reinforce your business brand, as well as appeal to your target customers. For instance, a child-care center might record its message with a warm, soothing motherly voice and play children's music.

Use these tactics to transform your business phone from a ho-hum necessity into a marketing powerhouse. 📞

Rieva Lesonsky is CEO and President of GrowBiz. This article first appeared on SBA.gov. Used by permission.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

BY MATT LEDGER



Pat Tafta has made a career of building steel structures, ranging from high-horsepowered vehicles to animal topiaries.

Pat Tafta has a few skeletons in his closet.

Actually, most of them are spread around his shop. And the rigid backbones of the projects he crafts from metal are something he should be proud for everyone to see.

Best known for building the metal frames used on display at the Greenwood Festival of Flowers, Tafta has made a coffee table from the engine of a World War II biplane and has plans to custom build a 400cc V-twin motorcycle with the massive cylinders from a B-17 bomber.

Fusing his dreams into metal is something Tafta has been doing most of his life — and he's showing no signs of slowing down.

As a young boy, Tafta built model planes, an influence from his father's hobby of flying as a private pilot. Unfortunately, he never got the chance to fly with his father, who passed when Tafta was only 11 years old.

Much of his free time is still spent on his love of aviation. "I flew solo my first time when I was 19, but waited until I was 57 to get my pilot's license," Tafta says.

Even though Tafta studied graphic engineering at Piedmont Technical College in Greenwood, he rarely maps out his projects. He began working as draftsman at the county courthouse, but stayed only six months as he literally "caught the bug," starting a new project that took off quickly and became a career. Tafta took in a number of side projects on Volkswagen vehicles that were more profitable than his day job.

Within a year he opened a repair shop of his own and became a renowned expert, customizing the iconic German cars for nearly 30 years. In 1986, he even achieved a world-record speed in his fifth drag race, driving a modified VW Karmann Ghia. "I think it's easier to get started and then work yourself out of the box," he says.

Modifying cars led Tafta to add a machine shop, which allows him to further explore his passions — whether he wants to fly down the track or fly through the air. His current project car is a 1973 Dodge Charger, with a blown 1,000-horsepower engine that he will rebuild.

DREAMS TAKING FLIGHT

Before getting his pilot's license a few years ago, Tafta began the most difficult project he has attempted thus far. "I'm building a World War II fighter just from looking at a picture on a wall," Tafta says. "I've spent a ton of time and money on it."

He began the replica F4U Corsair 10 years ago, with an estimated completion date of 2021.

He works on the plane as his schedule and budget allows, estimating it will have cost nearly \$300,000 when finished. It will be an 80 percent scale reproduction of the iconic fighter, but he has no plans to sell it. He will make the plane fully operational so that he may fly it one day, even adding a second seat so his kids can enjoy the ride.

Nearly four years ago, Tafta built an airplane hangar for the project. He then followed his wife's advice and bought a plane that he could actually fly. "I had a World War II Stearman trainer biplane in mind, so I went on an Internet quest and found one in Virginia." He bought the plane and had another pilot fly the vintage plane to the new destination, since Tafta was a student pilot at the time.

"Every time I put on the goggles and flying cap to go fly my Stearman — which has an open-air cockpit — I get this little fuzzy feeling of excitement," Tafta says. Each flight gives a sense of American history and a reminder of the sacrifice when the pilots who flew planes like this began



Pat Tafta is custom building a vintage WWII fighter from merely looking at photos of the airplane.

battling over European skies.

Tafta built a second hangar in 2013 for his Corsair project, bought 43 acres next to the private airport and extended the grass runway an additional 1,000 feet for safety.

CREATING CREATURES

Tafta Inc. in Donalds receives challenging projects on any given day. With a foundry operation and expansive machine shop, the business can create nearly anything out of metal. "I can build an engine from scratch," Tafta says. "If I wanted to go to the moon, I could. I'd need some help, but I could build a spaceship to go there and come back."

In 2013, Kay Self approached Tafta about a simpler project for the City of Greenwood in time for the annual Festival of Flowers celebration. She hoped Tafta might turn his welding torch toward making some animal skeletons for topiar-

ies — the metal frames that would be covered with plants to make some of the festival's signature displays. Tafta had not previously tried making wildlife sculptures from rebar but knew he could easily construct the creatures Self wanted to cover with greenery. "If they can think of it, we can probably do it," he says. "Many times they just give me a picture and say, 'Here's what we're looking for.'"

Tafta began the topiary by sketching a few simple drawings to help him calculate the dimensions of the nearly two-story sculptures. With something that large, he also had to figure out how to get it out of the shop and transport it to the festival.

The first topiary was a 13-foot bearcat, sponsored by Lander University. He started off making the middle of the belly, which is the biggest ring, working outward to create the body and then the limbs. Tafta didn't like the expression in the submitted photo, so he proposed a more menacing mug for the beast and set of claws to match.

A tiger and gamecock followed the next two years, completing the collegiate theme with Clemson University and the University of South Carolina being represented. Tafta created a pig and a mermaid in 2015 and will build a golf ball and tee topiary for 2016.

