

West Carolina Tel

JULY/AUGUST 2015

CONNECTED

BLESSINGS IN A BAG

Local program
feeds hungry kids

LEGISLATIVE LESSONS

McCormick student earns trip
to Washington, D.C., from FRS

4G LTE IS HERE

New speeds change the
game for WCTEL Wireless



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

FCC commits to working with rural carriers to extend broadband service

Broadband Internet service is impacting practically every part of our lives — from economic development and health care to education and entertainment. As NTCA member companies such as your local telecommunications provider work hard to deliver advanced broadband services, it is a significant development to see the Federal Communications Commission turn its attention to helping them meet the challenges of serving rural America.

In April, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler announced that the regulatory agency would move forward with efforts to modernize the part of the Universal Service Fund (USF) dealing with smaller rural carriers such as yours. The FCC has worked the past few years to transform the USF for the nation's big carriers into its Connect America Fund. Now it is our turn, and we couldn't be more delighted to finally see this progress.

This is great news for the people who live and work in rural America, where a reformed USF would have a tremendous impact. In his blog post dated April 17, Chairman Wheeler stated, "Senator (John) Thune (the South Dakotan who chairs the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee) rightly recognizes this fact, and my colleagues and I recently made a commitment to him to take action on this issue by the end of this

year. Modernization would ensure that this program reflects the realities of today's marketplace and supports the deployment of broadband networks throughout rural America."

As part of these efforts, the FCC is pulling together key players in the industry to ask for their input and to draw upon their expertise. You can be assured that, working together through NTCA, your local telecommunications provider will have a voice at the table as these critical discussions are being held.


What is at stake? As the FCC sets out to modernize the USF, it must craft an

approach that promotes broadband deployment, stabilizes a dependable stream of support, incentivizes investment and establishes equity surrounding a

relatively small, limited pool of support. The policy update must maintain the goal of ensuring that all rural Americans have access to supported broadband, with or without a landline phone.

This is important work so that, as Chairman Wheeler said, "all Americans, regardless of where they live, can be equal participants in the social and economic life of the 21st-century United States. We all share this goal, and modernizing this program is something everyone should be able to get behind." That's a sentiment that I believe we can all agree upon. ☎

— “ —
You can be assured that, working together through NTCA, your local telecommunications provider will have a voice at the table as these critical discussions are being held.
— ” —




**MOVE
OVER**



The next time you're driving along and see a utility vehicle on the roadside, don't think about our robust, reliable network. Don't think about the advanced services we offer across that network.

Instead, think about the men and women who sometimes put themselves in harm's way so you can enjoy the best in telecommunications. **Pay attention. Slow down.** And, if you can do it safely, **move over** a lane.



Thank you for helping our employees return home safe and whole to their families each day.

Decline in rural jobs and workforce underscores importance of broadband in community development

Throughout much of 2014, America's rural counties posted year-over-year increases in their number of jobs. According to reports from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, that trend is reversing.

Comparing January 2014 and January 2015 published numbers, rural areas posted job losses of more than 330,000.

This job loss coincides with a loss in workforce for rural regions as well. "Workforce includes both those who are employed and those looking for work," writes Bill Bishop, co-editor of the Daily Yonder, a multi-media source of rural news found at www.dailyyonder.com. "The workforce in all rural counties dropped by 557,000 people between January 2014 and January of this year."

As jobs and the population in general

shift from rural to metropolitan areas, the need to develop broadband infrastructure becomes all the more important. Telecommunications companies such as your local provider understand this and have been working hard the past few years to build the networks necessary to offer advanced broadband services to rural communities.

A recent report by Broadband Communities magazine found a strong correlation between the availability of broadband and population trends. The study showed that counties ranking in the top half of their state for access to high-speed broadband service experienced population growth 10 times that of the bottom half of counties from 2010 through 2013. "Good broadband is even more closely related to economic opportunity

than has been realized," writes Steve Ross, the magazine's editor-at-large.

Broadband's role in job creation and retention is well established. It now stands alongside reliable electricity and transportation systems as a must-have offering before a company will consider bringing jobs to a community. Writing for Site Selection magazine, Matt McQuade, director of North American Business Development for Columbus2020, says, "Advances in technology have elevated the importance of the Internet in economic development and site selection. The availability, quality and competitiveness of broadband service have become and will continue to be a key issue for many locations." ☞

► For more on the impact of broadband, visit www.broadbandbuildsbusiness.com.

New look, new technology for RFD-TV

Network "connects city and country" from redesigned studio on Nashville's Music Row

RFD-TV, "Rural America's Most Important Network," has launched new state-of-the-art studios in Nashville, Tennessee, along with a fresh new look, upgraded technology platforms and all-new live production capabilities.

"We are giving our viewers the experience they demand and deserve," says Patrick Gottsch, founder of RFD-TV. "Our new look stays true to rural America's roots, while the set design and technology shows how we will grow and thrive in the future, as we connect city and country."

