

West Carolina Tel

MAY/JUNE 2014

CONNECTED

DEEP ROOTS

Brothers grow
Charlie's Creek Nursery
from family ties



MAKING AN IMPACT

Local group seeks to
open doors for youth

FESTIVAL GUIDE

Events highlight
Southern culture

Our national telco association joins with 34 rural groups to work for broadband support

Access to affordable broadband Internet affects all aspects of rural life, and regulators should act quickly to put a plan in place that will support the availability of affordable broadband service in rural America.

That was the message a group of 35 national organizations sent to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in March. NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association signed the letter, along with groups representing consumer, community and business interests. NTCA is the national voice of telecommunications companies such as ours.

Because of the way Universal Service Fund (USF) support is currently set up, “consumers in rural America are being forced to select services they may not want, such as traditional landline telephone service, in order to gain access to broadband services at an affordable rate,” says Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA.

The letter specifically urged the FCC to move forward as quickly as possible to implement a Connect America Fund (CAF) mechanism for rural telecommunications companies like ours — a mechanism that will “provide

In addition to NTCA, other organizations signing the letter include:

- ▶ Agricultural Retailers Association
- ▶ American Association of Community Colleges
- ▶ American Farm Bureau Federation
- ▶ American Library Association
- ▶ American Telemedicine Association
- ▶ Independent Community Bankers of America
- ▶ National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education
- ▶ National Rural Economic Developers Association
- ▶ National Rural Education Association
- ▶ National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- ▶ National Rural Health Association
- ▶ National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative
- ▶ Rural School and Community Trust
- ▶ State Agriculture and Rural Leaders

sufficient and predictable support for broadband-capable networks across all of rural America,” Bloomfield adds.

The letter stated that “our groups include representatives of agribusiness, farmers and ranchers, rural health care providers, rural educational initiatives, economic development agencies, utilities, lenders and other sectors that are indispensable to our rural and national economies.” ☎

—From NTCA Reports



Telcos respond as FCC pushes for increase in local service rates

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced in March a new “rate floor” for rural telecommunications services that, if enacted in full, could raise local phone service rates by 40 percent for some rural consumers.

This increase is intended to bring rates across the country into better balance. To comply with the new minimum, some telecommunications providers would be forced to raise their

rates for local phone service by as much as \$6 per month.

NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association filed a notice with the FCC expressing concern on behalf of the nation’s rural telecommunications companies. “The strict implementation of this rule presents real challenges for rural consumers and could put at risk access to both quality voice and broadband services in many rural communities,” wrote NTCA Chief Executive Officer Shirley Bloomfield in the notice.

Suggestions to the FCC include phasing in the rate increase amounts over time as well as delaying the dates for the increases to be implemented.

As your telecommunications provider, we will continue working through NTCA to present the concerns of rural consumers to the FCC. Please see the July/August issue of this magazine for an update. ☎

The IP Evolution

Support for 'middle mile' networks is vital to keeping rural regions connected to Internet

The technology that powers the Web — known as Internet Protocol, or IP — has become the standard for transmitting information between devices. As we use this technology to connect everything from security systems to appliances, in addition to watching movies and sharing files over the Internet, it is more important than ever that federal regulations support the “IP Evolution.”

When you use your Internet connection and our local network to access the nation’s Internet backbone, your information travels across “middle mile” networks. Because these networks are a vital connection between your local provider and the rest of the Internet, it is important that our nation’s policies support their development — especially as people in rural

America grow to rely more on broadband connections for education, business growth, entertainment, telemedicine and general communications.

“The networks required to connect rural areas to Internet ‘on-ramps’ are costly, and consumer demand is increasing the need for bandwidth,” says Mike Romano, senior vice president of policy for NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association. “To keep rural broadband services affordable, such networks need universal service support.”

As your telecommunications provider, we will continue working through NTCA with other companies like ours across the U.S. to encourage changes in federal regulations that will help consumers take advantage of the IP Evolution. ☎



Lifeline Service

When you need help paying for telephone service

Is your annual household income at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines for a household of its size? Do you or someone in your household participate in any of the following low-income government assistance programs? If so, you may qualify for Lifeline Service.

- Medicaid
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Section 8 Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- National School Lunch Program’s Free Lunch Program

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, customers must fill out standard forms, available at your local telephone company’s office, as mandated by the Federal and/or State government. Your telephone company is not responsible for determining who qualifies for these programs or who receives assistance. Customers must meet specific criteria in order to obtain assistance with their local telephone service, and qualifying is dependent upon government-established guidelines. To qualify for Lifeline credit, each customer must apply and provide proof that he/she, or a household member for whom he/she is financially responsible, participates in at least one of the programs listed above or that the customer meets the income-based requirements. Additional eligibility requirements may also apply. Customers must choose to apply the Lifeline discount to a landline or a wireless number, not both.

For more details about Lifeline Service and to apply for assistance, please contact your local telephone company.



“Is my child the victim of a cyberbully?”

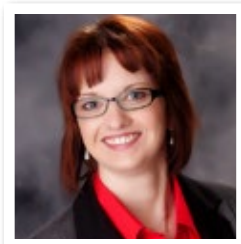
It is difficult enough for a child to face a traditional bully. But as we learned in the March/April issue, cyberbullies can be particularly damaging because they are always present. Using the same technology that brings fun and convenience into our lives, a cyberbully victimizes people through email, social media and text messaging.

