

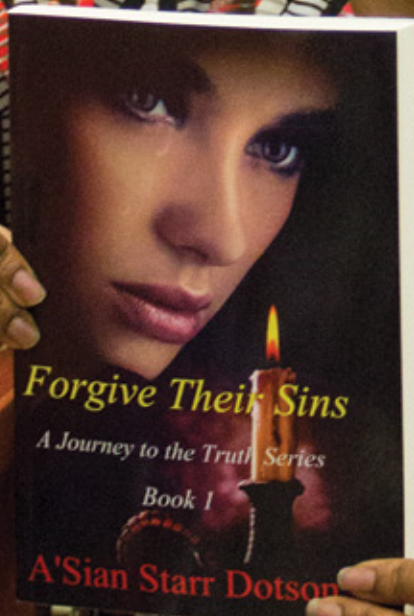
West Carolina Tel

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015

CONNECTED

A NEW CHAPTER

Local author says publishing is easier than you think



HOME FRIED

Host makes Southern Fried Morning Show sizzle

LINKING LOVED ONES

Abbeville nursing home uses Skype to bring families together



RURAL CONNECTIONS

BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

Broadband may be the greatest health care innovation for rural America

When we talk about the impact of broadband Internet access, we often focus on its importance to economic development, business growth and such. While it is absolutely an economic driver, broadband may also be just what the doctor ordered for rural America.

You will sometimes hear it referred to as telemedicine; other times, telehealth. Whatever you call it, the use of broadband technology is changing the way health care is delivered. And I believe we are only seeing the beginning.

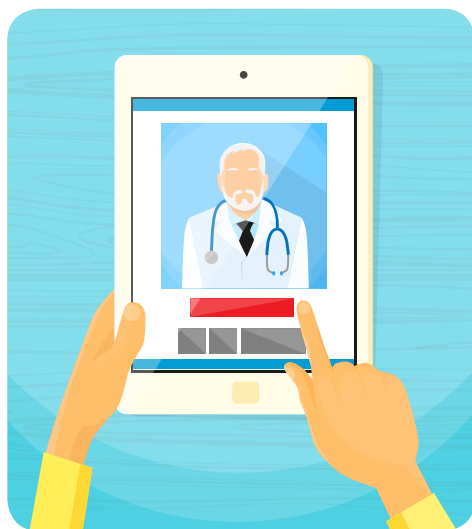
For example, electronic medical records are allowing doctors to streamline care, especially for patients in rural areas. A patient who normally visits a rural clinic can be confident that their health information is accurate and up-to-date when they visit a regional hospital.

I wrote in the previous issue of this magazine about aging in place, noting that technologies such as videoconferencing, remote health monitoring and X-ray transmission are helping rural seniors stay at home longer. But the aging population is just one segment that can benefit from broadband-enabled applications.

Recently, I attended a technology showcase that focused on the interconnection between technology providers, health care providers and innovation in telemedicine. It was a fascinating conference that

left my mind spinning with the possibilities for rural health care delivery.

We heard from a rural telecommunications provider who said small telcos are



often too small to get the main contracts from the base hospitals, but that they have an important role in providing the local infrastructure and having the construction team on the ground. This has helped build the case for having a role in the large clinic and university hospital contracts in the future.

Hugh Cathey of the innovative company HealthSpot provided a real glimpse into what broadband can mean to all segments of society. His company has kiosks in several Rite Aid drug stores in Ohio where patients can walk in and be face-to-face with a healthcare professional via a video screen. These stations come outfitted with everything you need to receive a wide variety of remote treatments. The HealthSpot network has seen thousands of patients since May, for ailments such as allergies, cold and flu, bronchitis, cough, rashes, sore throat and fever.

With applications such as these, it's easy to get excited about what the future holds for telemedicine. And with the great work being done by your telco and others like it who are building world-class broadband networks, we can know that rural America will not be left behind in this 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.

Easy steps to help **STOP** telemarketing calls!

If you are like most consumers, you are tired of being disturbed by telemarketing calls. There is help.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) have established a National Do Not Call Registry. Joining this registry can drastically reduce the number of telemarketing calls you receive.

