

JULY - AUGUST 2020

125 YEARS
1895 - 2020



NineStar CONNECTION

VOLUME 9
ISSUE 3

NINESTAR PHOTO CONTEST

We held a NineStar Photo Contest and asked customers to show us how they were using their free upgraded internet speed. Here are the winners!

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NINESTAR DIRECTOR WINS REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

NineStar Director Chris Jeter has won the Republican primary for Indiana House District 88.

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PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
GREENFIELD, IN
PERMIT NO. 220

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MT. VERNON
SCHOOL
RECEIVES
REBATE CHECK
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2020
4-H QUEEN
CONTEST
PAGE 10





Ninestar to the rescue! Ninestar Connect lineman participated in pole top rescue training. (See more photos on page 7)



OUR EMPLOYEES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE. HERE'S A CUSTOMER REVIEW FOR RACHEL.

"TODAY I HAD A GREAT EXPERIENCE WITH YOUR COMPANY! FROM THE WORD "HELLO" I KNEW I WAS TALKING TO A GREAT PERSON, RACHEL WAS AN ABSOLUTE PLEASURE TO TALK TO. SHE WAS POLITE, UPBEAT AND VERY HELPFUL! SHE WENT OUT OF HER WAY TO MAKE SURE THAT MY PROBLEM WAS TAKEN CARE OF. I COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE IMPRESSED WITH THIS LADY AND HER PERSISTENCE WHEN IT CAME TO SOLVING THE PROBLEM THAT I WAS EXPERIENCING."



- CUSTOMER BRUCE

Customer service is at the tips of your fingers. NineStar Connect's tech support call center is open around the clock. 317-326-help ninestarconnect.com

STORY IDEA?

Contact David Spencer at dspencer@ninestarconnect.com

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POWER OUT?
NO INTERNET OR TV?




CHECK NINESTAR'S
FACEBOOK OR TWITTER PAGE!!

Social Media is exploding and if you aren't checking your laptop, tablet or smart phone for the latest and greatest fads, trends and updates.....you are not living in the 21st century! We have found that posting news about NineStar Connect on Facebook and Twitter has been a successful line of communication for all of our social media followers. Once you "like" our page, you will automatically be notified of any post we share whether it's information about an outage, an event we are planning, local Channel 9 broadcasting or energy information to save you money.

Additionally, if you have a question for us, send us a message. We will research and respond to your question as quickly as possible. We don't want to "leave you in the dark" about any issues or inquiries you might have for us. Our Customer Service has always been a significant piece of what we do and giving you the answers you need is imperative to keeping you knowledgeable and satisfied with our service. To add, when there is that unfortunate outage, your communication to us is just as helpful in determining where the problem is and who it is affecting so we encourage you to share your thoughts.

So if you haven't already, grab your tablet or smart phone and "Like" or "Follow" our Facebook and/or Twitter page. We will do our best to keep you informed and post all the latest details about NineStar Connect news. But don't forget, we still like to hear your voice! When you need answers fast and need to talk to someone, a phone call to our 24/7/365 Support Center is always just a dial away - 317-326-HELP.



The *NineStar Connection* is a publication of NineStar Connect servicing retail and residential customers. Nearly 16,000 families and businesses receive this newspaper as part of their membership. *NineStar Connection* provides news, information and features about people, places and issues related to readers.