If your child is the victim of a cyberbully, it is important to recognize it and intervene as early as possible. Children who are victims of cyberbullying may:

- Become withdrawn or depressed, and exhibit anti-social behavior
- Say things about hating school or not having friends
- Experience a drop in their grades at school

- Appear anxious when their cell phone rings or they receive emails and texts
- Quickly stop using the computer, cell phone or other technology when you enter the room
- Decide to quit using the Internet, cell phones and other technology

What can you do if you see these signs in your child? In my next article, we will discuss ways to respond if you find out your child is the victim of a cyberbully.



Carissa Swenson is the owner and technology specialist of TechTECS, a technology training, education, consulting and support company.

Investing in a stronger future

For those who put money in the U.S. stock market, the past few years have been like a long ride down a rough road. The same can be said for the real estate market. But as your telco, we are making investments that have guaranteed returns.



We are investing in our communities. We are committed to doing more than just providing a basic service to the communities in our area. We understand that quality of life is about more than the basics; it's about having access to services that create greater opportunities for our families, businesses, schools and other institutions. We are investing the time and resources into making sure you have access to those advanced services.

We are investing in technology. Technology is the key that makes those advanced services possible. Just like electricity in the 1930s and 1940s, and reliable telephone service in the 1950s, broadband is the new infrastructure that is driving our community development. We are investing in the equipment and people to deliver broadband technology to everyone in our service area.

We are investing in education. Today, children in rural America can have the same opportunities to pursue a top-notch education as their urban counterparts. To take advantage of those opportunities, the systems and the technology must be in place — from Wi-Fi tablets to distance learning. We are partnering with our schools by investing in the broadband network that makes advanced education happen.

We are investing in health care. Technology is changing health care faster than perhaps any sector. From electronic medical records to telemedicine, technology is helping people receive better care while helping providers control costs. We are partnering with health care providers by investing in the broadband network that powers these advances.

We are investing in business. Local businesses are no longer competing with just the shop next door or in the next town. Now they are competing with companies in other states, and even other countries, thanks to the Internet. We are partnering with our businesses by investing in the broadband network that helps them offer the best local service while competing on a much larger stage.

We are investing in the future of this industry. The progress of rural America is directly tied to the success of the rural telecommunications industry. Working alongside hundreds of other telecommunications companies through NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, we are representing your concerns in Washington, D.C. In April, leaders from rural telcos across the country met in our nation's capital to discuss policy concerns and remind our elected officials that any reforms to this industry must be fair and workable for rural communities. For every proposed law or regulation that comes along, we are there to work on your behalf to protect the progress we have all made together.

These are the kinds of investments we are making — and will continue to make. And they are guaranteed to yield a return, because ultimately what we are investing in is a stronger future for you and your family. 📞

JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lee W. Logan, President
Due West, Area 4

Stanley H. Keaton, Vice-President
Antreville/Lowndesville, Area 5

Jane U. Stone, Secretary
Donalds, Area 3

Talmadge R. Bussey
South McCormick, Area 9

L. Ned McGill
Starr, Area 1

John Michael Thomas
Iva, Area 2

James T. Hester
Calhoun Falls, Area 6

William "Billy" Bauman
Abbeville, Area 7

Westley "Wes" McAllister
North McCormick, Area 8

West Carolina Tel

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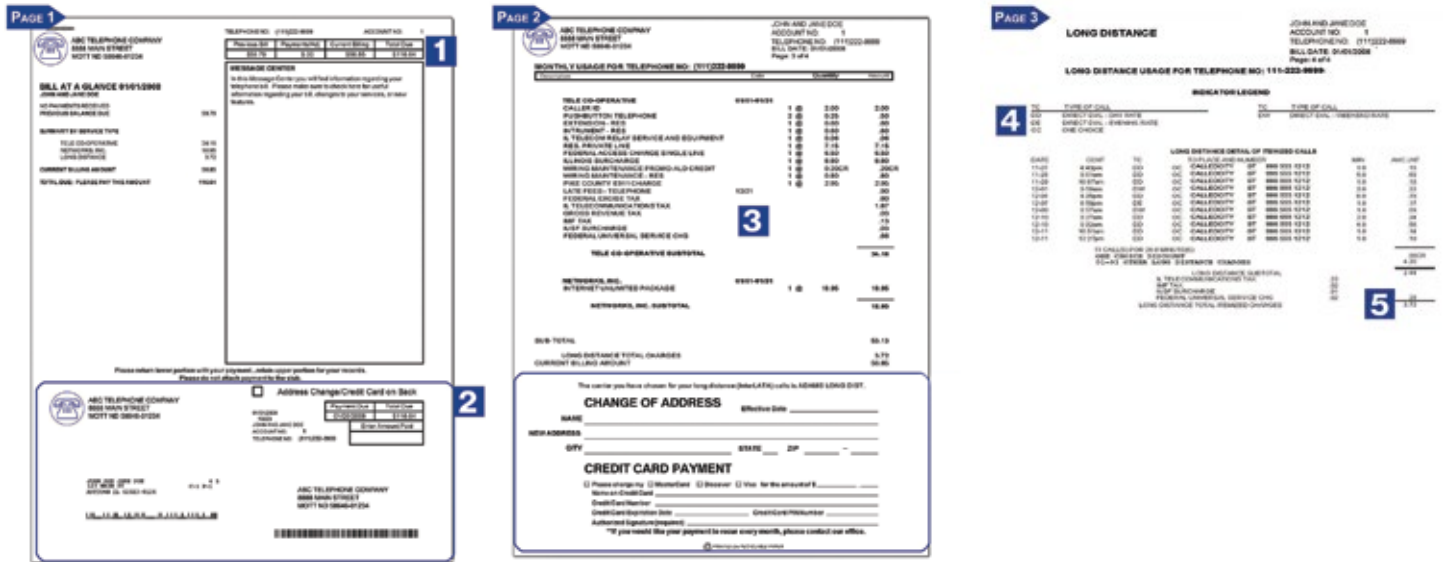
Produced for West Carolina Tel by:
www.WordSouth.com

On the Cover:



Jake Black inspects a row of magnolia trees at Charlie's Creek Nursery. See story Page 13.

