

West Carolina Tel

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

CONNECTED

COZY CUSTOMERS

Stoll Fireplace stands
on founder's values

ONE YEAR ALREADY

Security service rolls out new
products on its birthday

STOP DEVICE DRAMA

Connect your new Wi-Fi
gadgets the easy way



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

You are part of a nationwide rural family

In my role at NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, I work with your telecommunications provider and nearly 900 others like it all across the country. Every day I am reminded of their dedication to building connections that support strong communities. When basic telephone service was what everyone needed, they were there. As broadband has become a vitally important resource for economic development, education, health care and more, they have focused their energies on building the best networks available.

And they do not stand alone. These rural providers understand that to serve you best they must stay on top of what is taking place in Congress and at the Federal Communications Commission. To do that, they stand together on issues of common concern, speaking with one voice to make sure our nation's leaders understand the needs of rural America.

This publication is another great example of that spirit of collaboration. By working together, telcos across several states are sharing important information about their companies and keeping you updated on news that impacts rural America.

A few weeks ago I had the honor of being invited to the White House, along with several leaders of rural telecommunications companies. We met with the White House Rural Council to talk about what rural telcos just like yours are doing to support community development. It was



Shirley Bloomfield (right) commenting at the White House Rural Council meeting. Listening to her presentation is Doug McKalip, senior advisor for rural affairs in the White House Domestic Policy Council.

another great example of us all working together to shine a spotlight on the good work being done by your provider and hundreds of others like it.

From success stories on health care, education and public safety to efficient energy management, rural telcos have shown time and time again that they are not only the brains behind the networks they deploy, but also proven solution providers with a track record for adapting to and embracing change, and most importantly, responding to the needs of their communities.

Because of that cooperation, you as a customer or member of your local telco are part of an even bigger family that stretches across every region of this country. In the months ahead, I look forward to sharing stories with you about what these telcos are doing at the national level to ensure rural America stays connected. 📞



WHAT TO DO when calls don't come through

Rural call completion continues to be a challenge, as people experience failed connections and poor call quality when making long-distance or wireless calls to rural landlines. While the FCC and Congress have taken steps toward a solution, there is still something you can do to help.

If someone has trouble completing a call to you from a long-distance or wireless telephone service provider:

- 1 Encourage them to report the issue to their provider. They will need the date and time the call was attempted, plus the calling and called telephone numbers.
- 2 Encourage them to report the problem to the FCC by calling 888-225-5322 or visiting consumercomplaints.fcc.gov. They will need the date and time the call was attempted, the calling and called telephone numbers and the name of their long-distance or wireless telephone service provider.
- 3 Call your local phone company and provide the same information so they may work with the long distance or wireless provider to isolate the problem.

POPULARITY OF ONLINE VIDEO IS GROWING

Online video is bringing consumers greater entertainment choices, making broadband even more important. A recent study by networking company Ciena predicts that average household bandwidth requirements will increase by 31 percent annually over the next five years, as viewers connect their smart TVs and devices (Roku, Apple TV, Chromecast, etc.) to watch Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO Go, Hulu and more.

Do you enjoy online video? Share your story at www.HowDoYouBroadband.com

What is your favorite part of this magazine?

If you enjoy the stories, recipes and information we share in each issue of this magazine, please spend just five minutes taking our brief survey. Your answers will help us understand what parts of the magazine you most enjoy, and how you are using the information in these pages.

To say “thank you” for sharing your thoughts with us, each respondent will be entered into a drawing for one of several \$25 Amazon gift cards. One lucky winner will receive the grand prize: a Kindle Fire HD!

▶ To take the brief survey on your computer, enter this address into your Web browser: www.surveymonkey.com/r/telcomagazine

▶ To take the survey on your smartphone, scan this code with any QR code reader app:



Secure Your Future Today:

Do the paperwork and planning now to protect your small business from cyber threats long term

By MICHAEL RAMAGE

It is easy to be consumed with the immediate needs and concerns of cyber security. These are important, but a small business should also plan ahead to secure its future by creating cyber security policies, plans and strategies that will reduce the risks posed by the bad guys of cyberspace.

In the first two parts of this series, we looked at the cyber security threats facing small businesses and practical steps to protect against those threats. In this final article, we'll look at longer-term strategies for small businesses to address their security needs well into the future.

• **Policy Development** – Security policy development is often overlooked but is very important to organizations. This will likely include a number of separate policies that provide the guiding strategy for all security activities within the company. Suggested policies include general Internet usage, computer security, physical

security and even social media usage. Templates for these policies and others are available from the Sans Institute at www.sans.org/security-resources/policies.

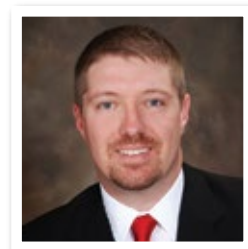
• **Asset Identification** – Any security planning process should include asset identification. Consider what you have that needs to be protected (customer information, personally identifiable information, banking information, corporate secrets, etc.). Also, consider what would impact your business the most (Internet outage, building collapse, server failure, etc.). Asking these questions will help you realize your true assets.