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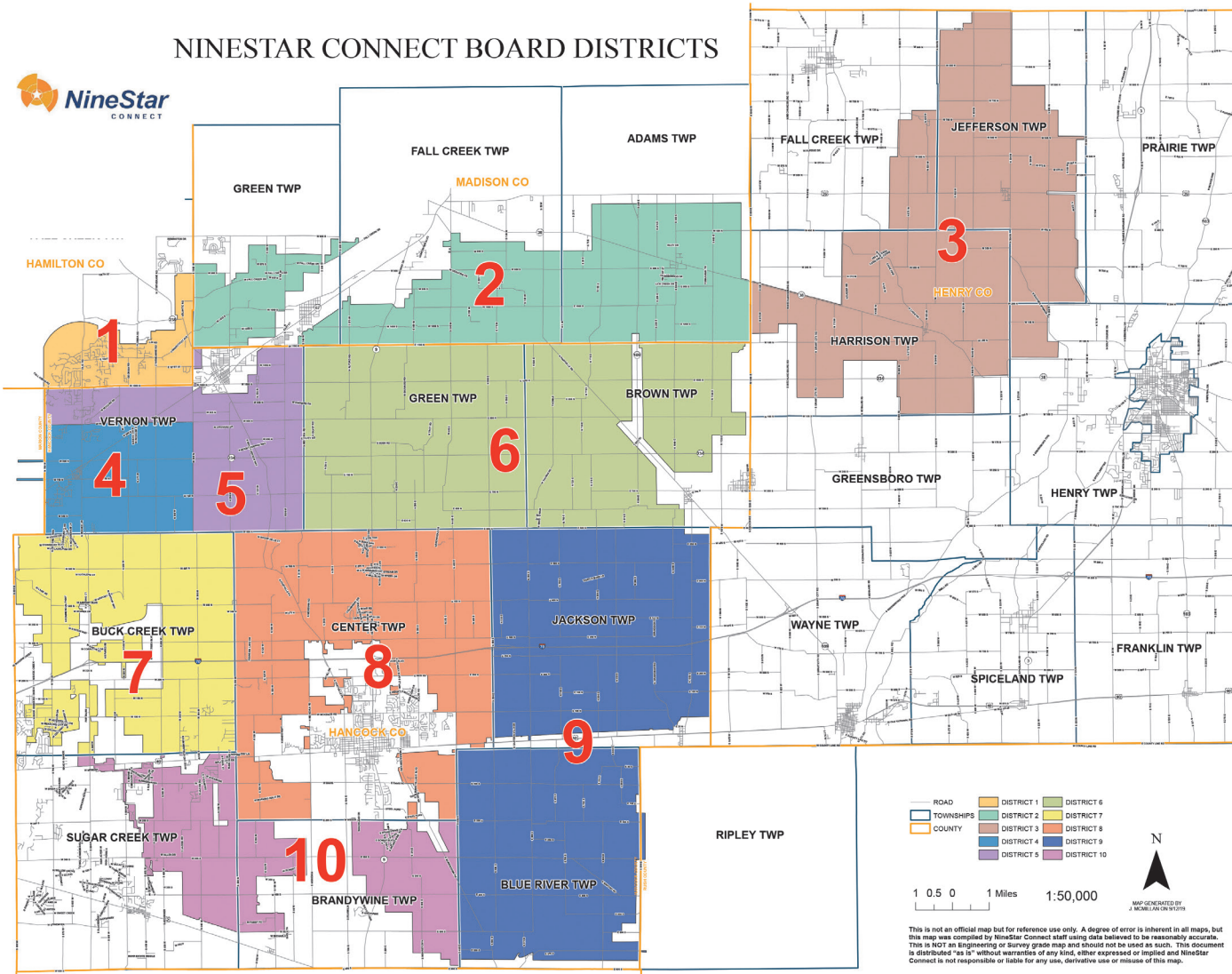
JAMES E. CHERRY



KIM CRONK



RONNIE MOHR





By Julie Young

No question about it: the coronavirus changed the way we lived and worked throughout the first half of 2020. While hospitals and healthcare centers were working to flatten the COVID-19 curve, NineStar Connect was working to stay ahead of it by providing members with the service they needed to navigate their new normal.

“We upgraded all of our fiber customers to GigE service for three months in order to help them get through the workday and the school year,” said Brian Dowden, director of operations for NineStar Connect.

With social distancing measures in place and public gatherings cancelled for weeks on end, Hoosiers turned to their devices for work, education,



entertainment, and human connection. Luckily, NineStar offers the fastest and most reliable fiber optic Internet service in the area.

“I can’t say enough about them,” said NineStar member Brandon Hayes. “Even though everyone was on the same network, the quality of service was fantastic.”

Hayes is a network administrator for the Mt. Vernon School Community Corporation, which uses NineStar’s high speed Internet service at all six of the schools in the district. He lives in Eastern Hancock with his wife and two children and said having a fiber connection, especially during the current crisis, made all the difference in the world as they telecommuted for work and helped their students stay on track.

“We set up a little corner of the house so that we could do our work. The service didn’t break down once and the quality never skipped a beat,” he said. “Of course we were lucky that our children were in the sixth and ninth grades. I imagine it was a lot harder for parents of younger children.”