West Carolina bills get a new look



West Carolina Tel is switching billing companies, which means your bills will soon look a little different. These changes will help the cooperative operate more efficiently. Here is a quick guide to your new bills.

- 1) Quick look totals for amount due and previous months.
- 2) Return stub.
- 3) Monthly usage information.
- 4) Long distance details.
- 5) Long distance subtotal.

Construction underway on Blue Hole Pavilion

Calhoun Falls officials and West Carolina Telephone leadership broke ground in March on the new Blue Hole Pavilion on Lake Russell, and the building is expected to be finished later this summer.

Calhoun Falls Mayor Johnnie Waller says he's already gotten plenty of interest from groups as far away as Savannah looking to hold events at the site. It's an important element, he says, in transitioning Calhoun Falls' economy "from textiles to tourism."

"We definitely have high hopes for it," says Waller. "This is an important first piece in the plan."

West Carolina Tel helped fund the pavilion with a \$25,000 sponsorship. "They've been very supportive of this area and really their entire service area," Waller says. "We're very thankful for them."



RELAY TEAM SETS HIGH GOALS

West Carolina's relay team is raising funds for this year's Abbeville County Relay for Life coming May 16. The cooperative's team has raised more than \$10,000 each for the past two years and has the same goal for 2014.

"This is an event everyone in the community rallies behind, and we're excited to again be a part of it," says team captain Amanda Clark.

In addition to voluntary payroll deductions for employees, the team is raising money by selling \$100 track signs to local businesses that want to advertise at the relay. To help the cause, contact Clark at 864-446-2111.



Fleet gets new look

West Carolina Tel's service vans recently got a facelift, including a new graphic wrap. Be sure and wave at our crews when you see them around town!

Broadband Builds Business

Small businesses depend on broadband access as they drive America's economy



Look for the “Broadband Builds Business” logo in our magazine throughout the year as we highlight companies who are using broadband to create new business opportunities and to bring new services to their communities.

► Are you a small business owner?

Share your story of how you're using broadband to grow your business at BroadbandBuildsBusiness.com. We may feature you in our magazine!

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Every day across rural America, small business owners are taking care of their communities — from grocery stores, restaurants and service stations to beauty shops, newspapers and banks.

Not only are these small businesses meeting our local needs, but they are also a vital part of our country's economic recovery. According to reports compiled by the ADP Research Institute, the six-month period from September 2013 to February 2014 found that businesses with fewer than 50 employees created some 455,000 jobs, or 42.8 percent of all jobs created.

As small business owners put people to work — and generate some 46 percent of the nation's gross domestic product — they increasingly rely on broadband Internet access to manage and grow their companies. In fact, reports from the U.S. Small Business Administration show that broadband is one of their most important resources (*see infographic, next page*).

“Access to high-quality broadband Internet service is absolutely vital for small businesses seeking to grow their operations,” says Rick Schadelbauer, an economist with NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. “It allows small business owners to cost-effectively promote the unique aspects of their operations and provides access to customers and markets that would be otherwise unattainable.”

Beyond having a website, small businesses are also using their broadband connections to engage with customers through social media. They are using online software for functions such as project management, bookkeeping and sales tracking. And they are networking with vendors to maintain inventory and track orders.

As broadband becomes the lifeblood of small business, telecommunications providers like us remain committed to delivering reliable, affordable broadband to rural America. ☎

THE FACE OF SMALL BUSINESS

In communities across the region, small businesses are using the power of broadband to operate more efficiently and provide better service.



BELLE CHEVRE (Elkmont, Ala.) relies on broadband to help market its cheeses, which have won nearly 100 national awards and been declared a “national treasure” by critics.



WOUND CARE RESOURCES (Yorkville, Tenn.) provides products to treat chronic wounds. Broadband is the company's lifeline for making sales and backing up its files.

• National Small Business Week is May 12-16 –

THE IMPACT OF SMALL BUSINESSES ON THE U.S. ECONOMY

SMALL BUSINESSES COMPRISE:

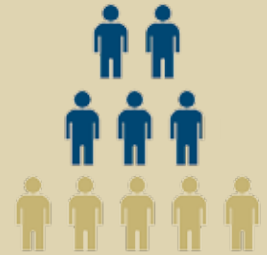


99.7%
of U.S.
employer
firms



64%
of net new private-sector jobs

49.2%
of private-
sector
employment

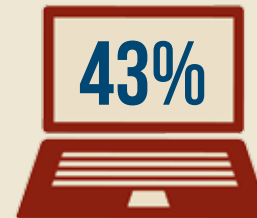


43%
of private-sector payroll

GDP

(Gross Domestic Product)

46%
of private-sector output



of high-tech
employment

*Source: SBA, Office of Advocacy publication
"Frequently Asked Questions about Small Business," Sept. 2012*

AND THEY DEPEND ON BROADBAND TO:



ACHIEVE
STRATEGIC GOALS



IMPROVE
COMPETITIVENESS



IMPROVE
EFFICIENCY



REACH MORE
CUSTOMERS



INTERACT WITH
VENDORS

Source: SBA, Office of Advocacy report, "The Impact of Broadband Speed and Price on Small Business," November 2010



HILL TIRE (Walterboro, S.C.),
a family-owned tire company serving
customers since 1968, uses broad-
band to connect with its distributors,
track hours and train employees.