Here are some important facts about the list:

- Once registered, telemarketers have 31 days to stop calling your number.
- You can register up to three non-business telephone numbers. You can register cell phone numbers; there is not a separate registry for cell phones.
- Your number will remain on the list

permanently unless you disconnect the number or you choose to remove it.

- Some businesses are exempt from the Do Not Call Registry and may still be able to call your number. These include political organizations, charities, telephone surveyors and businesses that you already have a relationship with.

Strict Federal Trade Commission rules for telemarketers make it illegal to do any of the following regardless of whether or not your number is listed on the National Do Not Call Registry:

- Call before 8 a.m.
- Call after 9 p.m.
- Misrepresent what is being offered
- Threaten, intimidate or harass you
- Call again after you've asked them not to



Adding your number to the Do Not Call Registry is easy!

Register online at
www.donotcall.gov
or call 888-382-1222
For TTY, call 866-290-4236


You must call from the telephone number you wish to register.



Beware of sales calls disguised as surveys

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) says they have received numerous complaints from individuals who report receiving deceptive sales calls. The callers identify themselves with Political Opinions of America and ask you to participate in a brief survey, usually consisting of about three questions. After answering the questions, the individual is transferred to someone offering them a bonus for participating in the survey — usually a sales pitch for a time-share disguised as a “free vacation.”

The FTC warns that if the purpose of the call is to try to sell something — even if it includes a survey — it is telemarketing and all Do Not Call Registry rules apply.

If you believe a call violates the FTC rules against telemarketing, you can file a complaint by calling 888-382-1222 or go to donotcall.gov. 

ATTENTION LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS:

You can be penalized for not following these FCC rules

When people think of telemarketing phone calls, they usually imagine them coming from distant call centers. But local businesses that make phone calls to customers or potential customers should be aware that the same National Do Not Call Registry rules and regulations apply to them.

The Do Not Call initiative, regulated by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC), requires telephone service providers to notify customers of the National Do Not Call rules and regulations.

If you are a company, individual or organization that places telemarketing calls, it is very important that you familiarize yourself with the operations of the National Do Not Call Registry. Unless you fall under one of the established exceptions, such as telemarketing by charitable organizations or for prior business relationships, you may not make telemarketing calls to numbers included in the National Do Not Call Registry.

For information regarding National Do Not Call regulations, visit the National Do Not Call registry at www.telemarketing.donotcall.gov. You can find the Federal Communications Commission and Federal Trade Commission rules governing telemarketing and telephone solicitation at 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200 and 16 C.F.R. Part 310, respectively.

FRS is educating tomorrow's leaders

You often read in this magazine about the many ways West Carolina Tel works with other cooperatives to make your voice heard in D.C. In this issue I'd like to shine a spotlight on the work we do together through the Foundation for Rural Service, or FRS.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

FRS was formed in 1994 by NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association as a nonprofit organization. The foundation's core mission is two-fold: to educate the public about the benefits of a nationwide telecommunications network and to promote rural connectivity as an essential link in this network.

This is accomplished through a variety of programs. One of the most notable is the FRS College Scholarship Program. In the July/August issue of this magazine, we announced that Abbeville High School's Alexandria Temple not only won the West Carolina Tel scholarship, but also the FRS scholarship. The FRS program awards several \$2,000 scholarships to students who are sponsored by their local NTCA member provider, who adds

\$500 to the award. The program encourages students to return to their rural communities upon completing their education.


Also in the July/August issue you read about McCormick High School's De'Marcus Moore, who WCTEL sponsored for the FRS Youth Tour. For more than 20 years, we have sponsored a high school senior as part of this program that offers rural students an inside look at the telecommunications industry, educates them about the legislative and governmental process and gives them the opportunity to experience Washington, D.C., in person.

Programs like these are helping us prepare tomorrow's leaders, the people who will represent rural America in leadership roles. Whether they enter business, education, health care, public service or even the field of telecommunications, these students will have a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities of our nation's rural regions.

FRS also works to educate today's leaders, especially elected officials and regulators. One way the organization does this is through its Rural Telecom Educational Series. Each title in this series of papers provides information on a topic that impacts rural America and access to services for those who live here.