"Viewers will see the difference immediately from our investment and our strategy," says Gary Kanofsky, chief content officer and executive vice president for news. "We've built a set our audience will relate to and loaded it with the best tools of the trade to create a gorgeous new on-air look." The technology and design upgrade provides the following for viewers:

- New state-of-the-art studio featuring a main anchor set, complemented by additional areas for interviews, weather, live music and virtual production
- New 3D news graphics presented on an industry-leading platform
- Expanded real-time commodities and market data



The upgrade also includes all-new live production capabilities that make it possible for RFD-TV to broadcast live from virtually anywhere. With streamlined production, RFD-TV can cover more stories, while at the same time expand content partner relationships. ☞

► To learn more about RFD-TV's changes and programming, visit www.rfdtv.com.

Making a 'smart' decision

When it comes to technology, we want everything to be “smart” these days. We have smartphones and smart watches, smart appliances in our kitchen and laundry room, smart thermostats and smart home gadgets with smart apps to control them.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

While all this smart technology is impressive and can make life more convenient while saving us money, the really smart part of it all is the broadband network that so many of these devices and apps rely on to bring us this functionality.

This trend toward devices that are only possible with broadband is not going away. And as broadband becomes the leading infrastructure driving innovation, it is impacting every facet of our lives.

That's why we decided long ago that improving broadband service in our rural area was the smart thing to do. With access to an advanced broadband network, boundless opportunities open up for our region:

Smarter businesses: Technology allows businesses to reach new customers and better serve the customers they already have. Smart businesses are using data and their broadband connections to learn more about customer habits, streamline supply chains and optimize their operations. Studies have shown that broadband-connected businesses bring in \$200,000 more in median annual revenues than non-connected businesses. Our network ensures that these tools are available to our local businesses so they can compete regionally, nationally or even globally.

Smarter education: Local teachers and school administrators are doing amazing things with tablets, online resources and other learning tools. These smart schools are opening up new avenues for students to learn. Experts say that nationally, students in schools with broadband connections reach higher levels of educational achievements and have higher-income careers.

Smarter health care: From bracelets that keep track of physical activity to telemedicine, smart technology and broadband are improving the way we monitor and care for our bodies. Physicians are able to confer with other medical experts, transmit X-Rays and lab results and communicate with patients over our network. Through smart electronic medical records, everyone from stroke patients to expectant mothers is receiving better care because hospitals and doctors are getting “smarter.”

Smarter homes: A host of new devices has allowed users to bring smart technology into their homes. Smart devices, some of which are available through WCTEL, allow you to monitor your home, change the thermostat, turn on lights and even lock or unlock doors remotely. While these smart devices offer plenty of convenience, they are also a smart safety decision to avoid coming home to a dark house or to receive an alert anytime someone pulls into your driveway.

We've made smart decisions that put our community in a position to take advantage of this smart revolution. As our devices, businesses, homes, schools and hospitals get smarter, rest assured that your cooperative is smart enough to have the infrastructure in place to handle these demands — plus whatever the future holds. ☎

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

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Produced for West Carolina Tel by:



On the Cover:



Mary Ann Nickles launched Bags of Blessings in 2009. The program sends bags of food home with children in need. See story Page 12.

Familiar faces changing places

WCTEL is excited to announce new positions for some staff members.

Alison Stone, who previously served as the wireless services specialist, has made a move to bookkeeping.

Amanda Blackwell, who had served as a switchboard operator, will now work as a customer service representative.

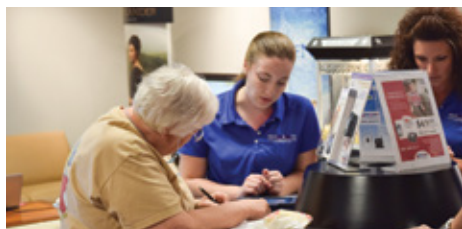
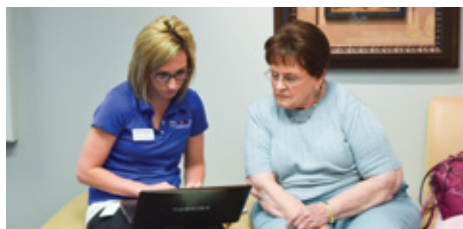
Brittany Ramey, who had been the plant services specialist for the outside plant, will now serve as an account services representative.



WCTEL Employees Brittany Ramey, Amanda Blackwell and Alison Stone.

These changes are designed to make the cooperative stronger. WCTEL's greatest assets are its employees.

TechLink: WCTEL offers technology classes



In April, West Carolina held its first TechLink drop-in class on Facebook Basics. Due to the success of this class, WCTEL staff will continue holding monthly classes at the cooperative offices. In these classes, customers learn about various topics and are able to ask any questions they may have.

UPCOMING TOPICS: July — Microsoft Word Basics • August — E-Books

TV subscription price increases

This year, television viewers have more quality programming options than ever before, and almost all of these channels are delivered in HD.