**EASTERN KENTUCKY Foothills
ECO-AGRITOURISM** is a group of
45 businesses in five counties using
broadband to promote the region as
a premier tourist destination.



**GRAND VISTA HOTEL (Helenwood,
Tenn.)** uses broadband to provide
Wi-Fi service to guests anywhere on
its property, allowing the hotel to re-
main competitive with larger chains.

Support small businesses in your community

MEET THE BOARD:

Leading through change

Experienced board members reflect on the cooperative's changes and positive direction

► TAG BUSSEY

West Carolina Tel is very different today from when Modoc resident Tag Bussey first joined the cooperative's board of directors in 1987.

"I was on the board back when it was just a phone company," Bussey says. "Now we're a technology company."

Bussey, who owns an industrial contracting company called Country Way in Augusta, Ga., says there are plenty of ways that owning his own business has helped him be a better board member and vice versa. "There's a lot of crossover," he says. "I built my company on quality and service and West Carolina is the same way."

In addition to work and serving on the West Carolina board, he is also a deacon at Modoc Baptist Church and a member of the Modoc Volunteer Fire Department.

He says the highlights of his tenure



Tag Bussey says his experience as owner of Country Way helps him be a better board member for West Carolina.

on the board have been the fiber to the home project and serving as chairman of the committee responsible for the new customer service buildings in McCormick and Iva.

"We're very proud of the fiber," Bussey says. "It's put us ahead."

He says he's enjoyed serving the mem-

bers over the years and looks forward to continuing that service.

"I've enjoyed being on the board," he says. "I think we've been diligent with our duties. I like to see new things bettering our community. When I leave here I would like to see it better than when I got here."

► NED MCGILL

In 2006 when Ned McGill joined the West Carolina board, he may have been new to the group, but he was not new to utility leadership. McGill has served on the board for Starr-Iva Water for about 30 years.



Ned McGill, a farmer and retired agricultural engineer, says the cooperative's future is tied to the fiber buildout.

But even as long as he has been on the two boards, he's been a cattle farmer for even longer. "I've had cattle since I was 9 years old," he says.

While his cattle and hayfield keep him busy now, he spent 30 years as an agricultural engineer for the agency formerly

known as Soil Conservation Services.

"Being an engineer, you have to pay attention to details," he says. "You have to do that with the board as well."

McGill is also active as a deacon at Starr Baptist Church, a member of the Abbeville and Anderson County Cattlemen's Associations and a veteran of the Army Corps of Engineers.

He says he appreciates the kinship that the board members share. "If you're sick, they'll cover you up with cards," he says. "In some ways, it feels more like a family than a business."

Looking forward, McGill sees the cooperative adapting to changes in the industry and exploring new ways to use the high-speed network its crews have installed throughout the region. "We've got a big investment in the fiber, so we're banking on broadband," he says. ☎

Exceeding expectations

New bundle customer wowed by service

BY ANDY JOHNS

As someone who worked at a bank for decades, Billy Cook knows a little bit about protecting people's assets. So when it came to protecting his own property, Cook recently made an upgrade.

Since he switched his security service and bundled other services with West Carolina, he hasn't looked back.

"I was really bowled over," says Cook, who retired from Abbeville First Bank. "It felt like you had your neighbors in your home installing your service."

Before he contacted West Carolina Tel, Cook was dealing with two national corporations to handle his Internet, television and security service. As someone who enjoys gadgets and technology, one of Cook's primary concerns with his switch to West Carolina was having a fast, reliable Internet connection. But he's been very pleased with his 30 Mbps speed and exceptional service.

His wife, Deborah, a retired school teacher, says she appreciates not having to write checks to three different companies when the bills come due each month.

"I don't have to worry about all of those things any more," she says.

In addition to the convenience, the bill is smaller than it used to be. On security, the Cooks saved about \$10 per month by switching.

On top of the price and conveniences, the Cooks know that the money they do spend with West Carolina stays in the community rather than goes to a corporate office somewhere far away.

"I really like the idea of the cooperative being local," Cook says.

SAFE AND SECURE

The new security system was particularly important to the Cooks. They had maintained a system since 1998, right after someone broke into their home.

But it had been years since they updated the system and the security company had attached hefty price tags to the needed upgrades.

When he decided instead to make those upgrades with West Carolina, he was amazed at the service, technology and how customizable the system was.

"They designed it the way we thought was best," Cook says. "And they went to the trouble to be sure we knew how to use it."



Billy and Deborah Cook say the customer service at West Carolina impressed them when they bundled their services.

Cook particularly likes the mobile app that allows members to check in on their homes when they are away. "I can't tell you how many times I've gotten halfway to work and wondered 'Did I set the alarm?'" Cook says. "With this, you just log in and check it on your computer or your phone."

ABOVE AND BEYOND

When the Cooks upgraded their security system to West Carolina, they decided to bundle services to add Internet and television so they could drop their national service provider. The evening after the install, the television set-top box inexplicably cut off and wouldn't restart. Cook called West Carolina to report the problem and schedule a visit from a technician for the next day. It was around 8:30 p.m. when the operator gave his number to technician Terry Ricketts.

Cook was surprised to get a call in minutes from Ricketts, who insisted on coming by to reset or replace the box, despite the fact that the Cooks had another television working fine.

