

West Carolina Tel

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017

CONNECTED

STILL ON TRACK

An unexpected hobby goes full speed ahead

GADGETS TO GIVE

Your guide for the hottest tech for the holidays

A CHRISTMAS TRADITION

Destinations to find that perfect tree



RURAL CONNECTIONS

BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Cybersecurity is everyone's duty

Now that November has rolled around, the time for scary movies, spooky costumes and Halloween parties is over. At NTCA, we also just finished a month-long focus dealing with something just as scary — the cybersecurity threats facing our country.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security declared October as National Cyber Security Awareness Month and November as Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Month. The two designations draw awareness to the danger cyber criminals pose to institutions, businesses and individuals, and it underscores the responsibilities of actively protecting our internet-connected systems.

Today, everything from traffic lights to banks to pharmacies relies on the internet to function, and it is crucial we work to keep these systems secure. One vulnerable computer is enough to leave an organization open to cyberattack.

While online criminals are nothing new, they also show no signs of going away. Cybersecurity is a top issue for NTCA, and I know your telco is working hard every day to ensure your network stays safe and secure. From talking with experts around the industry, here are some things consumers can do to help stop cyberthreats:

- Download and install new updates to your computers and mobile devices.
- Create complex passwords and keep them secure.
- Do not download “free” content or programs from non-reputable sites as they often contain dangerous malware.
- Consider a career in cybersecurity. Federal agencies and private firms are constantly hiring in this expanding field. ☑



BY DREW WOOLLEY

Before Hurricane Harvey even made landfall, telephone cooperatives throughout Texas were deciding how to support each other. Lines of communication opened directly between telcos, and the Texas Statewide Telephone Cooperative Inc. (TSTCI) helped companies along the coast plan for sharing manpower, equipment and generators.

That spirit of camaraderie is part of the cooperative mission, but it also extends beyond the cooperatives themselves. When YK Communications received a phone call from Matagorda County officials at 4 a.m. the morning of Aug. 28 asking for help setting up an emergency operations center, the telco was quick to offer their own offices as a headquarters.

“The fact that those relationships exist is pretty impressive for YK, but that’s also the kind of story you could have heard anywhere in Texas,” says Weldon Gray, CEO of TSTCI.

There are few organizations that understand the importance of giving a helping hand more than Star Communications in North Carolina. When Hurricane Matthew struck in 2016, Star’s main offices were flooded, along with the majority of its nearly 1,500-square-mile coverage area.

VP of Sales and Business Operations Kyle Randleman recalls wading through septic water in the cooperative’s offices to recover thousands of paper records. But he also remembers how Atlantic Telephone Membership Cooperative stepped up to provide generators and extra technicians to help Star get back on its feet.

“We’ll never forget that,” Randleman says. “I think independent telcos sometimes think of themselves as islands, but one of the things I learned is that sometimes you need to not be afraid to let your guard down and ask for help.”

Throughout the Harvey recovery, TSTCI has received offers from cooperatives as far away as Iowa for donations of surplus copper cable, and associate members like CoBank have begun setting up disaster funds throughout the state. ☑



Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative and Brazoria Telephone Company have also set up accounts for donations to help employees and others in their service areas who lost their homes and possessions in the storm.

Checks for Colorado Valley can be made out to CVTC Employee Charity Fund and mailed to CVTC Employee Charity Fund, Attn: Finance Department, P.O. Box 130, La Grange, TX 78945. PayPal donations can also be made directly to cvtcharveyrelief@coloradovalley.com.

Anyone who wants to support the Brazoria Telephone fund can donate to the “BTCL Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund” at youcaring.com.



BY DREW WOOLLEY

Anyone using technology in the last few years has heard about the importance of cloud computing, but it can sometimes be difficult for people to put their finger on what exactly it is.

Think of it this way: In the past, people had to download applications directly onto their computer or device to use them. With the cloud, those same programs are accessed through the internet.

If you check and send emails from your phone, that's using the cloud. Even posting photos and messages to social media like Facebook takes advantage of cloud technology. Your information is saved somewhere other than your computer, meaning it can be accessed from any other device as long as you have an internet connection.

That flexibility makes cloud technology a game-changer for individuals and businesses. For growing companies that aren't sure what their exact bandwidth needs are, it provides flexibility. For that friend who lost their phone with all the great vacation photos, it acts as a

convenient backup. The cloud can even help people across the globe collaborate on projects in nearly real time.

Research from software company Druva indicates that as businesses learn more about how cloud technology works, they trust its security over their own ability to back up important information. In a survey, 82 percent of people cited the ability to recover from a disastrous loss of data as one of the primary reasons to move their information to the cloud.

