

# Young or old, tips for staying savvy on social media

BY AMY OBERLIN

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Social media has become a part of many people's lives — young and old — with those 65 years old and older rapidly increasing their usage, according to statistics.

While it is a way to stay connected despite quarantines and limited social opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social media comes with its own problems. The flashy programs are designed to keep people's attention and can be distracting throughout the day. Users must be aware of the way information is disseminated and realize that not everything posted on social media is true.

GearHungry.com — which does reviews of gear, gadgets and gifts — surveyed 3,000 people 65 years old and older and found that 58% said their understanding of technology has improved since the start of the pandemic early this year. Fifty-five percent of seniors said technology has helped them feel less alone.

A rapidly growing demographic group for social media use is people 65 years old and older, according to the Pew Research Center. In 2015, 65 percent of all American adults were using social media.

David Bainbridge, a case manager in the LaGrange office of Northeastern Center who has taught English for Ivy Tech, Glen Oakes Community College and Trine University, said when he was teaching, older students seemed fascinated by social media "because it's a new way of thinking and being for them."

Younger people, on the other hand, have integrated social media into their psychological makeup, Bainbridge said.

He said he's seen several Northeastern Center clients



A social media meme frequently referred to as "the millennial and the cat" got a lot of play this year, encouraging people to write their own captions for the scene.

seriously affected by social media. "All I can really say is I've seen it break up families and consume or shatter people's lives," Bainbridge said.

Following are some tips for navigating social media without losing your mind:

- Limit time on social media.

While Westview High School junior Alana Miller says she's been able to make friends and join peer groups through social media, she adds that the "constant bombardment of bad things going on in the world" causes her anxiety.

"I've seen first-hand several clients become mentally more healthy after limiting their time online, choosing specifically what activities they will and won't engage in or avoiding certain people or topics," said Bainbridge. "As a parent and at NEC, I've suggested limiting time and

thinking of social media as simply sort of a photo album or very public diary."

- Do not allow children to use social media.

Youth have to be at least 13 years old to create profiles on Facebook and Instagram, though it is easy to provide a fake age.

Social media sites track users' activities to connect advertisers to people that may be interested in the products, says Roger McNamee, one of the early investors in Facebook, in the documentary "The Social Dilemma," released in September on Netflix. Jaron Lanier, author of "Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now," says the way information is disseminated and products advertised could create a "gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your behavior and perception."

While everyone is susceptible

to influence, youth may be less likely to understand the stimulus from social media algorithms. They also may be more susceptible to mischief or unscrupulous predators.

"I myself have had weird propositions from strangers on something as innocuous as Words with Friends," said Bainbridge. "You can try to monitor everything your kids do online ... but kids are super-savvy and can and will easily do things like make secret accounts."

- No devices in the bedroom at night.

A proper night's sleep is an important facet of good health, say medical professionals.

"Checking your phone stimulates the brain so we are more active and awake," said Dr. Harneet Walia, a sleep disorder specialist at Cleveland Clinic. Even a quick check can make it harder to get to

sleep, she said.

The blue light emitted by phone screens has been connected to suppressed levels of melatonin, a hormone that controls the sleep-wake cycle.

Walia suggests ending screen time about an hour before bed.

- Uninstall social media apps. A person can have a profile on a social media site without having an app on a phone.

The apps tell users when they have a notification on the social media site, tempting them to frequently check their accounts. Apps can be customized to not give notifications but if they are deleted completely, the user must go through a purposeful process every time he or she accesses a social media site instead of simply touching a colorful icon on the screen of an ever-ready cell phone.

- Don't accept recommendations.

Anyone who uses social media can attest to recommended groups, products and articles.

These recommendations are geared toward the individual user. By engaging with them, the user determines what material will be doled out in the future. Sandy Parakilas, a former operations manager at Facebook, likened the social-media-using public to "lab rats."

- Fact check.

CBS news correspondent Scott Pelley recently stated, "We have gone from the information age to the disinformation age."