"Here's this guy who's been working all day and it's 8:30 at night, and he came out so we could watch TV in our den," Cook says. "You don't get service like that anywhere anymore." 📞

Southern Celebrations

Festivals highlight big and small icons of rural life

BY ELIZABETH WOOTTEN

It's not every day that people stop to celebrate watermelons. Or MoonPies. Or crape myrtles. But throughout the summer, many counties and cities host unique festivals devoted to such unheralded aspects of life in the South. And the celebrations they put on can give you and your family the opportunity to experience all kinds of fun activities.

Not sure where to start? The Internet is a great tool that can help you during the planning stage. Finding directions, events and hotels is made easy by travel and tourist websites. With a little research, you can have your trip mapped out in no time. Get to planning those one-of-a-kind adventures for you and your family today. Here are some festivals to get you started.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Walterboro Antiques, History & Arts Festival • May 16-17, Walterboro

Hampton County Watermelon Festival • June 14-22, Hampton

Known for the longest parade in South Carolina, this event includes a wide variety of events such as a parade, a street dance, Battle of the Towns, Mud Run and more. This year's theme is The Hampton County Watermelon Festival Promoting Physical & Spiritual Wellness. www.hcmelonfest.org

**Lowcountry Blueberry Jam & Blueberry Festival
June 22, McClellanville**

**South Carolina Festival of Stars
June 27-28, Ninety Six**

**14th Annual South Carolina Festival of Discovery
July 10-12, Greenwood**

**Edisto Music & Shag Fest
Aug. 29-30, Edisto Beach**

**McCormick Gold Rush Festival
Sept. 20, McCormick**

From breakfast at the McCormick United Methodist Church to panning for gold at the Heritage Gold Mine, there is plenty to do for all ages at this daylong festival. Live music, games, a silent auction and live artist demonstrations are just a few of the activities to enjoy. www.mccormickgoldrush.net

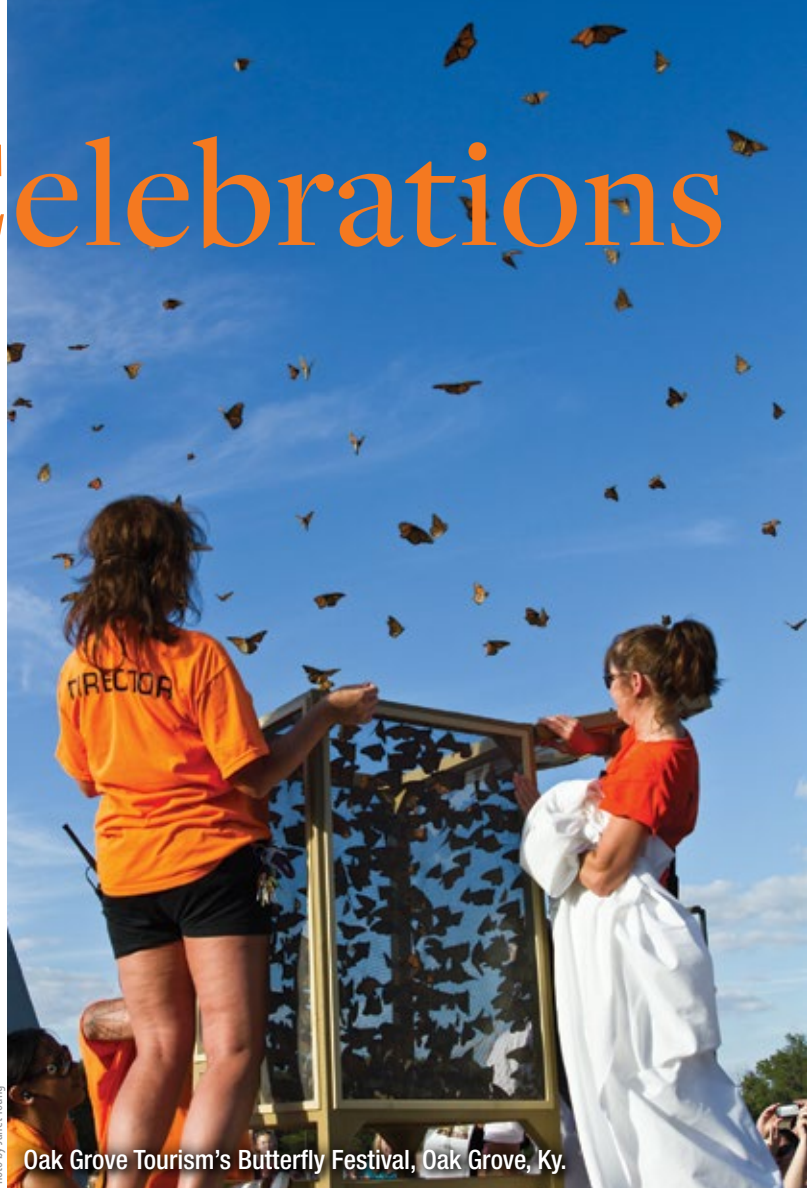
**Due West Fall Festival
Sept. 27, Due West**



**▲ Beaufort Shrimp Festival
Oct. 3-4, Downtown Beaufort**

Celebrating wild-caught shrimp and local food and fun in the Lowcountry, the festival features an arts and crafts market, a 5K run/walk, live entertainment, children's activities and, of course, plenty of shrimp. www.downtownbeaufort.com/beaufort-shrimp-festival

28th Annual Belton Standpipe Heritage & Arts Festival • Oct. 4, Belton



Oak Grove Tourism's Butterfly Festival, Oak Grove, Ky.