While reading about these topics is important, it is even more powerful to see firsthand the work telecommunications providers are doing in America's rural regions. FRS coordinates a tour each year that brings congressional staff members to visit communities served by NTCA members. Most of these staffers work for representatives and senators on key committees. It is good for them to hear rural business owners, health care providers, educators and local officials talk about the importance of a broadband connection and to see how important rural providers like WCTEL are to the success of the communities we serve.

FRS sponsors many other initiatives, such as its grant program that supports local efforts to build and sustain a high quality of life in rural America through business development, community development, education and telecommunications.

We are proud of the good work FRS does throughout the country. And we are especially proud to be part of the large family of telcos who support this good work. You can learn more about FRS by visiting www.frs.org. 

The West Carolina Tel Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by West Carolina Telephone, © 2015. It is distributed without charge to all members/owners of the 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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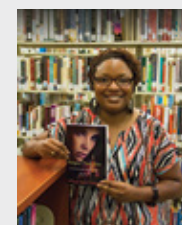
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Produced for West Carolina Tel by:



On the Cover:



A'Sian Starr Dotson has become a published author with hard work, a creative mind and the use of new technology. See story Page 12.



WCTEL is now Certified Gig-Capable

WCTEL has been recognized by NTCA as a Certified Gig-Capable Provider for delivering gigabit broadband speeds and enabling technological innovation to the surrounding service area.

WCTEL is one of only two dozen cooperatives to be initially "Gig-Certified" by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. The organization represents nearly 900 independent, community-based telecommunications companies and their interests in national government affairs.

The distinction is part of a national program highlighting independent telecommunications providers delivering gigabit broadband speeds. A gigabit is 1,000 Mbps — more than 60 times faster than WCTEL's basic Internet speed. A gigabit connection allows for fantastic download speeds, such as downloading a two-hour HD movie in less than 30 seconds.

The certification acknowledges the power of high-speed Internet and the potential it brings to the service area. "This is a great accomplishment," says WCTEL CEO Jeff Wilson. "We strive to continually improve and add onto our services so that our members will benefit from the opportunity to invest in our state-of-the-art services. This certification proves that we are heading in the right direction."

Area Christmas Parade Schedule:

Due West – Dec. 4 at 5:15 p.m.

Abbeville – Dec. 5 at 11 a.m.

Calhoun Falls – Dec. 5 at 2 p.m.

Donalds – Dec. 5 at 2 p.m.

McCormick – Dec. 12 at 10 p.m.

Iva – Dec. 12 at 2 p.m.

Lowndesville – Dec. 13 at 3 p.m.



Video on Demand New Release Schedule

For a small rental fee, WCTEL's Video on Demand service gives you access to new releases as many as eight weeks before Netflix or Redbox (designated by an *). To access Video on Demand, press the "VOD" or "On Demand" button on the remote or press the "Menu" button and look for "On Demand."

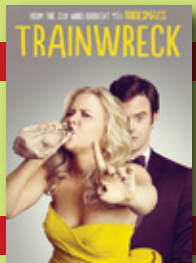
November 3

- Inside Out
- The End of the Tour



November 10

- Mr. Holmes
- Trainwreck*



November 17

- The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*
- We Are Your Friends

November 24

- Ricki and the Flash
- No Escape
- Shaun The Sheep Movie

December 1

- Amy

December 8

- Minions*
- Ant-Man

December 15

- Ted 2*

December 22

- Pawn Sacrifice*

December 29

- A Walk In The Woods
- The Perfect Guy



Liberty Bowl Stadium

Photo courtesy of Autozone Liberty Bowl

BOWLED OVER

There's more to bowl-game trips than football

As football season fades into history, host cities gear up for events that really score. Get ready for kickoff with a tour of the 2015 bowl games in cities across the South — which are great places to visit anytime.

DECEMBER 23

GoDaddy Bowl; Mobile, Alabama; Ladd-Peebles Stadium

Let's start your tour with the week leading up to the bowl game in Mobile. The focus is on the bowl's eve and its Mardi Gras-style parade. Marching bands and cheerleaders from each bowl team will help pump up team spirit. The parade culminates in a giant pep rally on the waterfront at Mobile Bay. So don't sit on the sidelines. Get into the action.