It's no wonder, then, that cloud technology has been on the rise and is a focal point for some of the world's biggest companies. Amazon and Microsoft both offer cloud computing services. Also, providers such as a telco in Tennessee have created services like NowCloud. In 2018 and beyond, the cloud is expected to reach even greater heights. ☁

30% The portion of Microsoft's revenue expected to be generated by cloud-based software in 2018. (Forbes)

83% The percentage of work conducted in the cloud by small- and medium-sized businesses. (RightScale)

68% Year-over-year growth for Amazon cloud services in 2017. (Forbes)

6X The rate at which cloud computing spending is expected to outpace all other IT spending from 2015 to 2020. (IDC)

\$180 BILLION Global spending on cloud technology in 2015. (Bain & Company)

\$390 BILLION Forecasted global spending on cloud technology in 2020. (Bain & Company)

89% The share of Amazon's operating income generated by Amazon Web Services in the first quarter of 2017. (Amazon)

Feeling thankful for employees and members

Annual traditions tie us together, creating threads that run through every season. Those bonds are never stronger than during the holidays: picking out the perfect tree, attending special church services and hosting friends and family for delicious meals.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

The holidays are also a time to reflect and be thankful for what we have and what we've been able to accomplish. As you'll see in the article on Pages 12 and 13, this has been a very busy year for those of us at WCTEL, and we have big plans to serve our region even better in 2018.

But when charting our progress with our network and the new technology we bring to our members, it would be easy to overlook all of the very important people who make that happen.

Every October, we celebrate the two most important groups of people in the WCTEL family: our employees and our customers. The WCTEL board of directors has a tradition of hosting an Employee Appreciation Day right around the time we host Customer Apprecia-

tion Week. Both of these are important marks on our annual calendar because — like Thanksgiving — they cause us to pause and appreciate just how fortunate we truly are.

Simply put, since 1952, the reason we've been successful is the hard work of our employees and the support of our membership.

I frequently tell our staff that no matter what their job is at WCTEL, they each bring value to the company. Yes, we have a world-class fiber optic broadband network that stands above the competition, but what differentiates us from everyone else is our world-class employees.

It's clear we have much for which to be thankful. We live in safe, friendly communities in a strong and prosperous country. Our homes, cars, schools and hospitals all have technology to help us in ways previous generations could only dream of.

Inside the WCTEL family, we are thankful for a thriving business with strong financials. We're thankful for wise leadership from our board and for our legacy of innovation over the life of our cooperative.

But I think if you ask most of our WCTEL employees — whether they answer phones, input billing data, string fiber optic cables or troubleshoot technical problems — they would say they are thankful for their co-workers and for our loyal members.

Our customers are the ones who, 65 years ago, decided the Freshwater Coast region of South Carolina needed a communications network and made one happen when existing corporate telcos overlooked the area. Our customers are the ones who continue to trust us as their telecommunications partner today, even as technology continues to evolve.

So as you count the blessings you enjoy in your life, remember that at WCTEL we count you as one of our blessings. It's our privilege to serve you. 📞

Happy Holidays
from our WCTEL family to yours!

West Carolina Tel

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

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WORDSOUTH
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On the Cover:



Bruce Motsinger bought his first model train 54 years ago. The basement setup helps him remain a kid at heart. See story Page 8.



Highlights from the 2017 WCTEL Annual Meeting

- ▶ The West Carolina Board of Directors held its 65th annual member meeting at the Long Cane AME Community Development Center in Abbeville, South Carolina, Monday, Aug. 21, 2017.
- ▶ Incumbent board members Tag Bussey, South McCormick; Robert Hester, Calhoun Falls; and Ned McGill, Starr; were re-elected.
- ▶ A moment of silence honored beloved co-worker and friend Laurie Wolfe and beloved board member and friend Sam Gilliam, who both passed away earlier this year.
- ▶ WCTEL's constant contact and involvement with the Federal Communication Commission and South Carolina State Regulators ensures that WCTEL members are treated fairly and that rural America is represented.
- ▶ WCTEL board member and past president Lee Logan was recognized for receiving the Director Life Achievement Award at the 2017 National Telephone Cooperative Association meeting earlier this year.
- ▶ WCTEL past CEO Dave Herron was recognized for being inducted into the South Carolina Telephone and Broadband Association Hall of Fame.
- ▶ WCTEL is building out to Greenwood, South Carolina, under their WCFIBER LLC subsidiary.
- ▶ WCTEL would like to thank every member who makes up our cooperative and especially those who were able to attend the meeting.



NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association recognized 13 of the top rural areas telecommunications companies in the United States and Canada that have earned Smart Rural Community Showcase awards. NTCA CEO Shirley Bloomfield, left, presents the national distinction to WCTEL Board President Wes McAllister.

WCTEL is proud to have been the only cooperative in the Southeast to make that list, from 850 independent organizations. NTCA Smart Rural Community award recipients were recognized at a gathering of more than 1,200 rural telecom leaders in Philadelphia. For more information about the initiative, visit www.ntca.org/smart.

Coming soon to Video on Demand



For a small fee, WCTEL's Video on Demand service gives you access to new releases as many as eight weeks before Netflix or Redbox. 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."



Spider-Man: Homecoming
A young Peter Parker tries to improve his standing among his friends while attempting to become an Avenger.



Baby Driver
Peer pressure takes its toll in this popular fast-paced caper as getaway driver Baby tries to make a clean break from chaos that surrounds him.



War for the Planet of the Apes
Actor Andy Serkis transforms into an otherworldly beast, yet again, for this sequel to "Dawn of the Planet of the Apes."