• **Security Assessment** – Once a small business takes the initial steps to secure its network, it should consider undergoing an assessment to see where vulnerabilities and challenges still exist. The primary goal of a security assessment is to help you learn where the challenges lie in securing your business. Many assessments

are conducted by external partners to ensure a thorough and unbiased review.

There are many free resources available online to help with your company's cyber security planning efforts. Two are the FCC Cyber for Small Biz (www.fcc.gov/cyberforsmallbiz) and the SANS Institute (www.sans.org). Consideration of federal requirements should also be included throughout the entire planning process.

Cyber security is the responsibility of everyone in your small business. Cyber security should not be an afterthought. Security matters! ☑



Michael Ramage is the Associate Director of the Center for Telecommunications Systems Management at Murray State University.

Helping you build the life you want

Why do you live in rural America? Maybe it's family connections. Maybe it's the close sense of community and the importance of tradition. Maybe it's because you enjoy a quality of life in this area that would be difficult to find in a metro region.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

Whatever your reasons, the people who work at West Carolina Tel understand that we play an important role in helping you build the life you want here. As your local telecommunications provider, we know you depend on us to supply the technology you need to stay connected. And that is becoming more important as our world grows increasingly dependent on broadband connections and Internet-based solutions.

Some might think that living in a rural area means sacrificing access to technology. We are proud that, as a member of West Carolina Tel, you do not have to sacrifice at all. In fact, because of our focus on building a state-of-the-art network, you have access to Internet speeds higher than those available to some people living in larger cities.

Of course, we still have many challenges. While just over 19 percent of the U.S. population lives in a rural region, almost half of Americans who are not connected to the Internet are rural. That means there are still millions of rural Americans who are missing opportunities made possible by a broadband connection. From education and jobs to health care and family connections, they have yet to discover what so many of their neighbors have already learned — that a broadband connection can help them build a better life.

That is one of our biggest challenges as your technology leader. Building a broadband network is only the first step; we must also help you understand how to use it. The magazine you are reading now plays an important role in those efforts. We choose the stories for this magazine very carefully. We include subjects that appeal to a broad range of readers with a variety of interests. We can almost guarantee that during the course of a year you will be drawn to something in these pages, no matter what your interests may be. And whether it's a profile on a local person with a unique hobby or business, a story on how someone is using technology, or a feature on a road trip, these have the mission of helping you learn to put our services to practical use in your life.

Speaking of the magazine, please look again at the top of Page 3 and spend just a few minutes taking our reader survey. Your answers will help us understand what you love best and find most helpful about your magazine.

I also want to call your attention to the Rural Connections article on Page 2. Shirley Bloomfield leads our national trade group, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, and does an incredible job keeping us connected on issues in Washington, D.C., that impact us right here in South Carolina. It is more important than ever that independent telecommunications companies work together on matters that impact us all; we are proud to welcome Shirley as a contributor to our magazine as she shares with you some of the work we are all doing together.

When you think about family and community, living in rural America really is all about being connected. At West Carolina Tel we are proud to provide the technology that makes many of those connections possible. [☎](#)

West Carolina Tel

CONNECTED

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WestCarolinaTel
YOUR TECHNOLOGY COOPERATIVE

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

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On the Cover:



Stoll Fireplaces are often the centerpieces of a living room. See story Page 12.

New faces and new places

In 2014, West Carolina Tel added a couple of employees and rearranged the duties of a few other employees as part of the cooperative's commitment to run smoothly and efficiently.



LEFT: (Back row from left) Chuck Nash is now the business solutions manager. Lance Tade has been hired as West Carolina's new chief financial officer. Previously, Tade worked for Tularosa Basin Telephone Company in New Mexico. Jeff Robinson will serve as business development manager. Shannon Sears will now serve as director of commercial operations. (Front row from left) Marie Titus is now the executive administrative assistant and a human resources generalist. Judy Cannon is now the accounting supervisor.

RIGHT: West Carolina's newest employee is Virginia Harmon, who has been hired as a marketing representative. Harmon, born and raised in Taylors, South Carolina, is a recent graduate of Erskine College. "I'm thankful for the opportunity to work at such a well-respected company," the former intern says. "I learned through my internship this summer that this is a great place to work, and I'm looking forward to being here for years to come."

INNOVATION AWARD

West Carolina is known around the telco industry for being a forward-thinking company.

That reputation was underscored again recently when the cooperative was honored with a Calix Innovation Award.

Calix, a broadband software and systems provider, presented the award to West Carolina and six other communications companies at its annual User Group Conference on Nov. 4.

The seven winners were chosen from more than 1,200 companies using Calix products. The awards are intended to highlight companies that are "best-in-class examples of leveraging the Calix



... software applications to deliver new services, inspire their local communities, and bring about overall business transformation," according to a company press release.