Unfortunately, some of these TV networks have decided to raise the fees they charge for providers like West Carolina to deliver these shows, news and sports to our viewers.

Greenville affiliates for FOX, CBS, ABC and NBC have added a total of \$8.04 in fees for every West Carolina TV customer. While we do everything we can to negotiate and keep the costs down for members, we are unable to absorb this fee increase. Beginning in August, West Carolina TV customers will see an increase on their bills.

RELAY FOR LIFE GOLF TOURNAMENT

On May 16, West Carolina sponsored the Relay for Life golf tournament. The tournament included 30 participants and raised approximately \$2,500. The winners were West Carolina Tel employee Tim Simpson, Walt Hilley and Darryl Waits.



WEST CAROLINA AND FRS SCHOLARSHIP WINNER



The West Carolina Tel scholarship is awarded to a member of the cooperative who exhibits a motivational drive toward accomplishing his or her future educational goals and is seen as a positive influence in his or her community. This year's scholarship winner is 2015 Abbeville High School graduate Alexandria Temple. Alex plans to attend Anderson University in the fall to pursue a degree in biology and a future career as a physical therapist. Alex also won the FRS scholarship for \$3,000. She will receive a total of \$11,000 toward her four years of education.

At Abbeville High School, Alex was student body president, captain of the varsity volleyball team, a FCA Leadership Team member and a Beta Club member. Alex is also active in the community, volunteering with Bags of Blessings, Angel Tree and Friendship Worship Center.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

West Carolina Annual Meeting

Aug. 17 at 3 p.m.

Abbeville Civic Center
404 North Main St.
Abbeville, SC 29620

HIKE, CLIMB, FLOAT, ZIP!

Take an action-packed road trip through Tennessee and Kentucky's grandest scenery

By ROBERT THATCHER

Our Southern landscape is shaped by the relentless activity of water on stone. You see it where water flows underground to create breathtaking caves. You see it where water flows above to carve glorious gorges. The wonders of water also invite relentless human activity — especially in the summer.

So let's hike, climb, float and zip on a road trip through some of the most beautiful and rugged country in the world.

MAMMOTH CAVE NATIONAL PARK

An alien world of secrets and stalactites

We start with a walk, or crawl if your knees are up to it, hundreds of feet below the sinks and springs of south-central Kentucky.

Entering the natural arch of Mammoth Cave, the name makes sense. It's the world's longest cave (400 miles and counting). Vaulted chambers like "Grand Avenue" are so big it's hard to believe that you're underground. You lose all sense of time and orientation in this delicate biosphere where it's always 54 degrees.

Take the two-hour historic tour or test your claustrophobia with the five-hour Wild Cave expedition. Young spelunkers can do the Kids Crawl, but no parents are allowed.



Mammoth Cave

Photo courtesy of National Park Service

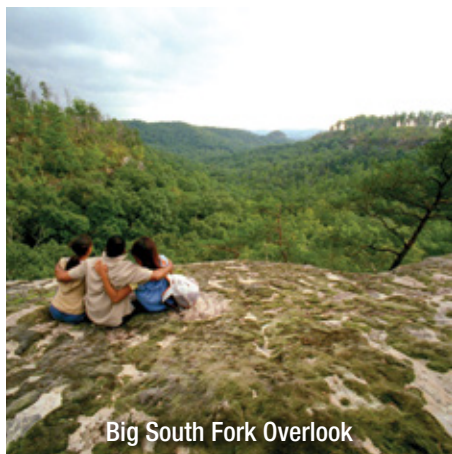
A big surprise for many is the mammoth fun above ground. Kentucky's largest national park offers canoe-camping along the gentle Green River, a horse-friendly camping location and trails, as well as the new Big Hollow Mountain Bike Trail.

EAT: Even if your eyes haven't adjusted to the light on the surface yet, follow your nose to the Travertine Restaurant's great fried chicken.



TECH-SAVVY TRAVELER:

Weekend warriors are cramming into their minivans as millions of Americans hit the roads this summer. Loading a few cellphone apps before the trip can be just as important as grabbing sunscreen or putting ice in the cooler. The **Oh, Ranger!** app by Ford will turn anyone into an explorer, searching by activity in state and federal parks. Parents of fearless thrill-seekers will want quick access to first-aid information, such as the **American Red Cross** app.



Big South Fork Overlook

Photo courtesy of National Park Service

BIG SOUTH FORK NATIONAL RIVER & RECREATION AREA

Grand gulfs, serious stargazing

Leaving cave country, we drive up 1,000 feet to the Cumberland Plateau — the rugged tableland creased with spectacular gorges and home of Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area, straddling the Kentucky-Tennessee border. At 125,000 acres, there's plenty to explore.