Don't miss these other releases coming soon to Video on Demand:

- Trolls Holiday
- Saving Christmas
- Bob the Builder: Mega Machines
- Birth of the Dragon
- The Hitman's Bodyguard
- 24 Hours to Live
- The Singularity



TREE TRADITIONS

Bluebird
Christmas
Tree Farm

Choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms make family memories

There's nothing quite like a freshly cut Christmas tree, including the aroma of pine, whimsical decorations on its branches and presents beneath its boughs. While the tree lasts just a few short weeks, it can help create lifelong memories.

Searching for the perfect tree, cutting it down and bringing it home is old-fashioned family fun. Here are some farms around the South that allow you to cut your own tree, plus some farms that do a little extra to celebrate the Christmas season.

Bluebird Christmas Tree Farm

985 Brushy Valley Road, Heiskell, Tennessee

Customers have returned for more than 20 years to this 7-acre farm in a scenic mountain valley on the edge of the Cumberland Plateau. "It's certainly a family tradition," says owner Joseph Collins, who adds that each holiday season also brings first-time visitors.

The farm does not allow chain saws but provides hand saws if you don't bring your own. And if cutting your tree is too difficult, folks on the farm will do the job for you. Most people prefer cutting a tree themselves, Collins says.

Bluebird's gift shop features locally made items, such as jams, butters and honey. Also, the store offers wreaths, garlands, handmade toys and ornaments. A historic log cabin provides a look back in history.

▲ **Trees for cutting:** Norway spruce, Leyland cypress and Virginia pine

▲ **Prices:** You can buy a "Charlie Brown" tree for \$10. Other prices range up to \$200, depending on tree type and size.

▲ **Information:** 865-457-5682 or online at bluebirdtrees.com

Old Dairy Christmas Tree Farm

3273 McClain Circle, Gadsden, Alabama

Mark and Lisa Stephenson are opening Old Dairy Christmas Tree Farm for the first time this year. "We sold a few to family and friends last year, and they plan to come back this year," Lisa Stephenson says. "I have watched a family sit down around a tree

and sing carols. That's one of the reasons I wanted to start the tree farm."

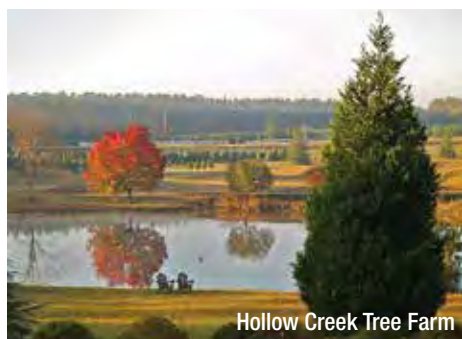
And while you search for a perfect tree on the farm, sip on a cup of hot chocolate that the Stephensons offer to ward off winter's chill. They also sell fresh wreaths. Call ahead to place your order.

Chain saws are not allowed. Hand saws are provided, or your tree can be cut for you at no charge.

▲ **Trees for cutting:** Leyland cypress, Murray cypress and Carolina sapphire

▲ **Prices:** Start at \$35

▲ **Information:** 256-504-8658 or on Facebook



Hollow Creek Tree Farm

Hollow Creek Tree Farm

228 Windmill Road, Gilbert, South Carolina

A day at Hollow Creek Tree Farm is all about family, including the family dog. "We're a dog-friendly farm," says owner Mike McCartha, whose dad, J.W. McCartha, started selling trees in the late 1970s to supplement his income after retiring from the Merchant Marine.

In the beginning, J.W. McCartha brought in trees from his brother's nearby farm. Now, 15 of the farm's 36 acres are planted with trees ranging in height from 4 feet to more than 20 feet.

Bow saws are provided — no chain saws allowed — or Mike McCartha will do the cutting for you.

Weekends on the farm feature free hayrides. You can also stop by the gift shop and sip on free coffee or hot chocolate while you shop for a fresh wreath for your door, handmade bows for your gifts or a stand for your tree.

▲ **Trees for cutting:** Leyland cypress, Murray cypress, Carolina sapphire, blue ice cypress, Virginia pine, white pine,

Burkii cedar, Deodar cedar, Thuja green giant, Hollow Creek slims

▲ **Prices:** \$7-\$13 per foot, depending on size and variety

▲ **Information:** 803-892-3662 or www.hollowcreektreefarm.com



Plantation Pines

Plantation Pines Christmas Tree Farm

10098 County Road 429, Tyler, Texas

This is the first year running the Christmas tree business for Burren and Heather Reed, but it's nothing new for them. She grew up in the business with her parents, Nick and Nancy Wiggins.

Last year, the Reeds took over the business and are now prepared for the masses of shoppers who come to their farm in search of the perfect tree.

Visitors can take hayrides, sip hot chocolate, warm up around a campfire, make s'mores, shop in the gift shop and more.

"It seems that every year more and more families come to share in the experience, and I'm excited to see the next generation of families come through the farm as we transition into running it,"

Heather Reed says. "We love the family traditions — that's what we're all about!"

Chain saws are not allowed, but hand saws are provided.

▲ **Trees for cutting:** Virginia pines

▲ **Prices:** \$7-\$8 per foot

▲ **Information:** 903-595-2046 or www.plantationpinesfarms.com

Cathole Bend Christmas Tree Farm

1243 Cathole Bend Road, Lancaster, Kentucky

Steven McManus began planting evergreens in 2004 and is now one of a handful of farmers in Eastern Kentucky who open their fields during the holiday season.