That was the whole idea. According to Dowden, the average smart home has approximately 42 devices connected to the Internet at any given time. This includes: desktop computers, laptops, phones, tablets, security systems, TV, gaming systems, and more. However, when you have several people at home all trying to access the Internet at the same time and on the same bandwidth, it can adversely affect the speed at which they can connect.

“They can still get the information that they need, but at a slower rate,” Dowden said. “By upgrading everyone to GigE for a period of time, we were able to make sure that they could get what they needed when they needed it.”

Luckily, NineStar’s network already has a strong backbone that allowed the co-op to ratchet up the service without any additional difficulty. Dowden says that NineStar is always looking at what

people will need three-to-five years down the line so that when unforeseen circumstances occur; they are ready to meet the moment.

“It’s not a reactionary thing,” he said.

Not only did NineStar turn up the profile for everyone in the service area, but they also found ways to help those who did not have Internet access. By adding Internet extenders to the schools’ connections, it allowed students to connect to their campus network just by sitting in the parking lot.

“We don’t just help out our members, but we look out for the whole community,” Dowden said.

Without question, the pandemic has forever altered the way some people live and work, but to what extent remains to be seen. Hayes said his wife Becky, who works for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) always said she could do her job from home, but never had the opportunity to do so until now. She proved she could still be productive and has since been approved to work from home on a permanent basis.

“I’m really glad for her,” Hayes said.

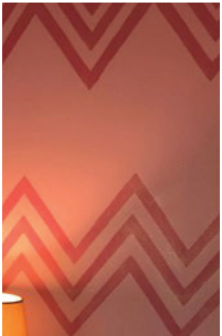
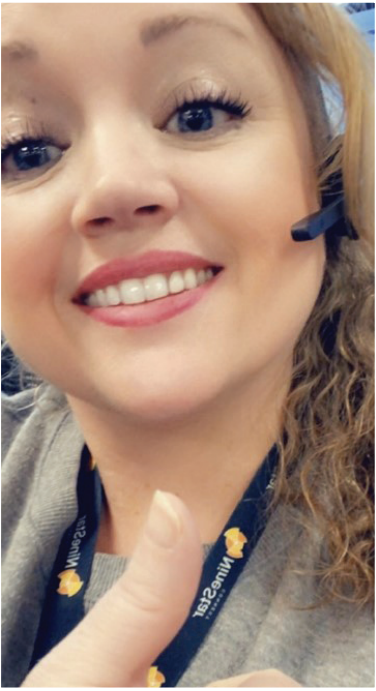
Dowden says for business owners that have always had a moderate Web presence, the pandemic has forced them to look beyond their brick and mortar locations in order to serve the needs of their customers.

“What we have seen is a reliance on the Web and how the Internet is now just as vital as any other utility,” he said. “I think it will have a long-term effect on how businesses are set up and how you capitalize on the impulse shopping that happens when someone is browsing in the store. NineStar is already thinking about what our members will need when we get back to normal, but one thing is certain; we will continue to play a big role in these transitions and we will always strive to stay one step ahead of them.”



WORKING FROM HOME

Over the past few months, our employees have been rotating in and out of the office. We are happy to say they have not missed a beat serving our members and customers. As of July 6th, all NineStar employees have returned to the office.





NineStar

CONNECT

PHOTO CONTEST

In mid-April, we held a NineStar Photo Contest. We asked customers to show us how they were using their free upgraded internet speeds at home; e-learning, working, streaming, gaming, etc. Winners received gift cards to a local restaurant. With lots of submission, it was hard to narrow it down to six winners.

During the week of April 19th, we featured one winner each day.

Winners were; Stacy Muffler of McCordsville, Sara Joyner of Greenfield, Steve Brammer of McCordsville, Steve Emmons of Greenfield, Brandon Hayes of Greenfield and Lindsey Wissler of Pendleton.

Thank you to everyone who participated!