Visitors can travel 420 miles of trails by foot, bike or horseback. Those are also the only ways you can get to Charit Creek Lodge. Accessible by three trails under 5 miles, Charit Creek is one of the few hike-in lodges in the country. Your trek is rewarded by a family meal and lodging in a circa-1800 cabin. With no phone service, Charit Creek offers a rare chance to look up from handheld devices to see how bright the night sky can be. Make reservations in advance.

Big South Fork has other cool ways to enter the park without driving. Ride the Big South Fork Scenic Railway from Stearns, Kentucky, to a restored mining town and trailhead. Or hike in from historic Rugby, Tennessee, an experimental utopian colony built in the 1880s. The experiment failed, but Victorian buildings remain.

Mountain bikers should cruise the Grand Gap Loop — one reason this national recreation area is the only one ranked an “epic ride” by the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

EAT: Schedule a family-style dinner at Charit Creek Lodge.

CUMBERLAND FALLS STATE RESORT PARK

Mist and Moonbows

Head north on the plateau into the Daniel Boone National Forest to some of the most rugged terrain west of the Appalachians.

Cumberland Falls State Resort Park near Corbin, Kentucky, offers a great overlook of the 200-foot-wide “Niagara of the South.” But on a trip about action, why not feel the mist on your face? Sheltolee Trace Adventure Resort, 5 miles east, will float you from the base of the falls down the Cumberland River's Class III rapids.

Cumberland Falls has great campsites — from primitive to RV-ready. But after a day of getting soaked, a better option is sitting by the big stone fireplace in the historic DuPont Lodge. This sandstone lodge offers a cozy break beneath rustic hemlock beams.

If you visit when there's a full moon and clear sky, you may be lucky enough to see the falls' trademark Moonbow. The misty nocturnal arch extends downstream from the falls and is a rare sight in the western hemisphere.

EAT: The lodge's Riverview Restaurant offers a fine Southern buffet and magnificent views.



Cumberland Falls

Photo courtesy of Sheltolee Trace Adventure Resort



Zipline at Red River Gorge

Photo courtesy of Red River Gorge Zipline Tours

RED RIVER GORGE

Climb the soaring cliffs

We began the trip underground — and end it in the sky. Traveling north to the Red River Gorge, we see the sandstone cliff lines that attract rock climbers worldwide.

The good news is that you don't have to be one of the many chalk-stained pilgrims to enjoy “the Red.”

Torrent Falls Climbing Adventure lets non-climbers experience the thrill with the only “via ferrata” in the U.S. Created to ferry troops across Italian mountains, this system of cables and iron rungs makes it easy for anyone (ages 10 and up) to traverse the resort's horseshoe canyon.

No worries if vertigo keeps you off the cliffs. Nearby Natural Bridge State Park features hikes past majestic arches, rock shelters and wildflowers that grow nowhere else on the planet. Don't miss the 6-mile Courthouse Rock and Double Arch Trail, or the half-mile Chimney Top Overlook.

But what if these cliffs whetted your appetite to go higher? Red River Gorge Zipline Tours will provide the adrenaline rush you need. This five-line tour zips you at 55 miles per hour 300 feet above Cowan Fork Gorge. So end your trip with a WHHOOOOSH!

EAT: Enjoy pizza and buy a T-shirt at Miguels, where serious climbers go to eat and camp. 🍕



Alison Stone, WCTEL's cellular specialist, says new 4G LTE technology will allow WCTEL Wireless to offer the latest phones.

4G LTE a 'game changer' for WCTEL Wireless

BY ANDY JOHNS

WCTEL Wireless has struck a deal with a national cellular provider to bring wireless customers the fastest mobile data speeds available.

The agreement allows WCTEL Wireless to offer 4G service and the newest phones to customers.

"The ability to offer 4G LTE service is really a game changer for WCTEL Wireless," says CEO Jeff Wilson. "We offer the same great cellular and data service on one of the nation's largest networks, but with our local service team to help. I'm not sure why anyone in our local area would go with anyone else."

4G LTE is the fastest available cellular data network, with speeds four to five times faster than 3G connections. The term 4G represents the fourth generation of mobile data networks. LTE stands for Long Term Evolution, which is the fastest and most reliable form of a 4G network.

"There are a lot of people who have been waiting for 4G," says Alison Stone, WCTEL's cellular specialist. "We're so happy to be able to provide it."

New phones, including some of the latest and greatest on the market, also come along with the new network. WCTEL will be selling the iPhone 6 Plus and the Samsung Galaxy S6, in addition to a full line of other smartphones.

WCTEL wireless customers will have access to a nationwide network using cell towers from a national provider. Current coverage maps indicate many parts of the WCTEL service area will have 4G LTE coverage, including Abbeville, McCormick, Starr and Iva. Weather conditions and buildings may limit 4G coverage in some areas, according to Stone and other wireless experts.

Beyond the quality phones and a reliable network, Stone says customers enjoy combined billing, bundle discounts and

the great customer service they've come to expect from West Carolina.

