BUSINESS
solutions

Hands-on Business Experience

Students in the Macoupin County CEO Program visit the Macoupin Art Collective and learn to create unique tumbler cups.

Madison communications

SMART RURAL COMMUNITY

A Program of:
NTCA THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

BUSINESS solutions

It's a smart idea to read this issue of *Business Solutions.*

Why? Because we've filled it with smart content about topics including the Smart Rural Community initiative, the smart (and ambitious) students in the Macoupin County CEO Program, and the smart strategy of buying local.

On page 3, we answer the question, What is a **Smart Rural Community?** Madison Communications was honored to be named a Smart Rural Community by NTCA– The Rural Broadband Association, and we look forward to helping our community make the most of broadband technology.

The **Business Spotlight on the Macoupin County CEO Program** is on pages 4 and 5. We think you'll be impressed by the high school students in this class and how they're building businesses thanks to the lessons learned. Keeping with our smart theme, check out page 5's employee profile on **Scott Eckhardt, Plant Superintendent.**

Keep reading to pick up even more smart ideas. Learn about **The Buy Local Loop** on page 6 and local "Go Green" opportunities as part of **Madison in the Community** on page 7.

Have a question about the best communications services for your business? Grab your smartphone and call us for some smart advice.

Sincerely,

The Madison Team

What is a Smart Rural Community?

Broadband enables rural Americans to enhance competitiveness and quality of life

You've heard of smart homes, smart phones, and the smart grid, which all rely on broadband technology to operate more effectively and efficiently. The same technology can be used to enhance entire communities.

NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association has an initiative—known as Smart Rural Community—that promotes rural broadband networks and related applications. The program encourages rural areas to use broadband to foster economic development, commerce, education, health care, government services, public safety and security, and efficient energy use. The program is based on the understanding that communities across the U.S. must be able to compete in a global marketplace, and that rural communities are often at a disadvantage in that they typically have less access to the tools and technologies that make it possible.

But, what makes a rural community "smart"? A truly smart community relies not only on technology, but also on the people who adopt and employ broadband-related services. According to NTCA, "A smart rural community should strive to create next-generation applications and platforms." The organization offers several examples of outcomes that can be gained through the use of broadband:

- **Customized learning environments** for students, including interactive and collaborative components
- **A dynamic health care infrastructure** capable of supporting such applications as electronic scheduling and patient monitoring
- **Precision farming tools** such as real-time weather reports and other helpful information that enable them to make better decisions
- **Platforms for connecting citizens** with local, state, and federal government resources

- **A next-generation 911 system** that allows first responders to communicate efficiently during emergencies
- **Modern utility networks** that give users more information and control
- **An energy-saving smart home network** that enables appliances and devices to connect with each other

Broadband provides a foundation that makes all of these developments possible. NTCA notes, "New innovative applications are created when there is a technological platform in place." A good broadband infrastructure should be capable of supporting the initiatives listed above, and have the capacity to continue doing so long into the future. The organization suggests that communities provide capabilities of at least 20 Mbps to regular customers, and 1 Gbps to institutions such as hospitals, libraries, and schools. The Smart Rural Community should also offer reliable mobile access. In addition, broadband providers should have a strong cybersecurity plan in place.

Madison Communications was honored to be named a Smart Rural Community by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. This distinction reflects more than our company's fiber infrastructure. It also pays tribute to our community partners who are using technology to help improve the lives of local residents. Learn more at http://www.gomadison.com/smartCommunity.

Macoupin County CEO Program

Meet three high school students who are now entrepreneurs

Entrepreneur Damon Walton speaks to students about the six components of all successful businesses.

The CEO in the Macoupin County CEO Program stands for Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities. This course for high school students is completing its first year, and the success stories are beginning. Facilitator Pete Visintin, says, "We have 15 amazing students in our class. To showcase what the CEO Program is all about, we're featuring three of them here—all seniors at Staunton High School."

Avery Dillon
C'est La Vie Collections

Avery Dillon plans to go to Butler University to study international business and textile design. Her business is C'est La Vie Collections, a women's boutique selling one-of-a-kind refurbished clothing. Dillon notes, "My grandmother taught me how to sew when I was 11, and I've had a passion for fashion ever since. I decided to do refurbished clothing because I was tired of seeing the same things in stores and wanted to offer unique items."

She adds, "My favorite part of running C'est La Vie Collections is thinking of all the creative things I could do with each piece. The most difficult task has been staying on budget. I'm quite the perfectionist when it comes to visuals and branding, so it was difficult for me to choose what was practical."