West Carolina received the award for its use of data to help customers upgrade to faster broadband connections on the cooperative's fiber network.



Tilley retires after 20 years

When Gary Tilley started with West Carolina almost 21 years ago as commercial manager, his business customers had only two choices.

"The biggest decisions they had to make was whether they wanted a black phone or beige phone," he jokes.

Tilley has retired from West Carolina, effective in December and though he won't be working full time any more, he plans to stay busy.

He plans to keep his seat on the board of the Greater Abbeville Chamber of Commerce, volunteer with the Red Cross and enjoy his new grand-baby Piper Lynn, who was born last summer.

"Even while I was still working, I was working on spoiling her," he says.

While he's looking forward to retirement, he says he will miss his coworkers. Whenever he hired someone — and he hired a large number of employees still on staff — he made a point to say "Welcome to the West Carolina family" when they came aboard.

"I'm going to miss the family," he says. "I'm going to miss the work, too, because it's been enjoyable. I would have left a long time ago if it wasn't fun."

Take a sweet-sounding Southern road trip from the blues to rock 'n' roll

368 MILES OF MUSIC

BY ROBERT THATCHER

Paul Simon hit the road in the early 1980s seeking inspiration. His drive from Louisiana to Memphis became the song “Graceland.”

This road trip may not give you a song, but it will surely inspire anyone who loves music. Hop in for a drive to four musical meccas.

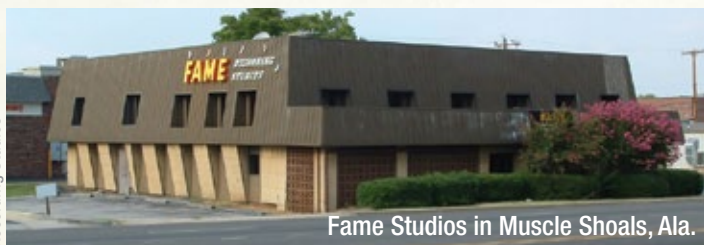


Photo courtesy of Fame Recording Studios

“Now Muscle Shoals has got the Swampers” Muscle Shoals, AL

This river town is all about musical beginnings. So start at the W.C. Handy Home and Museum, the log-cabin birthplace of the “Father of the Blues” in Florence. Stand by the piano where he wrote “St. Louis Blues” — and the blues were born.

Muscle Shoals is also the humble birthplace of another sound that shaped modern music. Think “Brown Sugar,” “When a Man Loves a Woman” and “Free Bird.” It’s hard to believe these global standards and more were recorded in two small buildings here — Fame and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio.

Tour dim rooms where “the Swampers” mixed gritty R&B and country soul to create the “Muscle Shoals Sound.” Then record your own demo at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in nearby Tuscumbia.

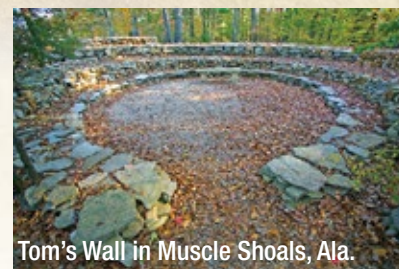


Photo courtesy of Florence/Lauderdale Tourism

All this music will leave you with a question. Why Muscle Shoals? Locals say the answer is at our last stop, Tom’s Wall, near the Natchez Trace Parkway.

Resident Tom Hendrix built this mile-long monument to his great-great-grandmother, a Yuchi tribe member. Forcibly removed during the Trail of Tears, she’s the only person to make the long walk back to Muscle Shoals. What motivated her?

She didn’t hear the river singing to her in Oklahoma. But she heard it here.

On the Menu: Dine with a view at Florence’s 360 Grille, Alabama’s only revolving restaurant, or under a rock at the Rattlesnake Saloon in Tuscumbia. Also, slurp down “The Harvey” milkshake at the Palace Ice Cream Shop in Tuscumbia.

“Long-distance information give me Memphis, Tennessee”

Memphis, TN – 151 miles via Highway 72 West

W.C. Handy’s musical road led to Memphis. So follow him to the street he made famous for the blues.

Whether you want authentic soul food or live music, Beale



TECH SAVVY TRAVELER

Despite what Johnny Cash would have you believe, nobody has been everywhere, man. But thanks to websites and apps like Yelp and TripAdvisor, today’s travelers can learn from the experiences of people who have been there and done that. Yelp.com offers reviews on restaurants while tripadvisor.com ranks attractions, hotels, restaurants and more.

Street has it all. And for a full dose of blues, visit May 1-3 during the Beale Street Music Festival.

Rivers and railroads made Memphis a melting pot of musical styles. Blues mixed with country to form rockabilly. And it all combined with a rhythmic force named Elvis Presley to create rock 'n' roll.

Start where he started — Sun Studio. In 1953, an 18-year-old Elvis walked into this corner building with a cheap guitar and a dream. Stand where Sam Phillips helped make the dream come true for Elvis and other stars including Muddy Waters, Roy Orbison and Johnny Cash.