In addition to cutting a tree, you can choose from balled and burlapped trees so that you can have a tree to plant after the holidays. If you do purchase a live tree, do not bring it inside until a day or two before Christmas. That's the best way to ensure its longevity.

If you want to cut your own — no chain saws allowed — McManus says he provides bow saws with high-quality European blades that cut through the wood with relative ease.

To ward off the day's chill, Cathole Farm offers free hot chocolate and coffee.

▲ **Trees for cutting:** Norway spruce, white spruce, black hills spruce, Canaan fir, Fraser fir, Meyer spruce and white pine

▲ **Prices:** Start at about \$40

▲ **Information:** 859-985-7044 📞



Old Dairy Christmas Tree Farm

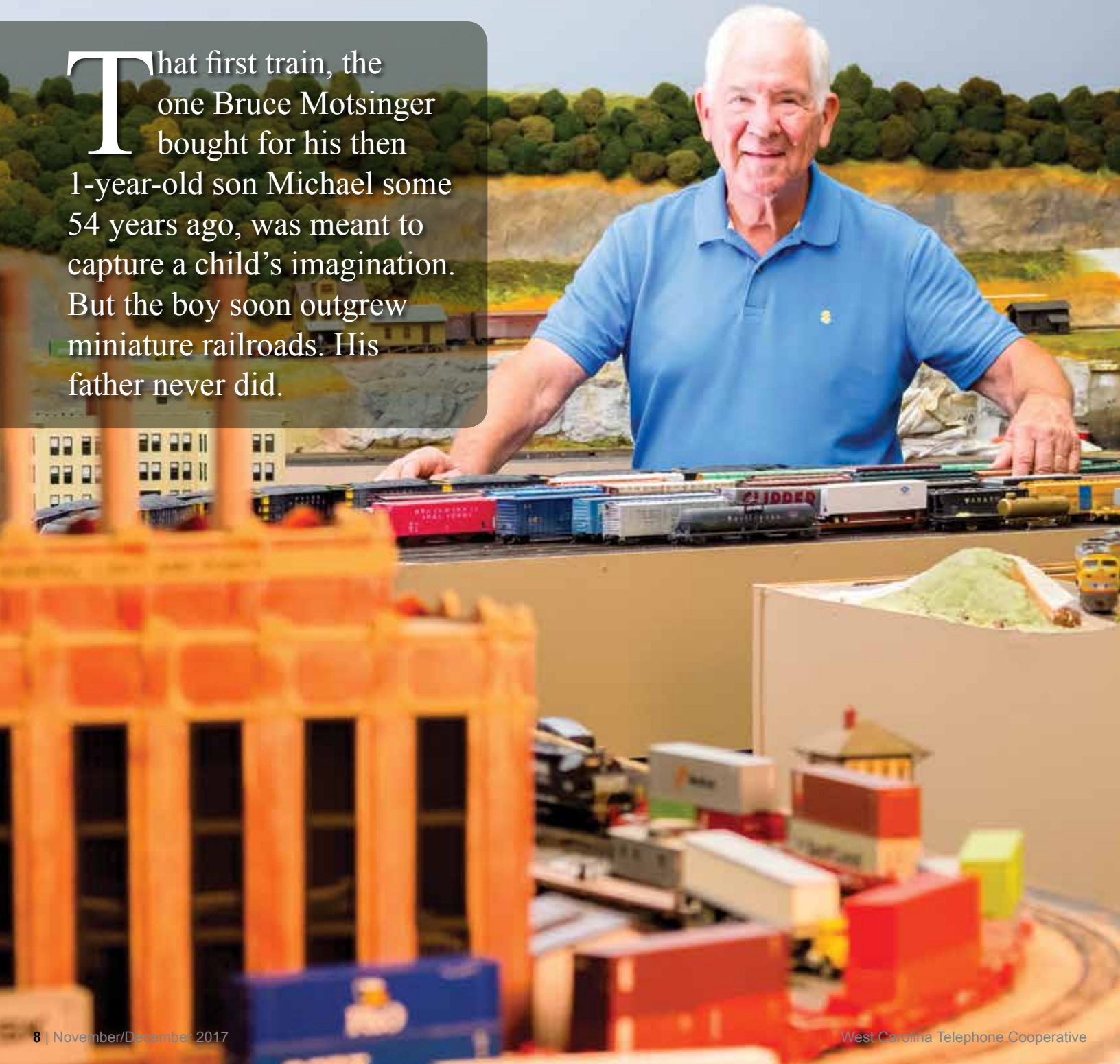
Photos courtesy of the associated tree farms.