The term "fake news" is familiar to many. While social media sites like Facebook have made efforts to monitor the truth of people's posts, a trouble maker could easily spread a lie.

Before you share something someone else posted, do a little research to make sure it has a basis in reality.

## REMCs working in tandem on fiber optics projects

BY MIKE MARTURELLO

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ANGOLA — Mark Leu no longer thinks of LaGrange County REMC as just an electric membership cooperative that serves a rural community.



Keiser

"We no longer consider ourselves an electric cooperative. We are now an electric and communications cooperative," said Leu, CEO of LaGrange County REMC.



Leu

That's the new reality of two

electric cooperatives that had humble beginnings of simply working to string wire to rural LaGrange and Steuben counties so those who lived in the country — mainly farmers — had electricity.

Both REMCs are starting to work on providing fiber optics to their members so broadband connectivity becomes a reality out in areas that, much like electricity during the Great Depression, was dark.

The LaGrange and Steuben REMCs have both started on projects that will string fiber to homes in their service areas, initially. LaGrange County REMC is just starting with its project after having gained funding through the LaGrange County Major Moves fund. Steuben County REMC

is buying the dark fiber network that's in place in Steuben County that had been operated by an arm of the Steuben County Community Foundation, which also received some seed money from Steuben County's Major Move monies. Steuben REMC's purchase of the Steuben County Fiber Network, originally known as iMAN, becomes final at the first of the year.

### Different directions

While LaGrange REMC is building from scratch, Steuben REMC is building off an existing, 180-mile network that serves every corner of the county.

"We hope to be able to roll out (internet) services to our members within the iMAN footprint by next spring," said Kevin Keiser, CEO of Steuben County REMC.

LaGrange REMC received a \$5 million grant from the county that the utility will roll together with \$15 million its finances to construct a brand new fiber-optic network in and around rural LaGrange County.

The Steuben County REMC will end up investing some \$25 million in addition to the \$2.4 million purchase price of the Steuben County Fiber Network.

Both are working with consultants to get their projects going. Come January, look for the projects to get rolling along at full steam.

"We are finalizing the bill of sale for the iMAN acquisition and we are working with our subcontractor, Conexon, on the



engineering and planning of the fiber to the home network," Keiser said. "We have hired a director of broadband operations who will begin working for Steuben County REMC on January 4."

"We have completed preliminary design and cost estimates. We have consultants engaged to complete the final design and assist us with bidding out the construction work to contractors. We hope to have this part of the process completed over the next four to six months and then get started on building the network," Leu said.

As the two REMCs move along, they plan on working together, when possible, to make sure their respective projects go as smooth as possible.

"Kevin and I are actively discussing how we might share resources to be more efficient and not have us both trying to re-invent the wheel," Leu said.

"Yes, we hope to work together with LaGrange and other electric cooperatives in the region. This cooperation could take on a number of different shapes

as each network grows and evolves and could include ISP services, call center and administrative service and even cover operational issues," Keiser said.

### ISP providers

Both REMCs will not only serve as providers of the broadband infrastructure, but they will be serving as internet service providers. Keiser noted that existing customers who are served by the three companies now providing internet service will probably be allowed to continue. Steuben County Fiber Network only served as the fiber provider, the broadband infrastructure.

Both plan on offering competitive rates.

"We essentially are starting from scratch. Fortunately, this trail has been blazed by a multitude of other REMCs across the country who have already bootstrapped a broadband company, so there are plenty of resources for us to draw from. I'm confident we can make this a success," Leu said.

Leu cited a Purdue University study suggesting that such a network will

result in an economic payback of nearly \$100 million.

Both REMCs have gone into their projects with boards that are not kicking and screaming about moving beyond their original mission of providing electricity, but that are insisting they move boldly forward with this technology. Both were on similar paths.