LINDSEY WISSLER
- PENDLETON



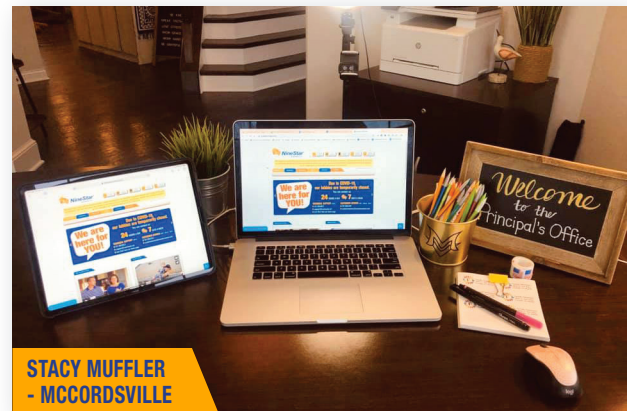
STEVE BRAMMER
- MCCORDSVILLE



BRANDON HAYES
- GREENFIELD



SARA JOYNER
- GREENFIELD



STACY MUFFLER
- MCCORDSVILLE



STEVE EMMONS
- GREENFIELD



Before you head out on vacation this summer, NineStar has a list of safety tips for you to keep in mind to help ensure a safer trip and a more pleasant homecoming.

LIGHT'S ON, BUT NOBODY'S HOME

Don't think you're fooling burglars if you leave a single light or two on for a whole vacation. When left on for extended periods, incandescent and even fluorescent bulbs can get very hot or make the fixture hot, creating a potential hazard. Consider investing in a motion-sensing outdoor lighting system and multiple programmable timers for interior lighting. Modern timers offer several settings, as well as a randomized setting, allowing you to create an illusion that different rooms are in use at different times.

UNPLUG

Unplug all appliances and electronics that aren't necessary while you're gone. Leaving appliances plugged in increases the risk of something like an electrical fire that will go unnoticed. Power surges also can occur anytime. Unplug things like the coffee maker and the toaster (things you should consider plugging in only when they're being used anyway), as well as televisions and home entertainment/electronic systems. Unplugging them is one less worry from lightning strikes should an electrical storm blow in while you're away.

KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED AND NOSE IN THE WIND

While traveling or at your vacation destination, keep your eyes open for electrical hazards. Not every hotel room, condo and Airbnb you see online practices electrical safety. When you check in, note overloaded outlets, extension cords in use, outlets

that get too hot, and the smell of overheated wires. Take precautions yourself. If too egregious, take the issues up with management to work out a solution. If management is unwilling or able to satisfy your concerns or refund your deposit, report them to authorities and move on down the road to a safer place. Don't stay at a tinder box.

STAY IN THE CAR

Finally, while driving, always remember to STAY IN THE CAR if you should veer off the road and strike a utility pole. Power lines can fall and still be energized. If lines have fallen on or near your vehicle, the mere act of stepping from it can electrocute you. Warn others to stay back. Stay put until an electric utility responder tells you it's safe to get out. If you come upon an accident involving power lines, warn those involved of the danger, and call 9-1-1.



POWER MOVES REBATE CHECK

NineStar was honored to be at the Mt. Vernon Community School board meeting on May 15th to present a check for over \$41,000. The money was made possible through Wabash Valley Power Alliance energy efficiency program POWER MOVES. NineStar worked with Mt. Vernon replacing old lighting in their facilities with updated more energy efficient alternatives. Presenting the check (far right) is NineStar energy advisor Matt Strahl. Accepting the check (L TO R) is MV Superintendent Dr. Jack Parker and MV School Board President Kellie Freeman.

POLE TOP RESCUE TRAINING

On June 3rd, our lineman participated in pole top rescue training. Pole top and bucket truck rescue training teaches the skills necessary to save another person's life. It gives actual hands-on experience for both pole top and bucket truck rescue operations that require dynamic action. The rigging, lifting, and lowering skills necessary to get the victim down from elevated heights must be trained and practiced.





Join Us for a **VIRTUAL Nerd's Night Out!**

Learn About:

- Transitioning to Work from Home
- Avoid COVID Scams & Phishing
- Communication & File Sharing when Working Remotely

Stay Safe and Be Well!

Wednesday, August 12, 2020 | 6:00 pm

TUNE IN LIVE AT:

www.ninestarconnect.com/nerdsnigh



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Congratulations to our latest monthly winner:

April	Shawn and Debbie Grass, Greenfield	\$50 Amazon Gift Card
May	Timothy and Martha Dehring, Fortville	\$50 Amazon Gift Card
June	Daniel Glese Jr., McCordsville	\$50 Amazon Gift Card

Paperless Billing is the easiest, cheapest way of paying your bill each month. Please feel free to give one of our Residential Service Consultants a call at 317-326-3131 to help you set up if needed. It will be a call you are glad you made!