Chugging along

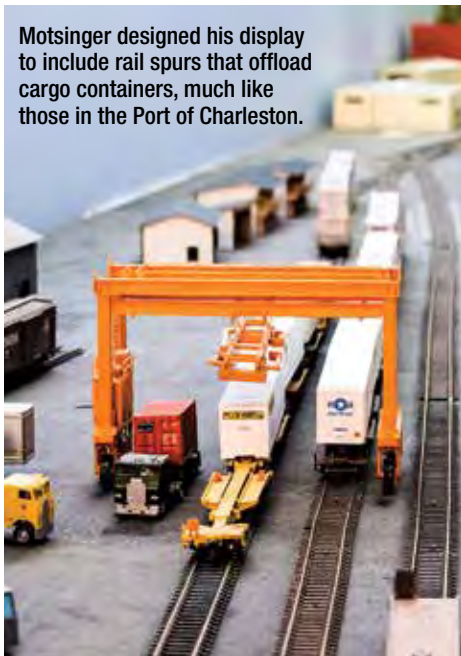
A model train brings smiles and hours of enjoyment

BY JOHN CLAYTON

That first train, the one Bruce Motsinger bought for his then 1-year-old son Michael some 54 years ago, was meant to capture a child's imagination. But the boy soon outgrew miniature railroads. His father never did.



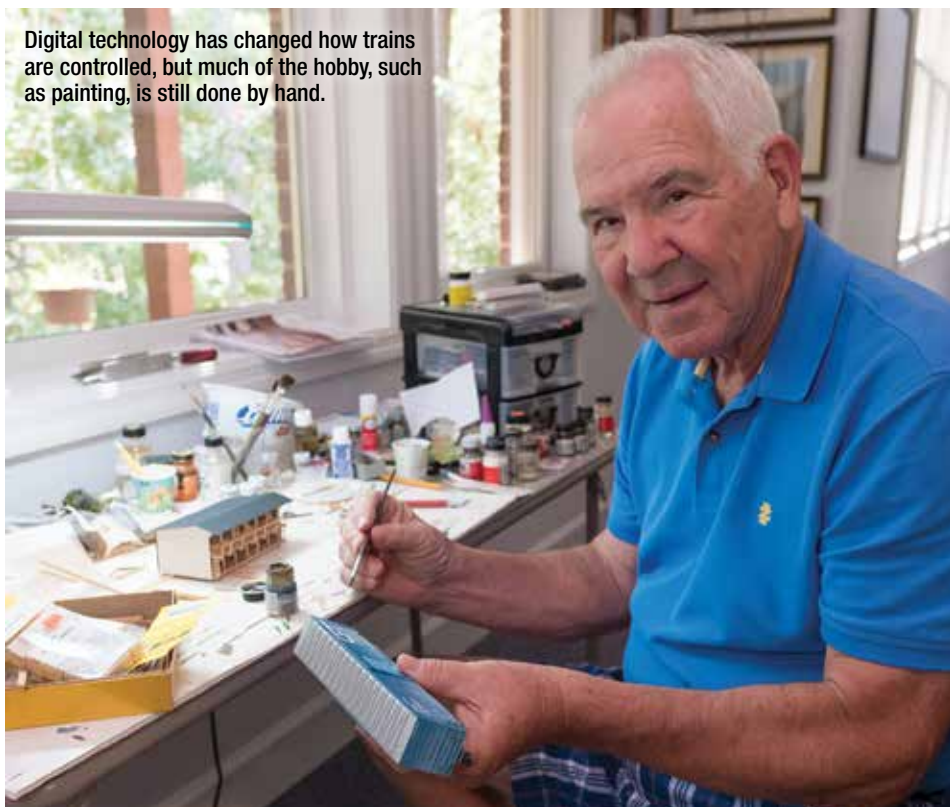
Motsinger designed his display to include rail spurs that offload cargo containers, much like those in the Port of Charleston.



Bruce Motsinger has spent many years collecting dozens of train engines and hundreds of railcars to make an impressive HO scale railroad system in his basement, which gets its name from being half the size of O gauge model trains.



Digital technology has changed how trains are controlled, but much of the hobby, such as painting, is still done by hand.



Motsinger, 78, and his wife, Judy, left the Chicago area to retire in McCormick, bringing with them his near-lifetime hobby, which has taken over about half of the couple's basement and more than a bit of his time.

"When I came down here, I came to do two things — one was to play golf and the other was to work on my model railroad," Motsinger says. "I've played all the golf I needed to play. I've worked with my model railroad not as much as I would have liked."

The layout in the home's basement is a 19-year work in progress, one Motsinger admits will probably never be finished. It includes more than 300 feet of track.

One of the prize components of the Motsinger Railroad is a locomotive modeled after a Union-Pacific prototype. "I bought that as a brass locomotive and had it detailed," Motsinger says. "I haul my green trains with that. ... It's a nice piece of equipment."

While model trains are much the same as they have always been, the hobby continues to evolve with digital technology and computer-operated systems.

Model railroad operators once used toggle switches to control blocks of the track. Governing the speed of a train was a matter of transferring power from the tracks to the models, which is no longer the case.

"Now, everything is electronic," Motsinger says. "Technology has enhanced the model railroad industry tremendously. The train runs from a digital-command control. Each locomotive has a decoder. You can have two trains running toward one another at different speeds. You program the decoders to do what you want them to do — the speed, where they go, whether you want the lights on or off."

Many of those advances have brought increased costs to the hobby, Motsinger says. An item that cost \$10 in the past might cost \$135 with some modern enhancements.

"If I were starting out today, I don't know whether I would be in the model railroad hobby business or not because the prices on things have escalated so much," he says.

Motsinger, who retired after 35 years with retailer JCPenney, says he has belonged to several model railroad clubs over the years — in Kentucky, Michigan and Wisconsin — but goes it alone now.