Other sights to see:

- The USS Alabama arrived in Mobile Bay in 1964 and opened for public tours a year later. Bill Tunnell, executive director of the USS Alabama Memorial Park, says bowl week is always a lot of fun for players and fans.



USS Alabama

Photo courtesy of USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park

- One of the best places to view Mobile's historic past is at the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception. The cathedral's stained-glass windows date to 1890, so bring your camera. And this would be a good place to say a prayer for a successful Hail Mary near game's end. The church is at 2 S. Claiborne St.

Where to eat: Regina's Kitchen, 2056 Government St., a mile from the stadium. Best bet: muffuletta with a side of potato salad.



TECH-SAVVY TRAVELER:

As if the holidays didn't provide enough excitement, it's nearly time for an unending blitz of college bowl games. There are a few apps to help get us even further into the game. **Team Stream** is a popular sports news app by Bleacher Report. Want the latest scores and highlights? The **ESPN** app alerts you when your team scores. Searching for a social media society of sports fans? **FanCred's** app could help visiting fans survive a trip into hostile territory.



DECEMBER 26

Camping World Independence Bowl; Shreveport, Louisiana; Independence Stadium

On our next stop, the days leading up to the bowl game see a marked change in the city of Shreveport. Fans sporting team colors are out in full force enjoying the many cool, old places to eat, drink and socialize along the riverfront. There will be a pep rally, which consistently draws big crowds. And there's always been a free event for families: Fan Fest — a fun time with face painting, jump houses and more.

If you feel the need to shop, there's no better place to go than Louisiana Boardwalk Outlets, home to 60-plus stores. "It's probably the most-popular destination for football fans," says Chris Jay, with the Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau.

Kids will enjoy spending time at Sci-Port: Louisiana's Science Center. It's always ranked in the top 10 of children's science museums in the country.

Where to eat: Sam's Southern Eatery, 3500 Jewella Ave., 0.7 miles from the stadium. One of the best spots in town for fried seafood. Favorite dish? It's a coin toss between the 3N3 — three shrimp and three fish fillets — or the shrimp with red beans and rice.

DECEMBER 30

Birmingham Bowl; Birmingham, Alabama; Legion Field

The journey continues as the year winds down. It's one of the smaller bowl games, but don't be blindsided by the fact that there will be as much play-by-play action off the field as on.

Bowl eve begins with the Monday Morning Quarterback Club Team Luncheon. The public is welcome, but tickets are required. Then, at 2 p.m., the Uptown Street Fest and Pep Rally kicks off a huge celebration with team bands, cheerleaders, players and live music.

And if you have time, make a drive to the Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum with its collection of almost 750 vintage and modern motorcycles and race cars.

Where to eat: Niki's West Steak and

Seafood, 233 Finley Ave. W, 2.7 miles from the stadium. Some of the best soul food in Alabama. Fried green tomatoes, turnip greens, stewed okra and white beans are favorite sides to daily entree choices.



Photo courtesy of Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl

DECEMBER 30

Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl; Nashville, Tennessee; Nissan Stadium

The home of country music earns a stop on the itinerary. Last year's Music City Bowl was one of the highest-attended in its 17-year history, and organizers are hopeful to repeat that success this year. To kick things off, there's a battle off the field on game eve: MusicFest and Battle of the Bands. It begins with the Hot Chicken Eating World Championships, followed by a free concert at Riverfront Park. The evening ends with the two team bands "duking it out" on the streets.

While in town, be sure to make time for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, where the history of country music comes alive.

Where to eat: Manny's House of Pizza, 15 Arcade Alley, 0.8 miles from the stadium. Creative pies are the trademark of this pizzeria, as well as great spaghetti and calzones. A local favorite.

DECEMBER 31

Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl; Atlanta, Georgia; Georgia Dome

Don't forget to plan a New Year's Eve stop. When traveling to a city the size of Atlanta, deciding what venues to visit is difficult. And during bowl week, they're often crowded. The Peach Bowl draws one of the largest of all bowl crowds. Visitors enjoy the restaurants, sights and sounds of The Big Peach, including the

Peach Bowl Parade. Dozens of bands and floats pass through the streets.