Then drive to where the dream ended. Tour Graceland's colonial mansion, visit the grave, view the airplanes — and pay tribute to a talent that left our world too soon.

If you arrive between Jan. 7-10, help Memphis blow out the candles for Elvis' 80th birthday celebration. And sing "Happy, Happy Birthday Baby!"

On the Menu: Rendezvous Ribs (If there's a wait, try TOPS, Central BBQ or Corky's.)

"I'm goin' to Jackson, look out Jackson town"

Jackson, TN — 88 miles on I-40 East

On the way to Nashville, stop by the International Rock-a-Billy Hall of Fame in Jackson.

The brainchild of Henry Harrison, this museum is aptly located in Carl Perkins' hometown, between Memphis (home of rock 'n' roll and blues) and Nashville (home of country and hillbilly music).

But Harrison is quick to point out that this tour is not about glittery memorabilia. It's about stories of the stars as ordinary people. These stories come firsthand. Harrison claims to be a childhood friend of Johnny Cash, classmate of Elvis and the man who once repossessed Jerry Lee Lewis' car.



Sun Studio in Memphis, Tenn.



Rock-A-Billy Hall of Fame in Jackson, Tenn.

"We don't tell you how many gold records Elvis had," Harrison says. "Everybody can look that up. But we do have a picture of Elvis playing touch football beside Humes High School when he was in the 11th grade, wearing Converse tennis shoes and a pullover top. And he was just one of us."



The Bluebird Cafe in Nashville, Tenn.

Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention and Visitors Corporation

"There's thirteen hundred and fifty-two guitar pickers in Nashville"

Nashville, TN — 129 miles on I-40 East

It's fitting to end our musical drive at the dream destination for would-be stars.

But don't be fooled by this city's honky-tonk past. Bob Dylan's Nashville Skyline is now filled with skyscrapers. And the "Country Music Capital" is now a center for all kinds of music — bluegrass, blues, Americana, jazz, you name it.

Start with a stroll down Music Row and Broadway, the heart of Nashville's entertainment industry. Take in the record labels, browse Ernest Tubb's Record Shop and pause by publishing houses. Then tour historic RCA Studio B to sample the famous "Nashville Sound" from the '60s.

You'll also want to tour the historic Ryman Auditorium downtown. This former tabernacle was home of the Grand Ole Opry from 1943 to 1974, and it still hosts the "world's longest-running radio show" Nov. 1 to Feb. 4. Otherwise, head to the

Grand Ole Opry House east of downtown.

Many come to Nashville with a guitar and a dream. So before you leave, catch a rising star at a "writer's night" — one of Nashville's small acoustic sets for songwriters to try out new material. Try the Listening Room Cafe or the Bluebird Cafe.

On the menu: Hattie B's Hot Chicken is a mouth-burning must. But you'll need a hearty breakfast to fuel your drive home. Try the Pancake Pantry, a Nashville tradition since 1961, or the Loveless Cafe. You never know when you might see a star enjoying a good flapjack, too. 🍳



The Ryman in Nashville, Tenn.

Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention and Visitors Corporation

Getting completely connected to Wi-Fi

Santa may have delivered those long-awaited tech gifts, like a tablet, gaming system or a new computer. But as Mr. Claus grabbed the cookies and jumped in his sleigh, he left you all alone to set up that wireless network. You could follow a few simple tips to build your own Wi-Fi network or let West Carolina Tel manage that network for you to get the most out of your new gadgets.

WHY WI-FI?

Wireless networks have always been convenient for laptop users, but now more and more products are designed to access the Internet through Wi-Fi. These include televisions, printers, tablets, smartphones and gaming systems. Upon establishing a home network, you can enjoy the full functionality of all your Wi-Fi enabled devices.

BUILDING YOUR NETWORK

West Carolina understands that many of its customers have multiple wireless Internet devices in their home. Most newer modems that customers could purchase cost between \$60 and \$100 and have Wi-Fi routers built in, but require some familiarity to install. That's why the cooperative has developed a service called "DeviceLink" to ensure that its customers can have a worry-free wireless Internet experience on any device in their home.



The annual residential cost of the service is equal to buying the device yourself, but without the hassle of setting up and maintaining the network. The DeviceLink service brings its installers to your doorstep to fully install a password-protected system. "We maintain the routers, and if anything were ever to happen, we will replace it," says West Carolina Tel installer Brian Mitchell.

CONNECT YOUR DEVICES

The West Carolina air routers "have a strong signal, often capable of reaching outside of your home," Mitchell says. Mitchell or another installer will help secure the DeviceLink network by password-protecting the system, and he's yet to meet a customer with too many devices for the network to handle.