"Our wireless customers get personal attention they won't get anywhere else," Stone says. "With us, they won't be taking a number and standing in line."

While hundreds of members already enjoy their cellular service from West Carolina, Stone says many members are not yet aware that the cooperative offers wireless plans. "Even longtime members are sometimes surprised to find out we offer mobile phones," Stone says. "Then when they learn they can get the same phones and same network as national providers, but deal with local people, they realize it's a pretty good offering."

Many members who switch their cellular service to WCTEL are eligible to bundle their cell phone plan with WCTEL broadband, DE Plus video service and landline phone service to get discounts on multiple products. ☎

MAJOR OPPORTUNITY:

McCormick drum major earns trip to Washington D.C.

BY ANDY JOHNS

De'Marcus Moore is a busy guy. Between running track, participating in JROTC, leading the McCormick High School band as drum major and taking college courses his junior and senior years, he doesn't have much free time.

But when WCTEL and the Foundation for Rural Service offered him a trip to Washington, D.C., as part of the annual FRS Youth Tour, he cleared his schedule.

"They've given us a good opportunity," says De'Marcus. "I wish more kids got this opportunity. It opened my eyes to see there are bigger things than high school."

De'Marcus, a rising senior at McCormick who returned from the trip June 3, says a highlight was meeting Senators Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham.

"It's different when you actually get to see who is making the decisions for your state and see them do their jobs in their offices," he says.



Principal Steve English says De'Marcus has the drive to be an important leader.



De'Marcus Moore, who recently returned from a trip to Washington, D.C., sponsored by FRS and WCTEL, is involved in band, track and JROTC at McCormick.

Among visits with officials, touring historic sites and seeing monuments, De'Marcus says he enjoyed meeting the 150 other students from the trip — some of whom came from as far away as Alaska.

"I got to meet every one of them," says De'Marcus, who was one of five students from South Carolina. "We actually did better than I thought we would do, because we were all from different states. Since we were all from rural areas, that made it easier."

A 'WHOLE STUDENT'

De'Marcus was nominated for the FRS trip by McCormick Principal Steve English. "He excels at everything he does," English says. "He's a whole student. This is an opportunity I wanted someone like De'Marcus to have."

The trip exposed De'Marcus to the world of politics and business. "He might be a congressman some day," English

says. "He's got that kind of drive."

While De'Marcus wouldn't rule out trying his hands at politics one day, he's focused now on his senior year with a goal to graduate in the top 10 of his class. At the end of his junior year, he was ranked No. 11.

As a dual-enrollment student, De'Marcus will graduate from high school with his coursework complete to get an associate's degree from Piedmont Technical College. His plans are to go to a four-year school to pursue nursing and eventually work as a physician's assistant.

But before that, there are plenty of band practices, track meets and drilling with JROTC to focus on during his senior year.

"Extracurriculars keep you on your toes," says De'Marcus. "It does get hard at times, but you have to work through those things. They're teaching you to be a leader not just in high school, but in the real world." 📱

PICTURE PERFECT

What will readers find at your blog?

ZG: Jody and I empower photographers to succeed, so you will find a plethora — more than 1,000 blog posts — of lighting, shooting, business and marketing content for photographers. We have videos, downloads, how-tos and behind-the-scenes information to learn how to make your business stronger and shoot better.

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

ZG: We started blogging in order to help answer questions we were getting through emails from photographers who wanted to know how we were doing what we were doing. We had no idea it would turn into a full-time business. Content is king, and useful, digestible content that a photographer can consume is a powerful thing to create. It can change someone's entire life if it's done right.

What are some of your favorite pieces of equipment, and what would you recommend for the amateur shooter who wants to get high-quality photos of their family vacations and hobbies?

ZG: Our favorite simple tool is the Expo Disk from ExpoImaging.com. White balance is how your camera perceives color. If the white balance is correct, all the colors are correct in the image. The Expo Disc allows you to custom white balance



your camera so that your color and exposure are perfect in all your photos. It's an awesome tool!

How has the Internet changed photography?

JG: The Internet has allowed anyone who shoots to share their images with the world. It allows you to create an audience without advertising it and has raised the level of amateur and pro shooters since so many people are now sharing their photos.

What is the most important thing to consider when getting ready to shoot a photo?

ZG: Lighting times five! Good lighting is the most important thing to look for when shooting. Large light sources create soft and beautiful light, and you can find that with indirect window light, in open shade — when you are in the shade but can see the open sky above you — just after the sun sets, or just before the sun rises. All those are great places to get soft light that looks great on your subjects.

OTHER PHOTOGRAPHY BLOGS YOU MIGHT LIKE:

► www.priscillabphotography.com/blog

Besides taking a look at some of her photographic artistry, you'll find her frequent musings that help to inspire her photography.