"The Steuben County REMC Board has spent over two years looking at how we could play a role in bridging the gap between broadband service in northeast Indiana and the more populated areas of our country like Fort Wayne and Indianapolis," Keiser said. "Obviously, a project of this size and scope clearly has risks and those are concerns, but in the end, our board felt that the risk of doing nothing is a greater concern because our region would only fall further and further behind the rest of the world. Having a long-term, viable broadband option that can span generations is, in our opinion, the best way to ensure that our members' quality life will be equal to our big city neighbors and that our region will be able to compete economically."

"The board directed me to begin researching the possibility of offering broadband to our members two years ago," Leu said. "We spent a lot of time researching the financial, technical and marketing aspects of this project. The research revealed to us that it was a service our members highly desired and we got the grant assistance that made it financially feasible. So I guess it was difficult in the sense that it we spent

a lot time and effort on the research. Once that effort was expended, the decision wasn't all that difficult because we had all the data to support our conclusion."

### How they deploy

Both will be working initially on deploying fiber on their existing utility pole networks. Where the service is first offered has not been determined.

Both Leu and Keiser said there will possibly come a time when they expand their reach beyond their existing member base to provide fiber and high speed internet to customers outside their service areas, much like the existing internet service providers.

"We will connect non-members who are in the footprint of our network at the same time we connect members in the initial phase," Leu said. "We hope to build beyond that to other non-member areas in the next phase of our project, but that timeline will depend on how successful we are in this initial phase."

Said Keiser: "The board has not yet addressed this issue. I would anticipate this being a point of interest down the road once the (fiber to the home) network becomes more developed."

The existing Steuben County Fiber Network system serves more institutional and commercial customers. The system provides fiber to all four public school districts that serve the county, as well as Trine University, Cameron Memorial Community Hospital, libraries, local government and numerous businesses and industries.

## Nursing home outbreaks flare in LaGrange, DeKalb counties

BY STEVE GARBACZ

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INDIANAPOLIS — Nursing homes are still battling COVID-19 outbreaks as multiple sites in the four-county area showed some flareups in cases among residents recently.

For the week ending Dec. 16 — long-term care data provided by the state lags a week behind — three nursing homes in LaGrange and DeKalb counties saw double-digit increases in resident cases.

In LaGrange County, the outbreak is a new one hitting the Life Care Center of LaGrange. The facility reported 19 new cases among residents between Dec. 9-13, after previously having only two cases all-time prior to that. The facility also reported nine staff member cases in the reporting week.

No deaths have been reported from that center.

The other LaGrange County long-term care facility, Miller's Merry

Manor in LaGrange, had three new resident cases but also reported it had three resident deaths, taking the total to 13 all-time from that facility.

In DeKalb County, two centers that have been battling recent outbreaks saw some increased case numbers again. The Laurels of DeKalb in Butler reported 13 new residents cases, two resident deaths and four staff cases during the week, while Miller's Merry Manor in Garrett had 11 new cases

among residents and one staff case.

Betz Nursing Home in Auburn, which has fought COVID-19 recently, had one new resident case but identified six new staff cases and reported two resident deaths.

Activity elsewhere across the region was more minor.

Orchard Pointe in Kendallville had six resident cases, Lutheran Life Villages in Kendallville had one new staff case and Presence Sacred Heart Home in Avilla had one resident and one

staff case.

Northern Lakes Nursing and Rehabilitation in Angola, which reported a chunk of staff cases the week prior, had two new staff cases reported in this reporting week.

Statewide, Indiana saw 1,238 new resident cases in the reporting week, which was slightly down from the week before at 1,400. Deaths were also down a little but still high at 248 compared to 265 the week before.

A total of 941 staff cases were identified during the

week.

In total, 18,750 cases of COVID-19 have come from nursing home residents, only about 4% of the statewide total. However the 3,794 total deaths account for 52% of all COVID-19 deaths in the state.

That proportion has been shrinking in recent weeks, however, as the state has seen sharply higher death counts including a higher proportion of deaths among people outside of nursing facilities.