During the past year, hundreds of customers have already signed up for DeviceLink, with newly connected customers frequently adding it from the beginning. It typically takes Mitchell, and other techs, about 30 minutes to connect the system, which includes a customer demonstration on how to connect any future devices. ☎



DeviceLink Service:

Residential: \$4.95 per month

Business: \$9.95 per month

- ▶ A worry-free wireless network experience
- ▶ Includes a high-end wireless router
- ▶ Free router installation
- ▶ Multi-device setup
- ▶ Password-protection of your wireless network
- ▶ Internet Tech Support (M – F, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. call 864-446-3111. After hours, call 864-446-4638)

Terms:

- One-year service agreement required. \$25 early termination fee.
- A \$40 charge will apply if the router is not returned upon disconnection of the DeviceLink service.
- DeviceLink is designed to function in the customer's home/workplace and will not necessarily reach detached structures outside of the primary building.

Security service marks anniversary with new products

West Carolina's Secure Connect service turned one year old in November and celebrated by rolling out several new products and enhancing existing products.

The products include security camera feeds that customers can view from their smartphone, home automation controls allowing them to lock doors or turn on lights from miles away and a mobile app to control their thermostat before they ever get home.

"West Carolina members know West Carolina is an innovator when it comes to new product offerings," says Kristen Turner, security and home automation specialist. "Our security service has been so well received in its first year that we decided to take it to the next level with new, cutting-edge technology."

Turner was one of the first to get one of the cameras at her house. She aimed it out toward her driveway through a window, and has it set to record for 10 seconds and send her a text message anytime it detects a car pulling in.

"I know any time anybody drives up," she says.

Turner recently talked to a customer



West Carolina's Kristen Turner uses a security panel.

whose husband had passed away and didn't like coming home to a dark house on these shortened winter days. With a Smart Home Solutions light kit, she's now able to either turn the lights on before she heads home or schedule the lights to come on or dim at certain times each day.

"When she comes home, that light is going to be on for her," Turner says.

The systems are available for both homes and businesses. ☒

For more information call 864-446-2111.



Automatic locks is one of the new features West Carolina is adding.

Upgrades mean a few changes for DVR users

West Carolina is making some upgrades to DE Plus that will give the cooperative more room to expand and improve DE Plus service in the near future. It will, however, mean a small change that DVR customers need to be aware of.

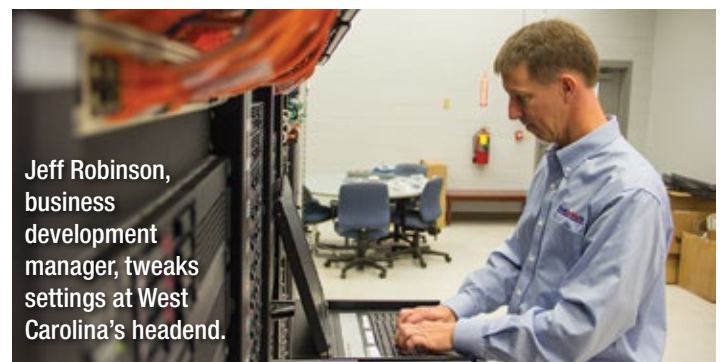
On a technical level, the cooperative's TV service will be going to a shared datacenter with two other South Carolina telcos so all three companies can offer more reliable service.

Practically speaking, the upgrades will allow for cutting-edge, customizable options in the future.

"It will definitely afford us opportunities that we wouldn't have otherwise," says Jeff Robinson, West Carolina's business development manager.

The changes will be made street by street throughout the service area over the first few months of the year.

However, because of the switch in servers, any members with



Jeff Robinson, business development manager, tweaks settings at West Carolina's headend.

saved DVR content will lose those recordings in the changeover. West Carolina apologizes for the inconvenience, but the issue is unavoidable. If you have DVR content that you would like to save, you will need to find a way to record it to a digital file, DVD or VHS tape before the changeover. Due to copyright laws, some recordings may be restricted from being transferred. Instructions for this transfer are available at www.wctel.net. ☒

For specific dates or help with saving any irreplaceable content, please call the West Carolina office at 864-446-2111.

HEALTH & FITNESS

What do readers find at your blog?

Shelley Bowman: Ramblings of someone who has managed not only to lose a large amount of weight — 100 pounds — but who is also keeping it off. This is a bigger victory to me than the initial weight loss. After all, hasn't just about everyone lost weight at one point, only to regain it?

What are some tips for those interested in losing weight and becoming fit?

SB: Stop eating fast food. Stop getting your meals handed out a drive-thru window. Track your food on a daily basis. I used MyFitnessPal.com. Put it all in there: the good, the bad and the ugly. Go for a 15-minute walk to start. Move daily. All the things you hear, like parking farther away and taking the stairs, add up.



How can someone new to running get started?

SB: Get fitted at a running store for a good pair of shoes. The right shoes can make or break you. Then go for a short walk, and at the end, try a slow run for 30 seconds. Gradually transition to running a little more each time; don't go crazy and try to run a mile if you've never run before because that's a good way to get shin splints; then you'll end up hurting and not wanting to run. Also, finding a friend to run with



makes a big difference for me. Knowing that you're going to meet someone to run helps to make sure you actually do it.