That does not mean he and his hobby go unappreciated in McCormick. "When my neighbors have their grandkids visit, my phone will ring," Motsinger says. "They'll come over, and we'll run trains." 🚂

GADGET Gift Guide

BY LUIS CARRASCO

The holidays are a time to get together with family and friends and share joy and laughter and maybe a gift or two. There are few sweeter feelings than making someone happy by giving them what they've always wanted. Of course, you can also enjoy the time-honored tradition of hint-giving by leaving this magazine casually open to this page, maybe even draw — casually, casually — a giant red circle around your favorite gadget. Either way, get ready to enjoy a high-tech holiday with those you love.



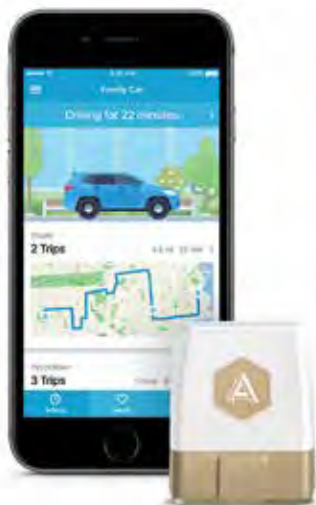
'STAR WARS: JEDI CHALLENGES'

Remember that scene in the original "Star Wars" where Luke wears a helmet with its blast shield down and deflects lasers from a training drone? You'll look about as silly as he does but feel 10

times cooler as you wear this augmented reality headset and battle the likes of Darth Maul, Kylo Ren and Darth Vader himself. Along with lightsaber duels with your favorite bad guys, "Jedi Challenges" also lets you play a strategy game and even holochess. The kit comes with a lightsaber controller, an AR headset and a tracking beacon, but you still need a compatible Android or iOS smartphone to run the game app. **Available at Best Buy or Lenovo.com for \$199.99.**

AUTOMATIC PRO

Plug an Automatic Pro adapter into any car's standard diagnostics port to monitor everything from its location to engine diagnostics from your smartphone. The Automatic Pro app can tell you the problem behind that check engine light, keep an eye on your family's progress while they're on the road, and even call emergency services automatically if there's a crash. **Available at automatic.com and Amazon for \$129.95.**



ECHO SHOW

The Amazon Echo launched in 2014 as slightly more than a glorified Bluetooth speaker. But it quickly added functions and partner apps that have made it the device to beat as the nerve center of a smart home or as a viable personal assistant. The Echo Show adds a 7-inch touchscreen, which means now — along with the Echo's ability to type up your emails, control your smart home devices, shop on Amazon, etc. — you can use YouTube, make a video call, look up a recipe or watch the news. **Available on Amazon for \$229.99 or a two-pack for \$360.**



LEGO BOOST CREATIVE TOOLBOX

This 840-piece set lets you build five progressively more challenging models and is basically a starter robotics kit. Although it's recommended for children ages 7 through 12, it's hard to imagine adults who won't have fun helping put together everything from a robot that dances and tells jokes

to an automated production line that builds smaller Lego models. The kit comes with Bluetooth connectivity; two motors; and tilt, color and distance sensors. A tablet is needed for instructions and to program your creations. **Available at Lego.com and most retailers for \$159.99.**



Kid-friendly streaming

A world of content and parental control



My kids will never know the agony of waiting until Saturday morning to watch their favorite cartoons. Nor will they ever need to adjust the “rabbit ears” to make the screen a little less snowy. Thanks to DVRs, streaming and high definition, my kids have access to their favorite shows every day of the week in crystal-clear quality.

For those of you who are curious, streaming has nothing to do with water in a creek. It’s all about watching videos over the internet. Some people prefer this method of TV, as it allows them to watch the shows they want when they want, without having to sit through lots of commercials. I must admit, I love that there are fewer commercials during kids shows as it reduces the amount of “Mom, I want THAT” I typically hear when the kids see their favorite shows. So how do you “stream”? There are three key things you need:

1 A high-speed internet connection, preferably a broadband connection for the best signal. If you want to stream on several devices at once, you’ll need a faster connection.

2 A device with streaming apps installed, such as a smartphone, tablet, computer, or a streaming stick attached to your TV such as Roku, Amazon Fire TV Stick or Apple TV.

3 A streaming app that has the content you want to view. There are several different streaming apps available, with Netflix being one of the most popular.

If you already subscribe to Netflix for your own viewing, you can set up profiles for different members of your household. You can assign a “teen,” “big kid” or “little kid” status to your children’s profile. This keeps them from viewing shows that may be inappropriate. However, if you are looking to just stream content for kids, there are many other free options out there that would be just as good, if not better than what Netflix offers for kids. ☎



CARISSA SWENSON
IS A TRAINING
AND EDUCATION
CONSULTANT
FOR CONSORTIA
CONSULTING.

Here are some streaming apps I recommend for kids:

- **YouTube Kids** – A good option for bigger kids who know how to search for the types of shows they enjoy.
- **WATCH Disney** or **WATCH Disney Junior** depending on the age of your kids – Includes episodes of all your kids’ favorite Disney Channel shows.
- **PBS Kids** – Has all your kids’ favorite PBS shows including “Sesame Street” and “Curious George.”
- **PlayKids** – A good option for entertaining preschool-aged children.