TENNESSEE

**Poke Sallet Festival
May 9-10, Gainesboro**

A tractor show, quilt show, iris show, Outhouse Race and Poke Sallet Eating Contest are some of the features this year. Kids can enjoy the day, too, with a petting zoo, rides and games. www.pokesalletfest.com

**Annual Highway 52 Yard Sale
May 16-17, Macon County**

Country Fried Festival at Milky Way Farm • June 7-8, Pulaski

4th Annual Genealogy Jamboree and Pioneer Day • June 12-14, Cumberland Gap

**The Secret City Festival
June 13-14, Oak Ridge**

**Defeated Creek Bluegrass Festival
June 13-14, Defeated Creek**

**Lions Club Annual Hillbilly Days
June 19-21, Lafayette**

**Bell Buckle RC-Moon Pie Festival
June 21, Bell Buckle**

The Southeastern Tourism Society has named this festival a Top 20 Event. A 10-mile run kicks off the event, with a parade, bluegrass music, a performance by Speakeasy, the coronation of the king and queen and more sprinkled throughout the day. www.bellbuckle-chamber.com

**The 15th Annual Lavender Festival
June 21, Oak Ridge**

Lynchburg Frontier Days
June 26-28, Lynchburg

Nine Mile Bluegrass Festival
June 27-28, Pikeville

Smithville Fiddler's Jamboree & Crafts Festival

July 4-5, Smithville
Celebrate Independence Day weekend with traditional Appalachian music and old-time fun. Beginning at 9 a.m. each day, the festival will include more than 35 categories of music and dancing as well as food and craft booths.
smithvillejamboree.com

Smokin' in McMinnville BBQ Festival
Aug. 8-9, McMinnville

Franklin Jazz Festival
Aug. 30-31, Franklin

32nd Annual Standing Stone Marbles Festival & National Rolley Hole Championships
Sept. 13, Hilham

ESPN, ABC Evening News, Sports Illustrated and others have featured this one-of-a-kind festival. Although registration is required for the Rolley Hole Tournament, activities open to all include marble making, a swap meet and demonstrations.
www.facebook.com/theNationalRolleyHoleMarblesChampionships

Half Moon Music Festival
Sept. 14, Ten Mile

Rockwood Fall Festival 2014
Oct. 4, Rockwood

6th Annual October Sky Festival
Oct. 19, Oliver Springs

European American Heritage Festival • Oct. 25, Pulaski

KENTUCKY

33rd Annual Little River Days
May 16-17, Hopkinsville

The Lower Town Arts & Music Festival • May 16-17, Paducah

Mountain Memories Festival
June 6-7, Frenchburg

Stringbean Memorial Festival
June 19-21, Jackson County
Bluegrass and mountain music honoring the memory of David "Stringbean" Akeman. Music classes and workshops.
www.stringbeanpark.com



▲ **18th Annual Duncan Hines Festival** • July 12, Bowling Green

Berea Celtic Festival
Aug. 15-18, Berea

Swift Silver Mine Festival
Aug. 29-31, Campton

Hatfield-McCoy Heritage Days 2014
Aug. 29-31, Pikeville

Tobacco Festival
Labor Day Weekend, Sandy Hook

Blazin' Bluegrass Festival
Sept. 18-20, Whitley City



▲ **Gourd Patch Arts Festival**
Sept. 20, Mayfield

25th Annual World Chicken Festival
Sept. 25-28, London

A tribute to the heritage of Colonel Harland Sanders, founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken, this international celebration includes a variety of attractions, from Chick-O-Lympics and Barnyard games to face painting and a car show.
www.chickenfestival.com

Cave Run Storytelling Festival
Sept. 26-27, Morehead

Morgan County Sorghum Festival
Sept. 26-28, West Liberty

◀ **Oak Grove Tourism's Butterfly Festival** (See photo, opposite page)
Sept. 27, Oak Grove

From a monster mural to an insect road show exhibit, there are activities for children of all ages. Learn about nature through hands-on activities during the day, and stay for the release of hundreds of butterflies at the end of the day.
www.oakgrovebutterflyfest.com

The Murray Highland Festival
Oct. 25, Murray

ALABAMA

30th Annual Poke Salat Festival
May 16-17, Arab

Mentone Rhododendron Festival
May 17-18, Mentone

On Friday, there will be a bonfire in the town square where you can enjoy marshmallow roasting, storytelling, and live entertainment. The festival also includes food, arts and crafts, children's events, live music and more. www.facebook.com/MentoneAlabamaFestivals

▼ **NACC Latino Festival**
June 7, Rainsville



31st Annual Sand Mountain Potato Festival • July 4, Henagar

Main Street Music Festival
Aug. 8-9, Albertville

Ardmore Crape Myrtle Festival
Aug. 30, Ardmore

Purchase crape myrtles of all colors and sizes as well as other plants and flowers at this event. You can also experience crafts, antique cars and tractors, children's activities and more.
www.ardmorealtchamber.org

The 44th Annual St. William Seafood Festival • Aug. 30, Guntersville

Best known for its famous gumbo, the festival is the primary fundraiser for St. William Catholic Church and attracts seafood lovers from near and far. Come enjoy freshly prepared food at Civitan Park on Lake Guntersville. stwilliamchurch.com/seafood_festival

Ider Mule Days
Sept. 1, Ider

Riverfest Barbecue Cook-off
Sept. 19-20, Decatur

Boom Days Heritage Celebration
Sept. 20, Fort Payne



▲ **New Hope Annual Outdoor Juried Arts & Crafts Festival**
Sept. 27-28, New Hope

48th Annual Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention
Oct. 3-4, Athens

Athens Storytelling Festival
Oct. 23-25, Athens ☎

SPECIAL OPERATION

Operation Impact seeks to engage youth

BY ANDY JOHNS

A complicated problem is usually only solved by a complex answer.