How do you stay motivated?

SB: I feel so much better now that I'm not carrying 100 extra pounds. I have a different lifestyle, too. I'm much more active, and I like being able to run or walk without feeling like I'm going to die. Continuing to eat right most of the time keeps me in check; I honestly don't like how I feel when I overindulge.

What are some of your favorite healthy foods?

SB: You should have a few go-to meals where you can eat healthy without having to think about what you are preparing. For me, it's nonfat Greek yogurt (I love Fage), either fresh berries or Craisins, and some homemade granola. If I'm out of my granola, I like the Kind brand. For dinner, I like to make black bean tacos using corn tortillas, fresh pico de gallo and a little Parmesan cheese. Snacks range from watermelon or pineapple in the summer, to raw almonds and a little bit of dried cherries. And sometimes an apple and a tablespoon of peanut butter. I also drink a lot of water daily and try to have a glass right before I snack — it makes me fuller so I don't overdo it.

OTHER HEALTH AND FITNESS BLOGS YOU MIGHT LIKE:

- ▶ **www.DashingDish.com**
Besides fitness ideas, this blog is "a place to find healthy alternatives to the food you crave."
- ▶ **www.ComeBackMomma.com**
This fitness coach shares her "continued journey to be the best woman, wife and mother that I can be."

Why did you become a blogger, and how has blogging changed your life?

SB: I became a blogger when I started my last diet. I wanted to remember how hard I worked to get the weight off, so this time I would actually keep it off. I had no idea how much blogging would connect me with other like-minded people who were doing the same thing. The most important thing was finding a couple of bloggers who had lost over 100 pounds and were keeping the weight off. I was very overwhelmed in the beginning, but finding others who had succeeded gave me hope. And I hope I'm able to give that to the new person who is just starting their journey to weight loss and fitness. ☺

Whatever your interest, there is likely an online community of people who share that interest with you. Our "Featured Blogger" series introduces you to people who write online websites about a variety of topics. In the March/April issue, we'll focus on home/DIY projects.

Staying connected to those NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

BY MATT LEDGER



It's that time of year again — New Year's resolutions. Some face them with dread, while others resolve to try a bit harder than last year.

Statistically, most resolutions revolve around cutting out the sweets, reinstating gym memberships or trying out another aspect of fitness, but there are many other ways to enhance our lives. Maybe less Facebook and more face time with those friends? You might even include them in your next selfie. It's easy to let technology distract you, but it can also be used as an incredible tool for time management, goal setting, fiscal planning and of course tracking exercise.



ORGANIZATION — TRELLO

Don't you wish you could have that kitchen dry erase board in your pocket to remind you of that errand you just forgot or that key ingredient from the recipe? Sure, you could just write another Post-it note, but your smartphone can allow you to edit, sync, upload photos and even assign tasks to other family members. Trello is a cloud-based app that you can use to organize the tasks of a big project and/or the daily routine. Users create color-coded boards, with lists of prioritized tasks that are easily dragged to the completed column to track your weekly progress. Trello is used by tech clients at Google, PayPal and Kickstarter.



BUDGET AND FINANCE — MINT.COM

Just about everyone could do a little better managing their money in 2015. To track those finances and budget your spending, Mint.com offers free tracking software to electronically monitor investments, purchases and income. Mint, from the makers of TurboTax, Quicken and QuickBooks, has encrypted security equal to your bank. Just like those major credit cards, the system will alert you of unusual account purchases, spending trends and if you exceed your budgets.



FITNESS — MOBILE APPS

Speaking of investments, improving your overall health is an investment in your future. Being healthy helps parents stay active with their kids and pays many dividends later on during retirement. To get started, try the 7-minute workout app by Johnson and Johnson, which coaches you through dozens of simple home exercises. Once that becomes routine, you can escape to the nearest park and use the RunKeeper or MapMyFitness apps to track how many miles you run or bike.



VOLUNTEERISM — CREATETHEGOOD.ORG & HANDSONNETWORK.ORG

While the first three areas focus on yourself, many people make resolutions to help in their communities to make the spirit of the season last well beyond New Year's Day. The websites createthegood.org and handsonnetwork.org allow people to search for local volunteer programs. Some current projects are seeking volunteers for everything from youth tutors to repairs at homeless shelters to mentors to helping the elderly. Having your own budget or fitness in order is great, but nothing gives you that feeling of satisfaction quite like helping others. ☑



Stoll Fireplace can make custom orders to fit almost any style of home.

Hearth at Home

Local fireplace manufacturer continues to grow

BY ANDY JOHNS

As thousands of families across the country snuggle in for a cozy winter evening in front of the fire, they won't be thinking about Bill Stoll or any of his family or employees.

But the Stolls' handiwork is right there in front of them.

Stoll Fireplace in Abbeville County has become an industry leader in fireplaces, distributing its product across the country — from local homes, all the way to the office of Vice President Joe Biden.

And while things are busy year-round, peak demand is right now during the winter.