To narrow down the playing field of other sights to see, there are two places near the Georgia Dome. The College Football Hall of Fame is a touchdown for football fans with its interactive exhibits and helmet and jersey collections. And for fishy folks, there's the Georgia Aquarium and the inhabitants of its 10 million gallons of fresh and salt water.

Where to eat: Jamal's Buffalo Wings, 10 Northside Drive NW, 0.7 miles from the stadium. Scramble over to Jamal's for a football tradition: wings. It's a hole-in-the-wall, but don't let that stop you.



Photo courtesy of AutoZone Liberty Bowl

JANUARY 2

AutoZone Liberty Bowl; Memphis, Tennessee; Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium

There's nothing sad about ending a bowl season journey at the home of the blues. As if Beale Street wasn't busy on any given day or night, it scores big with an undercurrent of excitement that builds as the Liberty Bowl teams come to town, exploding at the Bash on Beale Pep Rally. The area comes alive beginning at 3 p.m. with a parade featuring local bands, team bands, cheerleaders and more. When the parade ends, the pep rally begins. And this year, it all happens on Jan. 1, the day before the game.

And if there's time in your schedule, don't forget a tour of Graceland, as well as Sun Studios where Elvis, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison and more sang the blues.

Where to eat: Soul Fish, 862 S. Cooper St., 1.4 miles from the stadium. The best catfish, Cuban sandwiches and fish tacos in Memphis, but the place scores an extra point for its oyster po' boys. ☑



Renee Bledsoe, left, and Bridget White help Abbeville Nursing Home resident Emily Smith use video chat.

SENIORS ON SKYPE

BY ANDY JOHNS

A diagnosis of terminal cancer for a beloved niece is never easy, especially for Marie, an 88-year-old resident of Abbeville Nursing Home.

When her niece, Velma, in Staten Island, New York, received a grim diagnosis in September 2014, Marie and Velma worried they would never see each other again, since neither was fit to travel. That's when broadband technology and the creative staff at Abbeville Nursing home stepped in.

Using Skype, the two were able to talk face-to-face over video chat from 700 miles apart several times before Velma passed away in January. Marie died two months later.

"Those months that she was able to talk to Velma meant so much," said Vickie Wickware of Abbeville, who was Marie's best friend for 37 years. "It made Marie feel like she was still a part of Velma's life. When she was able to Skype Velma and talk to her and see her, it gave her some hope."

Activity Director Renee Bledsoe and Social Services Director Bridget White developed the idea of using video chats to connect families, which earned the Abbeville Nursing Home staff the 2013 South Carolina Spirit of

Caring Award.

“We wanted to allow family members to be able to communicate with their loved ones when they live far away,” Bledsoe says.

Marie isn’t the only resident to benefit from this new kind of connection. Over the last two years, about 10 percent of residents have used the service, but White and Bledsoe are working to include others.

“In the past you had the phone, but the face of the future is computers,” White says.

White remembers one resident who has only seen a young nephew through Skype calls, since the family lives out West. “She really hadn’t been able to see or talk with them,” White says.

Video chatting sometimes gets through to residents when the staff cannot. One resident, whom the staff did not name, had become solitary, never wishing to leave her room to socialize. White and Bledsoe set up a “Skype buddy,” who was a consultant for the nursing home, and every Friday the resident and her Skype buddy talked. “This was probably a highlight of her time here,” Bledsoe says.

When Bledsoe and White were honored with the Spirit of Caring Award at a state-wide meeting, they were able to Skype with the once anti-social resident so she could “meet” the audience. Even over the connection, the resident’s funny personality shined.

“She brought it home for us,” Bledsoe says. “Everybody was either crying or laughing.”

WARMING UP TO THE WEB

The first resident to try video chatting was a 100-year-old lady who was able to talk with her granddaughter face-to-face through the computer.

“She said she had been around a long time and seen a lot of things, but by far this was the most interesting,” Bledsoe says. “It was really just amazing.”

The newness of computers and technology like Skype, the Internet’s leading video chat service, intimidated some residents at first. Many residents, most of whom are between the age of 80 and 100,



were hesitant at first to get online. “This is technology that a lot of them have never experienced,” White says.

But they pick it up quickly and are genuinely pleased to see loved ones.