President's Message

I doubt anyone would deny that 2020 has been a monumentally historic year and it's only half over. One thing the first half of this year has taught me is just how valuable a local cooperative utility can be when times get tough.

As the public health restrictions steadily became tighter during March, NineStar personnel were kept busy adjusting processes and procedures to the changing circumstances. By the time Governor Holcomb had issued his stay-at-home executive order, NineStar had plans in place to close its offices and begin allowing employees to provide our essential services from their homes.

I was never prouder of all of the NineStar employees than during these stay-at-home orders. Our linemen responded to service-related issues quickly and seamlessly, including a power outage that was triggered by passing thunderstorms. Our telecom installers and fiber splicers managed to install over 100 new communications customers in the first 30 days of the stay-at-home as our members and customers came to realize how valuable a fiber-to-the-home connection really is during a pandemic.

Customer service continued to answer calls and process orders and utility bills working from their homes – so efficiently that most of our members and customers didn't even know. The same was true of our 24/7 support center which not only takes care of our own, but also those of other coops and small companies throughout Indiana and even in neighboring states. Our accounting department shined bright as well, maintaining our books and making sure all of our bills were paid on time.

Our marketing and member relations group went into overdrive during the stay-at-home – encouraging early voting by our members so we could meet quorum, avoid cancelling and instead broadcast a virtual annual meeting. They also kept our website and social media platforms updated daily so our members and customers had the latest information on their coop.

Because we are a community-owned and focused cooperative, we also managed to do some pretty remarkable things that a regular, for-profit utility wouldn't have dreamed doing. The Board of Directors voted to delay a small electric rate increase set to take effect in April that, to our average member, would have resulted in paying an additional \$5 per month. Instead, we have

chosen to delay any increase until late this year or early in 2021 by putting off some work on electrical infrastructure upgrades until later in the year. Five dollars might not seem like a lot, but every little bit helps if you are facing financial uncertainty during unprecedented times.

As I write this message, many larger electric utilities in Indiana have already filed emergency requests with the IURC to increase their rates to cover their loss of income during the pandemic. In my opinion, that is a large flaw in the for-profit model of delivering utility services - when revenue goes down, companies still have investors who are expecting a return and are often forced to raise rates on the public simply to cover those returns.

NineStar also increased all of its fiber-to-the-home customers' broadband speeds to 1 Gig, regardless what speed they might have been subscribed to, at no additional charge. For the nearly 90 days NineStar did that, it essentially "gave away" nearly \$3 million dollars of internet services to its members and customers in an effort to make their working from home and their children's e-learning a little easier experience. The investment in fiber we've made over the last 20 years paid off in a big way as our fiber network traffic quadrupled during the stay-at-home period with no real impact on its ability to perform. It confirmed our belief that fiber truly is "future proof" in its ability to expand as demand inevitably grows.

One thing that the coop and its employees were particularly proud of was the emergency build of a fiber connection to Hancock Regional Hospital's COVID triage clinic in Greenfield in less than 72 hours. The logistics and cooperation between the State of Indiana, City of Greenfield, our contractors and employees were nothing short of extraordinary and historic in themselves. Fiber connectivity is rapidly becoming a critical component to quality healthcare and NineStar was glad to do its part to make this happen.

We also managed to get some of NineStar's 3D printers at Idea Coop working for the good of our local front-line health care workers. NineStar Network employees quickly printed out various



MICHAEL R. BURROW

pieces of personal protective equipment and other parts that made their work easier and hopefully safer.

NineStar also was honored to work with many of our local school districts to establish WiFi hotspots in parking lots where parents and students who might not have internet in their homes to be able to go to the parking lots and participate in e-learning opportunities being offered to them in the time of crisis. NineStar has a tradition of supporting local education and was proud to be able to help in this small way.

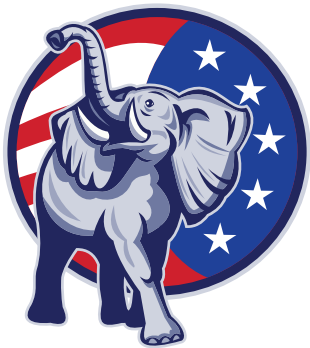
I could go on but suffice to say, the most important part of my message to all of you this month is to reinforce just how important it is for the success of a community to have essential services like utilities and healthcare locally owned and operated. To be sure, much larger, investor-owned utilities are often a few bucks cheaper per month on their services, but they are often so large and spread out, they simply cannot be responsive to the individual needs of a local community.