Tafta says he's been contemplating retirement in the next few years. If he does, that would allow him to ride off into the sunset, once he finishes that Stearman project. "I've been meaning to slow down a bit, but it's just hard to," he says. 📧



Tafta is always tinkering whether in the shop, on a plane or on cars.

CHILI WEATHER

To stare into the depths of a bowl of chili, with its heady currents of beef, onions, tomatoes and spices, is to understand a certain truth: Chili demands passion.

And it's with this force that Kentucky native David Bradley, a corrections unit administrator at Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex in West Liberty, Kentucky, and "a foodie by nature," creates his chili.

"I first remember making chili with my mom when I was around 12 years old," he says. "It was good, but she would serve it over pasta. I didn't like it that way, so she would always reserve a regular large bowl for me."

His mother's love of chili stirred Bradley's interest in making his own, so he began experimenting, using tips and techniques he'd seen on cooking shows, in cookbooks, and — like any good cook — by trial and error. A pinch of this and a dash of that, tasting, testing and tasting again until it was just right. Then, with a shot of confidence, he entered it in a chili cook-off, an event to benefit a local cancer patient.

Even though he knew his chili was good, his win as the "Crowd Favorite" came as a surprise, he says.

His chili goes beyond the typical ground beef mixture

with the addition of ground pork and bacon.

"That definitely gives the chili more flavor," he says. "Not many chili recipes have pork in them."

And here are a couple other secrets to round out the winning mix:

- **Beer:** Not just any brew. Use a hearty ale to give your chili a noted depth of flavor. If all you have on hand is Bud Light, you might as well use water. "If I don't have any beer on hand, I use chicken stock as a substitute," Bradley says. If you're worried about the alcohol, don't be. It burns off as the chili simmers.

- **Sugar:** Sugar tones down the acidity of the tomatoes and rounds out the flavors very nicely without reducing the savory taste.

Chili aficionados are quite opinionated about their preferences when it comes to this all-American meal.

In Texas, you'll most likely find it made with chopped beef rather than ground. And of course, no beans. Up Ohio way, you'll find it served over pasta. In the South, it's oftentimes served over rice and most always has beans.

Hearty chili helps David Bradley get through the cold Kentucky winters.

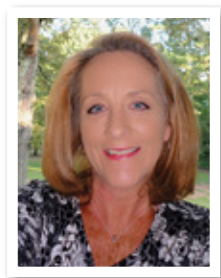


Bradley's wife and daughter prefer their chili over pasta. And beans? Bradley says he can take them or leave them, but, he says, they do help add protein and help to make the dish more filling.

Americans are in agreement when defining the American classic, though. When the cold creeps into your bones,

nothing warms you better than a steaming bowl of chili.

"Chili is great comfort food," Bradley notes. "It contains all the wonderful components that people love about food — the heartiness of beef, the taste of various vegetables and warm, aromatic seasonings that just make you feel good." 🍲



Food Editor **Anne P. Braly** is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Prior to pursuing a freelance career, she spent 21 years as food editor and feature writer at a regional newspaper.

DAVID'S BEST WINNING CHILI

- 5 to 6 slices of thick-cut bacon, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 medium onions, finely chopped
- 1 dried red chili pepper, finely chopped, optional
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 3 tablespoons chili powder (preferably New Mexico Chili Powder from Williams-Sonoma)
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- Salt and pepper
- 1 pound 85 percent lean ground beef
- 1 pound ground pork
- 1 cup beer or chicken stock
- 2 (15-ounce) cans kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (24-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 (24-ounce) can diced tomatoes, with juice
- 1/3 cup sugar

In a large pot, fry the bacon over medium heat until slightly crispy and browned, then add the garlic, onions, dried red chili pepper (optional), bell peppers, chili powder, cumin, oregano and smoked paprika; season with 1 teaspoon of salt and 1/2 teaspoon of pepper. Cook until the vegetables are tender and seasonings are aromatic. Next, add the beef and break it up with a wooden spoon. Allow beef to start browning, then add the pork. Add 2 teaspoons of salt and 1 teaspoon of pepper to the meat mixture. Break up the pork and brown, making sure the entire meat mixture is no longer pink. Once the meat is browned, stir in the beer and beans. Mix together thoroughly to combine, then add the crushed tomatoes, diced tomatoes and sugar. The sugar will round out the flavor and cut down the acidity of the tomatoes. Turn the heat down to low and simmer for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Taste for seasoning; add salt



A great chili can be enhanced by crackers, onions, cheese, corn chips or sour cream.

and pepper, if necessary. Makes about 6 servings. Refrigerate any leftovers. Tastes even better when reheated the next day.

DAVID'S QUICK AND EASY CHILI

This is David's mom's recipe — the one that got him started.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 pound ground beef
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 jar of Ragu garden-style sauce

- 2 tablespoons sugar
- Tabasco sauce, to taste (optional)

In a deep skillet on medium heat, add olive oil, onions and peppers and cook until vegetables are translucent. Meanwhile, in another skillet on medium heat, add hamburger and brown. Salt and pepper hamburger to taste. Drain off excess grease. Add hamburger to onions and peppers and combine. Add chili powder and toss to combine with hamburger mixture. Add Ragu sauce, sugar and Tabasco sauce; stir to combine. Reduce to low heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Makes 4 servings. 📖



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