So Claude Thomas knew solving the problem of underachieving youth in the Abbeville area would take a complex, multifaceted effort.

And that's why Operation Impact seeks to reach youth on so many different levels.

"There's a lot of work to be done," says Thomas, chairman of the nonprofit group's board. "We're trying to make a dent. If you can change a mind, you can change the world."

Since 1994, the members of Operation Impact have been mentoring, awarding scholarships, teaching golf lessons, funding field trips and hosting programs to broaden the horizons of young people in the area.

Funded primarily from an annual banquet and from dues paid by members, the organization intends to not only stress to teens and preteens that education is important, but also to show them where it can take them.

One thing many folks do not realize, Thomas says, is the value of exposing youth to new places and opportunities. A trip to Charleston or Columbia may not seem like much to most adults, but seeing business or state government in action can really broaden the horizon for young people.

"Some of our children have probably never left Abbeville County," Thomas says. "We're going to have to learn as a community how we work and thrive in this global world we live in. We want to help our kids step up so they don't get left behind."

MEANINGFUL MENTORS

Thomas, who is also on the Abbeville County Council, is particularly proud of Impact's mentorship program. The program has paired 15 young men with mentors, and they are expected to meet once a month.

At some of the meetings, they've brought in professionals like electricians to talk with the boys about trades. Other times the men just catch up with the boys and provide good role models.

One new emphasis the mentors have added is teaching their pupils the game of golf — but the focus goes well beyond recreation. Most of the youth in the county have never been exposed to the game and Thomas says that could hinder them as they climb the corporate ladder.

"Most corporate people like to play golf," he says. "It's networking. If you're not in their loop, it's tough to do business. You have to get to the table in order to do business."



Claude Thomas and the men of Operation Impact have a multi-pronged approach to reach youth.

With that in mind, the organization put on its first golf tournament this spring. To contribute to the cause, Parkland Golf Course in Greenwood donated five sets of clubs to the mentorship program.

Similar support from other local business partners will be a key for the next steps in Operation Impact's growth, Thomas says.

EARLY AND OFTEN

Thomas and other group members know that children need help before they get to the age for mentorship, so Operation Impact finds funding to support local elementary schools. The group also pays for eighth-grade trips for some students who can't afford it and coordinates service projects like cemetery cleanups.

"You have to prepare yourself for the next level," Thomas says. "You study and you work hard, but you also have to give something back to the community."

Operation Impact recognizes like-minded people and organizations in the community that are also making a difference. Each year at their banquet, board members give awards for those making a difference in education, community service, business, the faith community and with youth. 📞

➔ **For more information about Operation Impact call Claude Thomas at 864-378-7713.**

Family Trees

Brothers use hard work and faith to grow tree nursery

BY ANDY JOHNS

Don and Jake Black have been growing trees at Charlie's Creek Nursery for more than 30 years.

But the brothers are quick to point out they aren't the ones doing most of the work.

"We don't do much," says Don. "We just water and fertilize and the Lord does the rest. To see how he works, you just have to give him all the credit."

Through hard work, a commitment to service and help from above, the brothers have expanded the nursery business they started with their father in 1982 into a 500-acre horticultural hub, shipping trees to as far away as Oklahoma and New York.

HUMBLE ROOTS

The Blacks grew up running a Greenville-based landscape crew with their father Heyward, in the 1970s. They were in high demand, often going as far as Charlotte and Atlanta for corporate jobs.

By the early '80s, the brothers had talked their father, who had previously owned a plant nursery, into working on the supply side of the landscaping business. They opened Charlie's Creek in 1982 and without much formal training, the brothers have become respected arborists.

"If you're around it a lot, you learn a few things," Jake explains.

And there's a lot to learn.

It takes the trees three to five years from the time they are planted to the best time to sell them. Sell too many, too early and they've depleted their inventory for the next two years. Hold too many back and they get too big and deeply rooted to be transported.



BRANCHING OUT

To add to the complex planning, certain trees fall in and out of favor with landscapers and certain events can trigger a huge spike in demand.

The last couple of years, tea olive trees and Green Giant arborvitae evergreens have risen in popularity, replacing staples like the leyland cypress. Hurricanes and ice storms can also cause unforeseen spikes in demand. Most recently, the ice storm that hit the Augusta area had plenty of new and returning customers — including Augusta National Golf Club — calling Charlie's Creek. "People were calling saying 'I can see my neighbors now, I need something to replace the trees,'" Don says.

Some of those customers have been coming to see the Blacks for more than two decades, which tells the brothers they are doing something right.

"If they know your product and you stand behind it, they'll stay with you," Don says. 📞

▲ Brothers Don and Jake Black have learned tree cultivation and grown their business over the past three decades.



Tree planting tips from Don and Jake Black

- ▶ Don't plant too deep.
- ▶ Don't over-water new trees.
- ▶ Don't cut crape myrtles back too far.
- ▶ Cutting trees back every year is overkill.
- ▶ Don't plant under utility lines.
- ▶ Know your trees before you plant.
- ▶ Fertilize in mid-March followed by another round in July.
- ▶ Fertilize 18 to 24 inches away from the trunk for small trees, and farther out for bigger trees.