Our members and customers have come to expect more from NineStar because we are local. I hope during this most recent pandemic crisis, NineStar met and even exceeded your expectations.



CHRIS JETER

NINESTAR DIRECTOR WINS REPUBLICAN PRIMARY



NineStar Director Chris Jeter recently won the Republican primary for Indiana House District 88. Jeter defeated his opponent, Leah McGrath, early Wednesday, June 3rd when the AP called the race. With 100% of precincts reporting, Jeter had 57% of the vote to Leah McGrath's 43%, per WISH TV.

District 88 represents the northeast corner of Marion County and small portions of Hancock and Hamilton counties and is open for the first time in more than thirty years after the retirement of the former House Speaker Brian Bosma.

Jeter said he was looking forward to talking to more voters ahead of the November

general election. "I was humbled to see so many voters respond positively to our outsider campaign which is about bringing the next generation of principled, conservative leadership to the Statehouse," Jeter said. "I look forward to talking to more voters ahead of the November general election," he added.

Jeter, 41, is an attorney and small-business owner who is currently serving in his second term on the NineStar Connect Board of Directors. In addition, Jeter served on the Fishers Economic Development Commission and as a legal adviser to the Hamilton County Council.

HANCOCK HEALTH DONATIONS



Face Mask Donation

Hancock Health graciously donated masks to NineStar Connect. These masks have helped protect our members who visit our offices and our employees as they've transitioned working back in the office. Thank you to Hancock Health.

As we all know, our front-line workers have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic. To show our gratitude and appreciation we wanted to provide lunch to

workers at Hancock Health. On May 28th we presented them with lunch from Chicago's Pizza. Thank you, again for all you do for our community!



Lunch Donation

2020 Hancock County 4-H Queen Contest



Sponsored by:
NineStar
CONNECT

The
Pageant
Must
Go On!



Congratulations
TO THE QUEEN AND HER COURT:

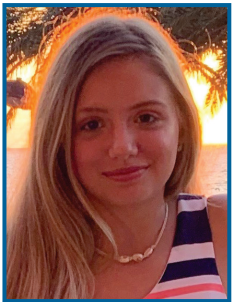
Queen: Jordyn Wickard **Court:** Rachel Bates
Princess: Megan Long **Court:** Lainie Lawrence
Court: Abby Elsbury **Miss Congeniality:** Ashley Swango



2020 CONTESTANTS:



ASHLEY
SWANGO



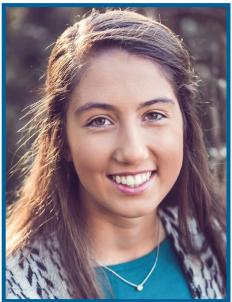
KELLY
HARP



LAINIE
LAWRENCE



EMMA
BRANHAM



MEGAN
LONG



RACHEL
BATES



ERICA
LONG



JORDYN
WICKARD



GRACE
SILCOX



HEATHER
SCHAFFER



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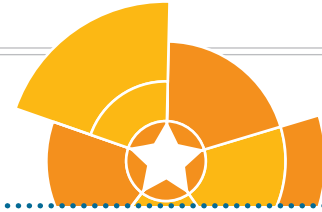


RILEY
MOSS



LAUREN
SILCOX

OPERATION ROUND-UP



BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB COMPLETE IMPROVEMENTS THANKS TO ORU GRANT

The Operation Round Up Board recently approved a grant in the amount of \$6,000 for floor renovations at the Hancock County Boys & Girls Club in Greenfield. The old floor, a linoleum surface, had been in place for many years and was in disrepair. With the money they received, the old floor was replaced with a durable carpet tile.

Chantel Fowler, Chief Executive

Officer of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hancock County stated that “Our kids are loving the new floors and as a result the game room is now their favorite place in the club!” She went on to say “Thank you so much for your generosity and helping provide this amazing opportunity for our kids!”

The Operation Round Up fund receives the money it distributes from the

membership of NineStar Connect customers, who voluntarily have their bills rounded up to the next highest dollar. This money is accumulated by the co-op and transferred to the NineStar Community Trust. An independent board made up of approximately fifteen cooperative members meets quarterly to review applications and awards grants.