“They get to see the little grandchildren that they wouldn’t get to see,” White says.

One advantage, White says, is for the family and caregivers to be able to have care plan meetings via Skype. At times, it’s difficult for family members to come to the nursing home for the regularly scheduled meetings, but video calls allow them to meet with White and other caregivers face-to-face during a lunch break or other times when it’s convenient.

“It’s beneficial with everyday business,” White says. “They still want to be a part of the care plan meeting and actually see what’s going on. We can use Skype to do that. All they have to do is call us and set up a date and time. We set up the computer for the resident.”

The video calls have also come in handy during cold and flu season, when visitation can be limited to slow or stop the spread of sickness.

Originally, Bledsoe and White used one of their laptops to allow residents to chat, but demand grew enough to where they purchased a tablet for Skype calls. White has even used other apps on the tablet to translate for a few residents or family members who don’t speak English.



That kind of technology use, especially video chatting, is expected to increase as more people aging into the nursing home have technology skills.

“I could see us use this a lot more because the younger clients that get in are computer-savvy,” White says.

White credits the reliable high-speed connection from West Carolina and support from administrator Alan Hughes with encouraging and allowing the staff to be creative and innovative in serving patients. “When Mr. Hughes thinks or hears of something and it’s good for the residents, you better believe we’re going to get it,” White says.

Since Abbeville Nursing Home received the state award, other nursing homes in bigger cities have noticed the program and reached out.

“We have had other facilities that have incorporated this into their program,” Bledsoe says. ☺

FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD

What do readers find at your blog in addition to recipes?

Stephanie Parker: In addition to recipes, Plain Chicken posts about our world travels and our three cats, and we also post a weekly menu on Sunday to help get you ready for the week.

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

SP: Blogging started as a way for me to store recipes. I would make food and take it to work. People would ask for the recipe later, and I had to search for it. I decided to make a blog and store everything online. The blog started expanding because we were in a dinner rut. I decided to make one new recipe a week. Well, that morphed into four new recipes a week. Plain Chicken has totally changed my life. I was in corporate accounting for over 18 years. Plain Chicken took off, and I was able to quit my corporate job and focus solely on plainchicken.com. I am so lucky to be able to do something that I love every single day.

Everyone has different tastes, so when the extended family gets together, what kind of menu can you plan to please everyone?

SP: Pleasing everyone is always hard, especially nowadays with all the different diet plans people are on. I always try to have something for everyone. If you know someone is vegetarian or gluten-free, make sure they have some options. But for me, at the end of the day, I'm their hostess, not their dietitian.

What are some ideas for getting the children involved in preparing the holiday meal?

SP: Getting the children involved with preparing the holiday meal is a great idea. When making the cornbread dressing, let



the children mix up the batter and crumble the cooked cornbread. Have the children mix the cookie batter and form the cookies. For safety's sake, just make sure the adults put things in the oven and take them out.

Budgets play a big role in planning holiday menus. What are some ideas for hosting a party with "champagne taste on a beer budget?"

SP: Plan your menu early and watch the grocery store sales. Buy ingredients and store them for the holidays. Freeze what you can, and store canned/dry goods in the pantry. Wholesale clubs, like Sam's and Costco, are also great places to buy large quantities of items and meats.

Do you have a good recipe for the holidays you're willing to share?

SP: Yes. Spicy Ranch Crackers are a great snack to have on hand during the holidays. The recipe makes a lot, and the crackers will keep for weeks. They are perfect for unexpected guests and are also great in soups and stews. 📧



Spicy Ranch Crackers

- 1 (1-ounce) package ranch dressing mix
- 1/2 to 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
- 1 1/2 cups canola oil
- 1 box saltine crackers

Combine dry ranch mix, cayenne pepper and oil. Pour over crackers. Toss crackers every 5 minutes for about 20 minutes, until all crackers are coated and there is no more oil mixture at the bottom of the bowl. Store in a resealable plastic bag.