Meet the **DECK CHEF**

Kent Whitaker wasn't born with a silver spatula in his mouth. Like every grill master, there was a time when Whitaker knew nothing about grilling. Granted, it's hard for him to remember the exact moment he took to the grill, knowing how to coax the best flavor from the meat that lay before him.

But now at the age of 47, he says it was during his teenage years that he began grilling seriously, learning a good deal of his technique from his dad.

"Outdoor cooking has always been a big part of our family," Whitaker says. "Both sets of grandparents loved to grill. But it was my dad who ruled charcoal grilling." His dad's instruction, along with a good deal of trial and error, Whitaker admits, helped him hone his skills at the grill.

"I've never had anything blow up or caught a car on fire like in the commercials," he says. "I was cleaning old grease off my smoker, and there was so much smoke that a neighbor ran over to see if our house was on fire."

Whitaker has authored numerous cookbooks sharing his love of the grill, with valuable tips on smoking, barbecuing and grilling meats as well as recipes.

"I'm still perfecting things and love the learning process and trying new things," he says, adding that he loves to try grilling new foods and adding twists to recipes.

"Some have not been what I call successes, though!" he says. "You learn by trial and error; some stuff you pick up in restaurants or class."



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



ABOVE: Gas or charcoal? Kent Whitaker says both. The grillmaster likes the flexibility of grills, so he can tailor a cooking method based on the cuisine.

RIGHT: One great thing about grilling is its portability. Whitaker frequently takes his grill on the road to football games, including the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.



COOKING METHODS



Whitaker says the first thing one should know about grilling is the difference between cooking methods.

- **SMOKING** uses very low heat (52° F – 140° F). Several hours up to several days, depending on temperature.
- **BARBECUING** also uses low heat (190° F – 300° F). Takes several hours with low, slow heat.
- **GRILLING** requires high heat (400° F – 550° F). Hot and fast and ready in minutes.

Once you've learned the basics, he says it's time to experiment with different rubs and marinades, as well as meats and other foods.

Whitaker has several monikers attached to his love of grilling. "Cornbread" is one; "Rib Bone" another. But most know him as the "Deck Chef." And that's where you'll find him on the Web: www.thedekchef.com, a site with recipes as well as a place to buy his cookbooks.



Grilled Strawberry Pound Cake

GRILLED STRAWBERRY POUND CAKE

This is my all-time favorite grilling recipe for an after-meal sweet tooth.

- Nonstick spray
- Pound cake slices
- Spray butter, such as Parkay
- Brown sugar (optional)
- Strawberry ice cream
- Sliced strawberries
- Strawberry syrup
- Toasted sliced almonds

If you fear placing slices of pound cake directly on a grill, try using a grilling basket or use a sheet of heavy duty foil to make a griddle-like surface. Use the nonstick spray to lightly coat the grill or foil as it heats up. Use butter spray or melted butter to lightly coat each slice of pound cake. Grill until edges are browned and the slice is heated evenly. If desired, sprinkle the slices lightly with brown sugar before removing from the grill. Place a slice on a plate, top with ice cream, sliced strawberries, drizzle with strawberry syrup and top with almonds.

GLORIOUS GRILLING!

APPLE BUTTER PORK CHOPS WITH COLA PECAN GLAZE

The flavors in this dish just seem to be meant for each other.

For the chops:

- 4 one-inch thick pork chops, bone-in or boneless
- 1 1/2 cups apple butter
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper

Glaze:

- 2 tablespoons minced onion
- 1/2-1 tablespoon minced garlic
- Butter
- 1 can of Coke (not diet)
- Handful of finely chopped apples
- 1/4 cup finely chopped celery
- Parsley flakes
- Salt and pepper dashes
- Crushed pecans

Place chops in a shallow glass dish. Combine remaining ingredients and mix well. Pour marinade mixture over chops. Cover tightly and refrigerate for several hours, overnight if possible. Remove pork chops from marinade. Place on grill approximately

six inches above medium-hot coals. Grill, turning and basting with marinade.

For the glaze: In a small skillet, sauté the onion and garlic in the butter until tender. Carefully add in the remaining ingredients and allow the Coke to reduce to half. Once the mix starts to bubble it will reduce quickly, so be ready to remove it from the heat. If the mix burns the sugar, the Coke will become bitter and you will need to start over. Drizzle glaze over chops and serve immediately.

ZESTY CHEATER WINGS

This recipe is so easy that it's like cheating.

- 12-24 mini chicken wings and drums
- Zesty Italian dressing
- Barbecue sauce
- Minced green pepper
- Minced onion
- Dried parsley flakes
- Hot Sauce

Marinate the chicken in equal parts of Italian dressing and barbecue sauce, toss in some hot sauce and spoon in a few tablespoons of minced peppers, onions and some dried parsley flakes. Cover, chill for a couple of hours and grill until juices run clear.

WHISKEY LONDON BROIL

- 1 (2- to 3-pound) London broil or flank steak
- 1/2 cup ketchup
- 1/2 cup whiskey
- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1/4 cup hot sauce
- 1/2 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1/2 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Combine all of the marinade ingredients. In a resealable bag, combine the meat and marinade. Chill in refrigerator for at least five hours (overnight or all day is better). When ready, heat up the grill and wipe a bit of oil on the grates or use nonstick spray. Remove the beef from the marinade and cook directly over the heat, turning as needed until outside is evenly cooked. I hate to put a time on this because it really depends on the thickness of your cut. You are probably looking at four to eight minutes per side, possibly more. Cook to your desired doneness. Allow to rest for a few minutes on a plate covered with foil. Slice thin and serve hot. 🍴

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