SAFEGUARD ELECTRONICS WITH SURGE PROTECTORS

Nearby lightning strikes are most often associated with power surges in your home’s wiring that can damage electronics and appliances. But smaller power surges — voltage increases above the intended level in the flow of electricity — are far more common and can happen at any time of day, regardless of weather. Surge protectors are relatively inexpensive devices that can help protect your electrical devices from these more common power surges.

“While these surges are not as intense as lightning surges, they can be severe enough to damage

equipment and technology,” said Matt Strahl, Energy Advisor at NineStar Connect. “But the damage often could have been mitigated if the consumer had used a surge protector.”

High-powered pieces of equipment are more likely than lightning to cause power outages. These powerful electrical devices, such as air conditioners and refrigerators, require a lot of energy to turn on and off quickly.

Other sources of power surges can include faulty wiring and downed power lines.

Any spike in voltage can harm your electrical devices if the increase is above the device’s

intended operating voltage. The excess voltage can cause an arc of electrical current, which heats and damages the device. Smaller surges may still damage electronics and gradually shorten the device’s life.

Point-of-use surge protection devices, the most common type of surge protector, protect the items directly plugged into it. This surge protector can’t stop the surge, but it instead diverts the surge to the ground, away from your electronic devices. The best point-of-use surge protectors have an indicating light and/or alarm that shows when it should be replaced.

Meanwhile, service entrance surge protection devices protect your home’s entire electrical system and are mounted on your main electrical panel at the base of the electric meter. This option protects what can’t be plugged into a point-of-use device, such as outlets and light switches. Whole-house surge protectors can handle surges from outside the home of up to 20,000 volts; standard outlet surge protectors typically can’t handle more than 6,000 volts.

But when lightning strikes near a power line, the electrical energy from the lightning can boost electrical pressure by millions of volts. Most surge protectors can’t tolerate extremely large power surges. For best protection, NineStar recommends unplugging sensitive electrical devices and electronics during storms.

Sources: Electrical Safety Foundation International, howstuffworks.com

CO-OP LIVING WITH MARY JANE

GETTING KIDS TO GOBBLE THEIR GREENS

— IN ONE GROWING SEASON OR LESS



BY MARY JANE BOGLE

If you struggle with getting your kids to eat their vegetables, you're not alone. Over the years, I've personally attempted several tactics to increase vegetable consumption at our house, with varying degrees of success.

Take the stealth approach, for example, crushing and chopping, slicing or dicing those greens into tiny, unrecognizable pieces and hiding them in the kids' favorite dishes. Of course, the danger with this strategy is that if you don't chop the vegetables fine enough, you risk exposing your entire battle plan. Unfortunately, my kids became super sleuths in the "kids versus veggies" combat, sniffing out those "foreign objects" in their spaghetti sauce as if their lives depended on it.

Although none of us wants to set up power struggles over food, I must confess that I have also refused dessert to everyone who didn't eat everything on their plates. You could also try the "it's-the-only-thing-available-so-like-it-or-leave-it" approach, which I have employed frequently throughout the day, limiting snacks to

freshly cut fruits and veggies. That way, if my kids didn't eat the broccoli I served at dinner, I could rest easy knowing they had consumed half a bag of baby carrots earlier that afternoon.

And let's not forget the "dip and dive" technique, offering various condiments to help your kids to gobble those greens. Unfortunately, most dips contain ingredients that pretty much cancel the nutrition value of the vegetables themselves. Of course, you could always ask Santa to declare ketchup an official vegetable, although I've tried this approach in years past with no luck!

That's before I discovered my latest, secret, veggie-eating weapon: our backyard garden. I stumbled onto this strategy quite by accident one year when I asked our youngest child to help me pick green beans. Until that moment, she had avoided green beans like the plague. While picking, however, she decided to take a bite. We were all surprised to learn that she likes them raw. Who knew?

These days, I reserve space in my garden for kid requests. Amazingly, they'll try

foods from the garden—especially if they help grow them—that they would never touch from the grocery store. Bonus: eating fruits and vegetables straight from the vine offers the highest nutrition value possible! So until Santa comes through for mothers everywhere and declares ketchup a vegetable, you might want to consider a backyard garden instead. Your kids could be gobbling those greens in no time.