► www.marieelizabetschmidt.com/blog

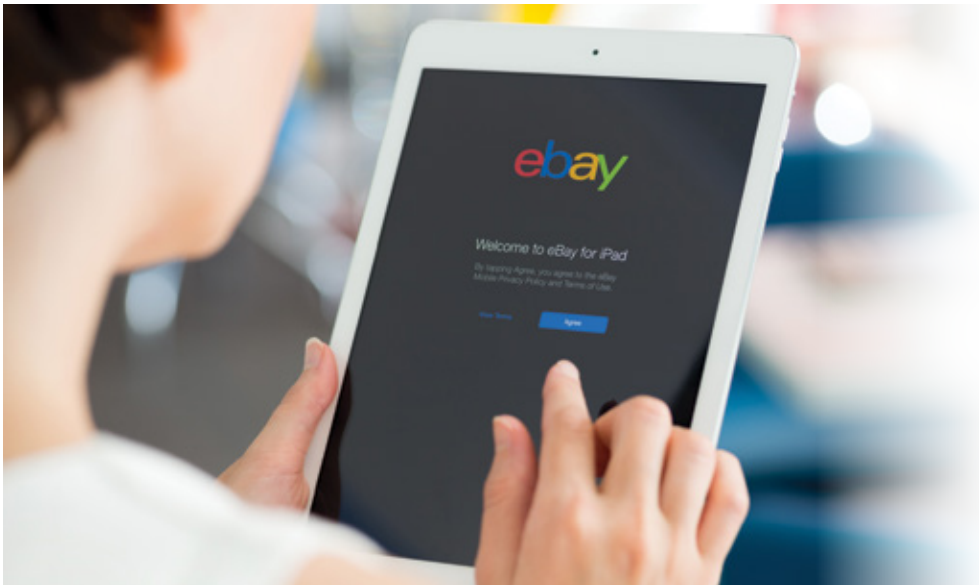
Her pictures contain more than captions. Marie Elizabeth Schmidt's photos fully encompass the moods of her subjects.

Do you prefer a studio/indoor setting or to let nature be your backdrop?

JG: Definitely outside is best. It feels natural and organic, and most of our favorite photos are taken outside. 📷



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 on the Web about a variety of topics. In the September/October issue, we'll focus on car blogs.



Digital Dollars

Making money online

BY MELISSA SMITH

There's plenty of money to be made on the Internet. Just ask the early investors in companies like Amazon, eBay and Google. Though on a smaller scale than the early dot com

investors, people earn a living every day by combining their skills, the Web and a little bit of business savvy. Check out these proven ways to make some money online.

Etsy

It's easy to set up a shop on Etsy, the popular site for handmade one-of-a-kind goods. The site boasts over 2 million shops, and it's growing daily.

And it's almost as simple to sell on the site.

Etsy has a fairly straightforward setup page for new shops. Simply select a template and enter your information. Also, it's very important to have nice, high-quality photos of the items you have for sale. You don't have to hire a professional photographer; just

find a place with nice natural light and think of the best ways to showcase your product.

Etsy stores charge 20 cents per item you post and collect 3.5 percent of the selling price of each item. Also, if you have items that remain unsold, an auto-renewal fee of 20 cents will be charged after four months until the item is sold.

Do you have more than one type of craft? In an Etsy store, you can list items in 10 different sections.

ArtFire

Like the better-known Etsy, ArtFire welcomes those with a creative spirit to sell their crafts online. With everything from home decor, handmade jewelry, fine art and craft supplies, ArtFire is a place to find something special and one-of-a-kind.

For a premium account, you pay a \$20 per month membership, and after that, you get to keep

everything you make from the items you sell. There are no hidden fees, and ArtFire doesn't take a cut of your profits. Also, your business page is completely customizable, and you get to post up to 10 photos per listing.


Once you start selling items and making money, ArtFire deposits the money in your account via the method you choose.

eBay

Perhaps the most well-established and well-known selling portal online, eBay made its first sale on Labor Day in 1995.

Twenty years later and still going strong, eBay remains one of the most popular sites to find good deals on rare and everyday items. One of the biggest selling points on eBay is that most items are up for

auction. So, the buyer can offer as much or as little as they like for an item.

eBay does require some seller fees, depending on the item up for sale, what kind of price reserve you set, the type of item, etc. Whether selling your own handmade crafts or cleaning out the garage, the Internet can help you turn those items into cash. 

Helping hungry kids

*Bags of Blessings
delivers food for
children in need*

BY ANDY JOHNS

Mary Ann Nickles and Barry Creswell stock bins and organize supplies in the Bags of Blessings room at Grace United Methodist Church.

Mary Ann Nickles was chaperoning a field trip when she commented to a teacher about how one child scarfed down his lunch. “The teacher said, ‘He probably hasn’t eaten since yesterday,’” Nickles remembers.

She knew right then and there she had to take action.

“There is such a need,” Nickles says. “If people knew what was going on right here, I think they would be surprised. The things you see on TV, that extreme poverty is happening right here.”