As I’ve mentioned before, screen time should just be a small part of your kid’s day. By choosing how your child watches their shows and how they access them, you maintain a little more control over what they are seeing and learning.

Parenting Tip

Need help setting limits for your kids’ screen time?

Healthychildren.org has an interactive Family Media Planner that can help you establish guidelines for when it’s OK and not OK for your children to use their electronics.



WCTEL completed renovations at the Abbeville office, including the creation of an operations center. Department managers can monitor the system status during inclement weather. Pictured, from left, are Account Services Representative Brittany Ramey, Outside Plant Engineering Manager Mark Crawford, Managed Services Group Leader Zac Campbell and CEO Jeff Wilson.



Prior to the WCTEL annual meeting, employees and members gathered to view the total solar eclipse on Aug. 21, including Outside Plant Engineer Marvin Martin and Director of Commercial Operations Shannon Sears.

YEAR IN REVIEW

WCTEL leads the way with growth and community involvement

BY JEN CALHOUN

Since WCTEL began 65 years ago as a rural phone company with copper lines, the world has seen the rise of technical innovations like TV, personal computers and broadband.

WCTEL kept up with those changes. Then, the cooperative pushed further ahead.

WCTEL members are now owners of a world-class communications operation and a state-of-the-art fiber broadband network more advanced than those in communities with far larger populations.

And WCTEL keeps growing. In 2017, the cooperative expanded its industry-leading gigabit service while continuing its mission to support local businesses, charities and public-private partnerships.

A STRONG CO-OP MAKES A STRONG COMMUNITY

WCTEL's board of directors works annually with an independent auditor to review the cooperative's financial records. This

year, it hired Turlington and Co. LLP to perform the audit and issue a report on its findings.

The audit found that the cooperative had maintained a strong financial record and used proper accounting techniques, WCTEL Chief Financial Officer Lance Tade says. That's good news for members.

"Because of this, members can expect to continue to receive the highest level of service using the latest technology at affordable rates," Tade says. "In addition, the board of directors has historically authorized the cooperative to return a portion of prior net profits to members in the form of capital credits."

In other words, the cooperative's sound financial status means members are more

likely to get money back through capital credits, which are returns on the investment made by members of WCTEL, Tade says.

In recent years, that money has gone to both new members and long-term members of WCTEL. In 2016, capital credit payments that totalled \$5 or more were distributed to each WCTEL member active in 2015, Tade says.

SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

WCTEL helps members in other ways, too. This year, the cooperative gave \$9,000 in scholarship money to local students Maria Olson, Emerald High School; Darnell Norman, McCormick High School; and Ashstan Voyles, Dixie High School.

The cooperative also supports local



Account Services Representative Amanda Clark teaches students at Long Cane Elementary School about how the internet aids in learning during a Career Day program.



WCTEL employees and family members gather to support Relay for Life.

youth by sending a high school junior to attend the Foundation for Rural Service Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. This year, Thomas Dove, a rising senior at Calhoun Falls Public Charter School, earned the trip.

WCTEL partners with several local businesses for the Youth Entrepreneurship Education Program, which organizes a Business Plan Competition among the high schools in the region. The cooperative awards a \$1,500 grant to fund the Regional Business Plan Competition at Erskine College.

WCTEL also plays a big part in local charities and community events, including career days, Christmas parades, festivals, job fairs and more, says Virginia Smith, marketing representative for the cooperative.

“We live in the community, and we’re a part of the community,” Smith says. “We like to do more than just provide internet service. We are here to support our fellow friends, family members and our neighborhood.”

Smith says the cooperative supports the Relay for Life organizations in Abbeville and McCormick counties. Cooperative employees have raised funds for the events for more than 15 years. They’ve raised more than \$10,000 in each of the last three years.

WCTEL also hosts the WCTEL Kick-Off Classic, which started in 2015. The vision

for the event was to bring together the local and neighboring communities with free food, activities and high school football.

“Having a major corporation such as WCTEL in our community is a huge asset,” a blogger for the Abbeville Panthers website wrote after the Kick-Off Classic in August. “Their relentless effort of giving back is just short of amazing.”

HELPING OUR NEIGHBORS: PROJECT GREENWOOD

WCTEL members know communities improve with a good communication network. Businesses and schools operate better, and access to latest technologies fuels innovation.

With those benefits in mind, WCTEL offered its industry-leading gigabit internet service to help residents in Columbia County, Georgia, in 2015. The service was developed through a WCTEL subsidiary named WCFIBER.

WCTEL plans to continue that expansion in Greenwood, South Carolina, where residents and businesses have reached out for help from the cooperative. This network will give Greenwood residents and businesses the internet connection they need to live, work and play.

The expansion will add more customers to the WCTEL network, which helps the cooperative’s bottom line. WCTEL members won’t see an increase in their

bill to pay for these costs. There are no current plans to give Greenwood customers membership rights that longtime customers enjoy, such as voting for board members or access to capital credits.

WCTEL Chief Executive Officer Jeff Wilson says the cooperative is going through significant changes because of the regulatory and technological environments. “Those things have forced us to think outside the box and grow geographically,” Wilson says. “And we’ve adapted very well.”