"The first little cool breeze, people are calling us," says Gary Yoder, national sales manager at Stoll.

Stoll Fireplace was founded by its namesake William F. Stoll Sr. in 1969. When he moved to Abbeville County from Virginia, Stoll found that his new home's fireplace was too large for any of the standard fireplace screens he could find. He decided to try his hand at making a screen for himself. He was pleased, but surprised when neighbors or friends who had seen the screen asked him to make one for them as well.



Gary Yoder says Stoll made good decisions that kept it strong through the recession.

One thing led to another, and soon Stoll had a growing fireplace business in which he worked hard to instill his personal Christian values. The company value statement, which came from Stoll, says, "Honesty is not a question, and to correct mistakes is an opportunity to show integrity."

Stoll passed away in November 2008 at 94 years old, but his sons Dennis, Marvin and Robert now own the business, which has continued to grow steadily over the years.

Gary, Darris, Doug, Franklin and Jonathan are the founder's grandsons who work at the family business.



◀ Bryan Sommers, left, and brother Aaron Sommers weld fireplace frames together in the shop.

▶ Stoll is one of the few fireplace companies still making products in the United States.



FIRED UP

At Stoll, customers have plenty of options in deciding on their fireplace. Currently, clean and modern designs are in style, but Yoder says most customers look for a design that fits the home. A rustic cabin in the woods needs a different-looking fireplace than a chic urban condo.

The company's website, stollfireplace.com, offers a menu of customizable choices and designs. Customers can pick the options they like and then order the products through Stoll's network of dealers.

While new homes make up a big portion of their business, more than half of the Stoll units are installed in existing construction where there are sometimes odd sizes. Stoll's inserts, facades and other heating products provide not only a "dress up" of an existing fireplace, but can also help seal a drafty chimney. Even new homes can lose a staggering amount of heating or cooling energy through a chimney, Yoder says.

Once a fireplace is designed, it goes through several steps before it's ready to become the centerpiece of the customer's living room. First, welders assemble the steel frame and support structure. At the same time, a computer-operated cutting tool is cutting out details onto the front face of the fireplace. From there, everything is powder coated to reach the desired finish. After powder coating, all of the components of the fireplace, including doors, glass, hinges and hardware, are assembled to test for the proper fit. Once they've been checked, they are then partially disassembled and prepared for shipping.

Every order is tracked at each step of the build from the design phase to its shipment and delivery to the dealer.

Stoll promotes its products online, but sells exclusively through its 900 authorized dealers, since much of the work is custom.

To do that, they've got an efficient system of sending design files to and from customers and dealers running across West Carolina Tel's fiber network.

"The days of faxing are behind us," Yoder says.

But while the dealer network is invaluable to the company, the Web has provided a lot of exposure for the company and a lot of opportunities to reach new customers.

"The Internet has opened the world up for people finding us," he says. ☺

Yoder says they were blessed through the recession over the last few years in that it seemed like different regions of the country went through the slowdown at different times. Downturns in one market were offset by upticks in others. They were also helped by many people deciding to renovate their homes in a slumping housing market, rather than move.

"We've been very blessed," Yoder says.

But that doesn't mean Stoll hasn't adapted to changing market demands. Stoll has launched "High Valley by Stoll" to sell wood stoves and "Carolina Premier" to sell hearth pads and steel mantles.

In the long term, the recession may have actually helped the company by driving competitors to move operations to other countries where labor is cheaper.

"When things got tough, so many in the industry went overseas," Yoder says. "Our local employees are a powerful part of who we are."

For the increasing number of consumers looking for American-made products, Stoll is one of the few options when it comes to fireplaces and accessories.

Additionally, by moving overseas, the competitors are going with more mass-produced models because shipping would be prohibitively expensive on single orders. That leaves an opportunity for Stoll to take on some of the demand for custom work.

"Most producers would say 'No, we can't do that,'" Yoder says. "Our motto is 'Yes we can.'"

In all, 85 percent of the products are made to order.

GAME TIME!

There are more tricks to cooking wild game than pulling a rabbit from a hat, and it takes a seasoned cook and avid hunter, such as Mike Page of New Hope, Alabama, to get it right.

Page, pitmaster of Bootlegg BBQ located in New Hope, and a longtime competitor on the wild game cook-off circuit, was the 2013 grand champion of the Alabama Wildlife Federation Wild Game Cook-Off held in Tuscumbia, Alabama. His dish, Elk Tex-Mex, was the best overall of 31 entries.

So it goes without saying ... he's wild about game.

"I was around 8 years old when my dad first started taking me hunting," he says. With that came an important lesson: "He taught me that if you kill an animal, you have to eat it."

So by the time he was a teenager, Page began cooking meat on his own. Early on, he learned the age-old, time-honored tricks of the trade: how to lessen the flavors of meats with heavy, gamey flavors; how to marinate tougher cuts; and which meats taste best grilled, smoked or fried. But the name of the game for most of Page's meats is low and slow: low heat and slow cooking.