Dillon's business launched in March and has been profitable so far. She spends about three hours a day working on it. "Whether it's sewing or editing my Facebook page, there's always something to do," says Dillon.

What has she learned from the Macoupin County CEO Program? Dillon replies, "You have to position yourself for success every-where you go—study a company before you buy in, learn about a client before you meet, and make yourself look tall in a room full of seemingly 6-foot-9-inch men. No one is going to hand you what you want. You have to figure out how to get it all on your own."

Jonathan McEnery
Eagle Custom Plasma Cutting

Jonathan McEnery plans to attend Ranken Technical College to study computerized machining. He owns Eagle Custom Plasma Cutting, making custom signs and parts as well as items including fire pits and school mascots. His business gives back to the shop program in Staunton with a percentage of his proceeds.

"I got the idea for Eagle Custom Plasma Cutting from my shop teacher, and we worked together to figure out how to implement it," says McEnery. "My favorite part of running a business is innovation. I love using CAD (computer-aided design) and the machine to make something new and exciting that people wouldn't have thought possible. The most challenging part for me is time management. It's hard to juggle all the things I have to do." McEnery spends about two hours a day on the business, which involves designing, cutting, painting, and building the projects.

He notes, "Sales are going great. There's always room for improvement, but I'm optimistic about the future. I'm grateful for all I learned from the CEO program, especially how to be professional. I know how to dress, speak, act, and shake hands like a businessman. These are common sense things that aren't commonly known. Everybody says they don't judge by appearances, but people know in the first five seconds whether or not they will like you. That's why looking and acting like a businessman is important."

Hannah Pritchett
Make Your Mark Designs by Hannah Pritchett

Hannah Pritchett plans to attend Southern Illinois University Edwardsville to study nursing or education administration. Her business, Make Your Mark Designs by Hannah Pritchett, creates custom stickers using a Cricut® machine in vinyl, window, and iron-on formats.

"I've done well thanks to friends and family as well as sales from Facebook. It's difficult to market these stickers on sites like Etsy due to all the competitors already there. So I have to learn how to market, price well, come up with new ideas, and always be on my toes," Pritchett explains.

She continues, "The most valuable thing I learned from the CEO Program is how to step out of my comfort zone. I was always scared to shake hands, talk to older people, and ask for advice. This class taught me how to be comfortable doing these things. I would never have thought to go to my math teacher for business advice, but she gave me great ideas. By asking for help, it creates bonds with people you would never have anticipated."

Pritchett most enjoys the customer contact of her business. She says, "I love learning how to deal with customers because it teaches me to be reliable and trustworthy. Learning this now will help me as I get older and start my dream job."

Gary Lumley (far right), Founder/Owner of That Crazy Fish Store & More, welcomes students for a business visit.

Madison Communications is proud to sponsor the Macoupin County CEO Program. If your business is interested in becoming involved, visit www.macoupinceo.com.

Who's Minding Your Business?
Scott Eckhardt
Plant Superintendent

Scott Eckhardt started working for Madison Communications in 1998 and now serves as Plant Superintendent. In this role, he manages the HFC (Hybrid Fiber Coax), Twisted Pair POTS and DSL (Plain Old Telephone Service and Digital Subscriber Line), FTTH (Fiber To The Home), and DIA (Dedicated Internet Access) circuits. He notes, "This includes checking the many monitoring systems used by Madison Communications to identify possible problems that could affect service to our customers. Once a potential issue is detected, we get it resolved."

Eckhardt is currently certified by the Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers as a BPI (Broadband Premise Installer), BPT (Broadband Premise Technician), and BPE (Broadband Premise Expert). He is continuing his education in the networking field to become a Cisco Certified Network Associate.

What does he enjoy most about his job? Eckhardt replies, "I enjoy helping co-workers understand what a specific piece of equipment does and how it works and helping Customer Care Specialists learn how to resolve troubles experienced by customers."

When not at work, Eckhardt and his wife Sherry, daughter Aubree, and son Gregory enjoy family vacations and off-roading. "Anything we can do together outside is wonderful," he adds.

The Buy Local Loop

Why it pays to think twice before shopping online

The phrase "what goes around comes around" applies to many things, including your local economy. When your company and other businesses keep your dollars local, you benefit the community, local nonprofit agencies, friends and neighbors, and—ultimately—your own business. Here's how it works:

YOU GET MORE CUSTOMERS

YOU BUY LOCAL

MORE SPENDING POWER

$

MORE JOBS CREATED

SUPPORT FOR NONPROFITS

MORE LOCAL TAXES

1. You buy local. Sure, the convenience of online shopping is compelling, and sometimes it even costs less. But consider seeking out the same products and services close to home. You get to bring needed items back to the office the same day, skip the shipping costs, and get an opportunity to know other business owners and employees in your community who often provide better personal service and advice.