A few months later in 2009, Nickles launched “Bags of Blessings,” a program that collects and distributes bags of food for children to take home over weekends.

Many children in need receive breakfast and lunch at school, so the bags are intended to keep their bellies full on Saturday and Sunday. Each bag gives a child enough food for two breakfasts, two lunches and three dinners. The bag also includes a snack and water.

Nickles started with 10 bags, then increased to 30. By the end of the first school year, Nickles and Bags of Blessings volunteers were stuffing bags in her garage to send home with nearly 60 kids each week.



Mike Erwin, left, Nickles and Creswell load up the bags to be transported to a school.

Now, the program has its own room at Grace United Methodist Church, and volunteers carry almost 200 bags to nine schools each week. “This is the Lord’s will that I do this,” says Nickles, a mother of four. “It isn’t me.”

DONATIONS

The donations continue to astound Nickles. One business donates fruit each week, and another routinely writes \$500 checks.

“People are just ready and willing to help because they care,” says Nickles, whose husband Tom is an employee at WCTEL. “Everybody has just come willing to help.”

Donations arrive from churches, businesses and individuals.

“I’ve never worried about the financial part of it,” she says. “It was just like Jesus feeding the 5,000. Where did all this food come from?”

Most of the shopping is done at Ingles, where managers find ways to help the program’s dollars go further. Usually, the volunteers can fill the bags for between \$3 and \$4 each. “It is a great ministry,” says Mike Erwin, a Bags of Blessings volunteer. “It breaks my heart for those kids to go hungry.”

Originally, the program focused on elementary school students, but now the



Ravioli and chicken noodle soup are two of the staples for Bags of Blessings.

majority of bags go to the middle schools. Local teachers are the main contacts for Bags of Blessings, alerting the volunteers of students who need the bags. “We don’t know who the children are, and we probably shouldn’t know,” Nickles says.

The Feeding America organization published a survey in 2012 which reported that 28 percent of children in South Carolina are “food insecure,” meaning their homes don’t have a consistent supply of healthy food. The study found more than 290,000 hungry children in the Palmetto

State. Nationwide, one in five children fall into the “food insecure” category.

Volunteer Barry Creswell says teachers have told him hunger can sometimes be the cause of disciplinary problems or other classroom struggles. “When a child is hungry, they can’t concentrate,” Creswell says. “When you’re sitting there and your stomach is growling, you can’t concentrate.”

Studies from the National Institute of Health and Harvard University have found that children who don’t have enough to eat don’t learn as quickly as others, are sick more often, have more behavioral problems and are less likely to get along with other children.

“People need to realize it’s going on right here,” Nickles says. Awareness is growing. Churches in Greenwood, Donalds, Iva and Starr have either started, or are looking to start, similar programs.

Everyone associated with Bags of Blessings volunteers their time, but that doesn’t mean they don’t get anything back for their work. “It’s caused my faith to be so much stronger,” Nickles says. “Those kids are so excited to get their bags.”

GET INVOLVED!

Donations to Bags of Blessings may be made at:

**Grace United
Methodist Church
145 Grace Drive
Abbeville, SC 29620**

Monetary donations are encouraged, but Nickles and her volunteers will also accept cans of ravioli or chicken noodle soup with pop tops (no can opener needed).

With check or cash, be sure to specify “Bags of Blessings” to ensure the money is properly delivered.

TOMATOES GOING GREEN

Books have been written about them; movies have been made about them; and songs have been sung about them. But when it comes to cooking fried green tomatoes, some say no one does it better than Brett Hadley.

He's been making them for 25 years and now serves them at his restaurant named after the beloved dish: Green Tomato Grill in Mooresburg, Tennessee.

A native of Hendersonville, Tennessee, Hadley worked for a few years as a corporate chef for a major casual dining restaurant. That's where he learned the intricacies of making fried green tomatoes.

Yes, intricacies. Because if you don't choose the right tomatoes, don't soak them for a while in buttermilk seasoned with Cajun seasoning or whatever strikes your fancy, and don't coat them with the right batter, they're simply not good.

"After testing my take on fried green tomatoes for many months until I got them right, we added them to our menu at 60 locations in 10 states," he says. "That company went out of business several years after I left, but I have used my recipe at several restaurants that I have owned," including, he adds, his 100-seat eatery "in the middle of nowhere where we sell over 250 pounds of green tomatoes a week."

Green Tomato Grill opened in the winter of 2012, and giving the place its name made sense. After all, everyone knows that just across the county line is where you'll find the famous Grainger County Tomatoes. "With the success I have had in the past with fried green tomatoes and the fresh, made-from-scratch menu I wanted to do, this seemed like a no-brainer to me," Hadley says.



Brett and Tammy Hadley opened the Green Tomato Grill in Mooresburg, Tennessee, in 2012.

When a green tomato is ready for the skillet, you'll notice just the slightest blush. That's when the flavor is at its sweetest, Hadley says.