"When I'm cooking wild game, most people will ask what it is," he says. "And they always like it when they try it, especially when I'm cooking more exotic meats, such as bear and gator. They really want to try that."

As for technique, Page readily admits that cooking wild game is a bit tougher than preparing farm-raised meats for the table.

"You have to pay attention to your dish," he says with a nod toward Mother Nature. "Wild game doesn't come in a package with instructions."

Most wild game meats require marinating, but what marinade is used depends on the type of meat. All wild game is different and has different textures, Page explains.



Mike Page demonstrates his grill skills with some mouth-watering gator roll-ups.



▲ **GATOR, ANYONE?** — Dinner is definitely never boring when Mike Page is in charge of the menu. The pitmaster of Bootlegg BBQ is also a wild game cook-off grand champion.

"You have to marinate the meat, but be careful not to overdo it," Page warns. "I like to taste more of the natural flavors of the meat, and I've found that others do, too." 🗨️



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.

MIKE PAGE'S SUGGESTIONS FOR MARINADES:

- ▶ Combine 3/4 cup apple juice, 1/3 cup oil, 1/4 cup cider vinegar, 2 tablespoons fresh sage and 1 teaspoon salt (good for bear, elk and venison).
- ▶ Mix the amount of Worcestershire sauce you need with some Montreal steak seasoning (good for elk, venison and duck).
- ▶ Red wine with crushed garlic (good for venison and elk).
- ▶ Mix together 1 can beer, 2 cups Worcestershire, 1/4 cup soy sauce, 2 teaspoons lemon juice, garlic salt and black pepper (good for almost any game meat).

RECIPES ON THE WILD SIDE

GATOR ROLL-UPS

There are no exact amounts in this recipe. It all depends on how much gator tail you have.

Bacon
Alligator tail pieces cut 1 inch wide and 4 inches long
Cream cheese
Prosciutto ham
Pepper Jack cheese
Barbecue sauce

Prepare smoker. Place a slice of bacon on cutting board or other clean surface. Place one piece of gator tail on bacon, then top with cream cheese, a thin slice of ham and a slice of cheese. Roll up and secure bacon with toothpick. Repeat with remaining gator tail pieces. Place roll-ups in smoker and smoke for 45 minutes at 300°. Serve with barbecue sauce.



WILD TURKEY 101

Uncooked strips of wild turkey breast, cut into 6- by 1- by 4-inch strips
Equal number strips of brown-sugar bacon
Pepper Jack cheese slices
Prosciutto ham slices

Place turkey strip on a slice of bacon. Cut a square slice of pepper jack into 3 strips; place two on top of turkey. Add 1 slice of ham and top with third cheese strip. Roll into a pinwheel and secure with toothpick. Season to taste with your favorite seasonings. Put three roll-ups on a kabob skewer. Grill on top of foil at 320° for 45 minutes, turning every 15 minutes. Remove from foil and cook over exposed fire or coals for a few minutes to caramelize.

ELK QUESADILLAS

1 pound ground elk meat
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 medium onion, chopped
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon oregano
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon chili powder
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 green pepper, chopped
1 red pepper, chopped
1 can black beans
Tortillas
Cheddar cheese
Garnishes: cilantro, salsa, sour cream, avocado, sliced jalapeno peppers

Preheat oven to 400°. Heat olive oil in pan and add onions, garlic and meat. Once meat is broken up, add spices. Saute peppers in a separate pan with a couple tablespoons of olive oil. Add beans after peppers are fork-tender. Place meat, peppers, beans and cheese onto half a tortilla. Fold in half and secure with a toothpick. Repeat with remaining tortillas. Place on a wire rack in the oven or the grill and cook for 4 to 5 minutes or until golden brown. Remove and garnish with desired toppings.

VENISON CHILI

4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 red onion, chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
4 tablespoons dark brown sugar
3 cups red wine
4 tablespoons red wine vinegar
4 tablespoons tomato paste
4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1/2 teaspoon chili powder
Salt, to taste
4 tablespoons canola oil
10 slices cooked bacon, diced
2 pounds venison (deer) stew meat, ground or finely diced
2 cups kidney or black beans, cooked and drained

Melt the butter in a large pot over medium heat. Stir in the onion and garlic, and saute for 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the brown sugar and saute for 2 to 3 more minutes. Then stir in the red wine, vinegar, tomato paste, chicken stock, cumin, cayenne pepper, chili powder and salt. Simmer for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the mixture is reduced by about half. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Stir in the bacon and fry for 3 to 4 minutes, or until the bacon is browned. Move the bacon to one side of the skillet and add the venison to the empty side of the skillet. Season the meat with salt, to taste, and saute the meat for 15 minutes or until well browned. Stir in the beans and toss all together. Transfer this mixture to the simmering pot. Mix everything together thoroughly and let simmer for another half hour. Serve in bowls with garnishes, such as sliced green onions, shredded cheese and sour cream on the side. 🍴

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