2. More business creates more jobs. When you support those local businesses, you're also supporting neighbors, friends, and relatives who can find jobs within them. Small businesses provide over half of all jobs in the U.S., but they can only do it if they keep their doors open. By spending locally, your business does its part to make sure that happens.

3. More jobs create more spending power. With more jobs come more residents who can stay in the local area, ensuring vitality and diversity. These citizens can also afford to spend money locally—supporting the economy, enlarging the tax base, and creating a better community with enhanced schools, roads, and parks.

4. Successful businesses mean support for nonprofits. Nonprofit organizations receive twice as much support from small businesses as from larger ones. So, when you support the local economy, you're also supporting needed services for groups like children, veterans, and the elderly.

5. Local individuals and businesses support you back. With a "buy local" mentality in your community, you'll get the benefit, too. If your business provides products or services to consumers, more of them will have the spending power to purchase them. If your company is business-to-business, other companies that need your products or services will seek them out.

6. You see the benefit and continue to buy local. As your business benefits from the positive "buy local loop," you have all the more reason to start the cycle again.

In addition to these benefits, shopping locally reduces environmental impact, ensures a wider variety of shops and products, and contributes to community health and diversity. If you're not already in the buy local habit, consider making your next purchase from a vendor close to home.

April 2016 Ecycling Day with our partner CJD Ecycling

Thanks to the Community for Supporting our
"Go Green" Projects

According to Earth911, Americans throw away 9.4 million tons of electronics every year and only 12.5 percent of it is properly recycled. To make it easier for our area residents to dispose of old electronics the correct way, Madison Communications sponsors Ecycling Day twice a year. Our most recent event was held on April 29 at our Staunton office. Participants were invited to bring anything metal with a cord—appliances, computers, printers, and more—for free recycling. TV sets were also accepted for a fee of $5 to $30 per TV, depending on size. In spite of the rainy weather, many people grabbed this opportunity to clear out their basements and garages of unwanted items.

Madison also offers other "go green" programs to help reduce waste at landfills and conserve natural resources. They include:

- **The SmartHub Online Bill Pay System** that enables our customers to sign up for paperless billing and make electronic payments by credit or debit card as well as ACH (automatic withdrawal)

- **Madison's paper recycling program** that shreds our discarded paper and donates it to Adopt-A-Pet in Benld to make cages at the animal shelter more comfortable

- **Donation of 21 used (but still in great condition) LCD monitors** to the Staunton and Bunker Hill School Districts and the Mt. Olive Library—upcycling to benefit education

Jerry Davis, IT Director for Madison Communications, notes, "We often have to upgrade equipment to maintain compatibility with information security standards or advances in technology, which can leave us with otherwise good equipment we can no longer use. We're glad the monitors can still provide benefit to the community, and by making these donations, it keeps them out of landfills."

Get Ready for Marching, Music, and Merriment

Everyone loves a parade, including the employees of Madison Communications! We'll provide Wi-Fi service at some of these events and enthusiastically participate in all of them. Mark your calendar now and join us in the summer fun.

Alhambra Homecoming Parade
Saturday, June 3 at 6pm

Benld Summer Concert
Tuesday, June 6 at 6pm

Staunton Touch-A-Truck
Saturday, June 10 at 10am

Worden Homecoming Parade
Saturday, June 10 at 6pm

Mt. Olive Homecoming Parade
Saturday, June 17 at 6pm

Staunton Homecoming Parade
Sunday, June 25 at 4pm

Bunker Hill Parade
Saturday, July 8 at 10am

Shipman Parade
Tuesday, July 18 at 7pm

Prairietown Homecoming Parade
Saturday, August 12 at 6pm

(L to R) Zina, Allie, Mary Beth, Natalie, Stephen, and Drew at the 2017 WordiGras parade

The Madison team at the 2016 Mt. Olive parade

Save With a Business Bundle

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For details on pricing and availability, call 800-422-4848.

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Mass Announcements Premium Service is an easy, low-cost way to record a message and have it go out to many customers or organization members via phone calls on Madison's voice network. The service redials automatically until each contact has answered the message. Call our business office at 800-422-4848 for more details.

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