"So much better than really firm tomatoes that have just been picked," he advises.

And though size doesn't matter to most, to Hadley, it does: The bigger the better, so there's more tomato on the plate for all to enjoy.

Though he won't give away all his trade secrets, he says the best way to fry a green tomato is to soak it first, then use dried rice flour in the batter.

"They'll fry up nice and crisp, and you will not lose your breading," he says.

At Green Tomato Grill you'll find fried green tomatoes served with nothing more than a homemade dipping sauce, but the tomatoes also replace cucumbers in the house salad. They appear alongside bacon in a pasta Alfredo dish and replace ripe tomatoes in the BLT. And there's nothing better than a fried green tomato on a grilled pimiento cheese-jalapeno cornbread sandwich.

The versatility of fried green tomatoes never ceases to amaze the palate. Here are some recipes Hadley has found particularly pleasing. 🍷



FAST FACT

They're certainly a Southern staple, but, in fact, fried green tomatoes originated in the Midwest. The first recipes for them were found in Jewish and Midwestern cookbooks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But it is here in the South where they've been embraced as part of our culture.

IF YOU GO

Green Tomato Grill
802 Old Highway 11 West
Mooresburg, TN 37811
Phone: 423-921-8282



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.

MARINATED FRIED GREEN TOMATOES

- 2 green tomatoes, sliced 1/4-inch thick
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 1/4 cup rice flour
- 1/4 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 teaspoon Cajun seasoning
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Oil for frying

Soak the tomato slices in the buttermilk for at least 30 minutes. Mix the flour, cornmeal, salt and pepper. Pull the tomato slices out of the buttermilk, then dredge them in the cornmeal mixture. Fry the tomato slices in about a 1/2-inch oil over medium heat in heavy skillet, such as cast iron, until golden brown on both sides, about 3-4 minute per side. Serve with remoulade sauce, if desired.



REMOULADE SAUCE

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 3 tablespoons ketchup
- 2 tablespoons dill relish
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dry mustard
- Few drops of hot sauce
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1-2 teaspoons prepared horseradish, optional

Combine all ingredients, adding horseradish if you like for a spicier sauce. Store, covered, in refrigerator. Serve with fried green tomatoes or use as sandwich spread for fried green tomato po' boys.

FRIED GREEN TOMATO BENEDICT with Smithfield Ham & Pimiento Cheese Hollandaise

- 8 slices fried green tomatoes
- Pimiento cheese hollandaise:**
 - 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted
 - 4 egg yolks
 - 1 tablespoon lemon juice
 - 4 teaspoons powdered cheddar cheese (like that found in a package of mac and cheese)
 - 1 (4-ounce) jar chopped pimientos

- Dash of cayenne or Tabasco
- Dash of Worcestershire sauce
- Salt, to taste

Poached eggs:

- 4 eggs
- 2 teaspoons white or rice vinegar

To finish:

- 4 thin slices Smithfield ham
- Chopped chives
- Salt and freshly cracked pepper

Fry the tomatoes, using the preceding recipe or any of your favorites. Once they're cooked, keep them in the oven on warm until you're ready to assemble the dish.

Make the pimiento cheese hollandaise:

Vigorously whisk together egg yolks and lemon juice in a stainless-steel bowl until the mixture is thickened and doubled in volume. Place the bowl over a saucepan containing barely simmering water (or use a double boiler); the water should not touch the bottom of the bowl. Continue to whisk rapidly. Be careful not to let the eggs get too hot or they will scramble. Slowly drizzle in the melted butter and continue to whisk until the sauce is thickened and doubled in volume. Remove from heat, whisk in powdered cheese a teaspoon at a time, Worcestershire sauce and cayenne. Stir in the pimientos. Cover and place in a warm spot until ready to use for the eggs

Benedict. If the sauce gets too thick, whisk in a few drops of warm water before serving. Salt to taste.

Poach the eggs: Bring a large saucepan, filled 2/3 full, with water to a boil, then add the vinegar. Bring the water to a boil again, then lower the heat to a bare simmer. This is the water in which you will poach the eggs. Working one egg at a time, crack an egg into a small bowl and slip into the barely simmering water. Once it begins to solidify, slip in another egg, until you have all four cooking. Turn off the heat, cover the pan, and let sit for 4 minutes. (Remember which egg went in first; you'll want to take it out first.) When it comes time to remove the eggs, gently lift out with a slotted spoon. Note that the timing is a variable on the eggs, depending on the size of your pan, how much water, how many eggs, and how runny you like them. You might have to experiment a little with your setup to figure out what you need to do to get the eggs exactly the way you like them. Gently remove the eggs from the poaching water and set in a bowl.

To assemble: Place two fried green tomatoes on each plate and top each with a slice of Smithfield ham, trimming the ham to fit the tomato. Place a poached egg on top of the ham, pour hollandaise over. Top with sprinkles of chives and fresh cracked black pepper. Serve at once. 🍴



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