STAYING STRONG FOR YOU

But with everything WCTEL has done to improve the lives of its members over the past six decades, its roots remain firmly planted in strong customer service, Wilson says. Superior broadband speeds are important, but taking care of the cooperative’s members is the true bottom line.

“Despite all these changes, we will make sure to stay focused on our customers with the care that we’ve given in the past,” he says. “We have the world’s best internet service as far as speed. But the difference-maker for us is the care and commitment our employees have for our members. It’s unparalleled to anything I’ve ever seen before. They truly care about the customers.” ☎

DESSERT

The best course of a holiday dinner

The holidays are one of the best times of the year for baking. And no one knows how to make a great seasonal dessert better than Lynn Cummins, who, with her husband, Mike, owns Whistle Stop Cafe in the tiny town of Glendale, Kentucky.

The cafe opened in 1975 in the town's former hardware store. Old wooden floors creak with age, and a bell on the door welcomes visitors. It's not uncommon to encounter a line of customers.

This place is known for its fried green tomatoes, hot browns, fried chicken and meatloaf. But take a look at the A-frame sign on the sidewalk out front: Try Our Famous Desserts.

The Cummins, the second owners, bought the restaurant 13 years ago. They added some of Lynn Cummins' favorite dishes, including an array of desserts all made from scratch on-site. The daily menu features seven different pies, two cakes and two fruit cobblers.

"I've always loved to cook and bake," she says. She worked in fast-food

management and in a school cafeteria, but she always wanted to use some of her own recipes.

"This was always one of our favorite restaurants," Mike Cummins says. "We used to come here on our way to where we lived in Indiana. So, jokingly, I told the owners, 'When y'all get ready to sell, let us know.'"

In March 2005, they took over one of the best places for desserts in Kentucky. "Even on cold, winter days, we get tables of people who have never been here before," Lynn Cummins says. "Seventy to 80 percent of our guests are not local. They come from as far away as California."

The secret to their desserts? For one thing, they use "good old lard," Mike Cummins says.

But there's also a trick to the mile-high meringue that floats atop many pies, Lynn Cummins says: "lots and lots of whipping." But just be careful not to overwhip the meringue, she warns, or the results may be grainy and dry.



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



Lynn Cummins' lemon meringue pie is one of the most popular items on the Whistle Stop Cafe menu, especially during the holidays.

Lynn Cummins' baking tips



- Always heat your oven before using, and use the middle shelf unless noted. Both of these steps will promote even baking and reduce the chance of burning or over-browning.



- If you don't have a toothpick to check for doneness on a cake, lightly press the middle. If it springs back, the cake is done.



- If you are frosting a cake that crumbles into the frosting, first spread a very thin layer of frosting. Then, frost as normal, spreading in only one direction.



- Never bake with whipped or tub margarine. Tub margarine contains the wrong amounts of water and fat for baking. Only use a good-quality stick margarine or butter, such as Land o' Lakes.

CHOCOLATE MERINGUE PIE

Crust:

- 2 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, slightly heaping
- 2/3 cup lard or shortening
- 1/3 cup cold water
- 1/4 teaspoon white vinegar

Pie:

- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 5 egg yolks (save egg whites)
- 1 teaspoon butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Meringue:

- 5 egg whites (from the pie filling eggs)
- 1 3/4 cups sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar

For crust: Mix flour and salt. Cut in the lard until crumbly. Stir in water and vinegar. If dough seems dry, add 1 teaspoon cold water at a time until it forms a smooth, stiff crust. Refrigerate for a half-hour or longer before rolling out.

For pie: Place milk in a double boiler and heat until a skin starts to form. Combine sugar, flour, cocoa and salt; add to double boiler. Stir gently until filling begins to thicken; add egg yolks. Stirring occasionally, let cook for 30 minutes, or until consistency of thick pudding. Add butter and vanilla. Pour into blind-baked pie shells. Spread meringue on the top and bake at 300 degrees until meringue is golden brown.

For meringue: While pie filling is thickening, make meringue. In large bowl, whip egg whites with sugar, cornstarch and cream of tartar on low. After 2 minutes, increase speed to medium. When it gets frothy and just starts to thicken, turn on high. Whip until it forms peaks. Do not overwhip.



Red Velvet Cake

- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- 3/4 cup oil
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 ounces red food color
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Sauce:

- 3/4 cup milk
- 1/2 cup sugar

Stir the first four ingredients together. In another bowl, cream the oil, sugar, food color and eggs together. In a cup, stir the baking soda and buttermilk — it will bubble up. Alternate the dry and liquid into the cream mixture, beating thoroughly. Stir in vanilla. Divide into two greased and floured cake pans. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes or until cake tests done.

To create the sauce, bring 3/4 cup of milk and 1/2 cup of sugar to a boil. As soon as you take the cake layers out of the oven, evenly distribute the sauce over them. Let set for 15 minutes, then remove from pans to cool on a rack.

When the cake is cool, frost with cream cheese icing.

CREAM CHEESE ICING

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 pound butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 cups powdered sugar

Cream the cream cheese and butter in a bowl. Gradually add the sugar and beat until smooth. Add the vanilla. If it is too thick add a tablespoon of milk and beat well. 📺



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