OTHER FOOD BLOGS THAT MIGHT TEMPT YOUR PALATE:

- ▶ **www.brittanyspantry.com**
This site combines a love of reading, writing and cooking into a blog that will keep you busy in the kitchen creating recipes that have been tested and tweaked for delicious results.
- ▶ **www.iamafoodblog.com**
Even for people who work with food for a living, the editors at Saveur "were overcome with desire," and named this blog its "Blog of the Year" for 2014.
- ▶ **www.southernbite.com**
This Prattville, Alabama-based blog focuses on Southern food with the idea that "food down South is not all about deep frying and smothering stuff in gravy."



CONNECTED CHRISTMAS

Your 2015 Gadget-Giving Guide

Ah, Christmas. It's approaching quickly, and it's never too early to start shopping. But are you struggling with what to buy that someone who has everything? Here are some of the season's hottest items that are sure to impress that technologically savvy, hard-to-buy-for family member, significant other or friend.

WOCKET SMART WALLET

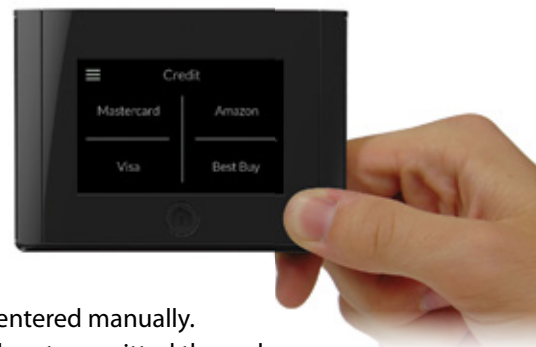
If you're tired of keeping up with all the cards in your wallet, the Wocket is for you.

The Wocket Smart Wallet is the world's smartest wallet. How does it work? First swipe your cards using the card reader included in the Wocket. Information like your voter registration or any membership or loyalty cards with bar codes can also be entered manually.

The information stored in the Wocket is then transmitted through the WocketCard.

The WocketCard gives the information to the point-of-sale device when it is swiped, just as with a regular credit card.

For only \$229, you can own the smartest wallet on the planet. Order yours at www.wocketwallet.com.



LILY

Have you been considering getting a drone, but can't bring yourself to pull the trigger? Meet Lily, the drone that takes flight on its own, literally. All you have to do is toss it up in the air, and the motors automatically start.

Unlike traditional drones that require the user to operate what looks like a video game controller, Lily relies on a hockey puck-shaped tracking device strapped to the user's wrist. GPS and visual subject tracking help Lily know where you are. Unlike other drones, Lily is tethered to you at all times when flying.

Lily features a camera that captures 12-megapixel stills, and 1080p video at up to 60 frames per second, or 720p at 120 frames per second. You can preorder today, but Lily will not be delivered until May 2016. Expect to pay \$999. www.lily.camera



AMAZON ECHO

If you're looking for a new personal assistant, Amazon has you covered. The Amazon Echo is designed to do as you command — whether it be adding milk to your shopping list, answering trivia, controlling household temperature or playing your favorite music playlist. The Echo, which uses an advanced voice recognition system, has seven microphones and can hear your voice from across a room. The Echo activates when hearing the "wake word." The Echo is constantly evolving, adapting to your speech patterns and personal preferences. "Alexa" is the brain within Echo, which is built into the cloud, meaning it's constantly getting smarter and updating automatically. It's available for \$179.99 on www.amazon.com.

ICPOOCH

Have you ever wondered what your beloved pup is doing while you're not at home? Wonder no more. iCPooch allows you to see your dog whenever you're away. By attaching a tablet to the base of iCPooch, your dog can see you, and you can see them — you can even command iCPooch to dispense a treat. Just download the free app to your tablet or smartphone and never miss a moment with your pup! iCPooch is available for \$99, not including tablet, from Amazon and the website store.icpooch.com.



Local author releases first book, others in the works

By MELISSA SMITH

Some readers who become absorbed with the characters in “Forgive Their Sins” fear for their favorite’s fate. “Well, good guys don’t always finish first,” author A’Sian Starr Dotson says. “You’ll get to connect with them in the next book.”

The novel is the first in a planned series, “A Journey to the Truth,” written by a woman you might see on a typical weekday down at Abbeville Community Federal Credit Union.

After work, though, she is a writer always trying to translate the stories in her head to paper. The novel is her first, and she self-published in paperback and digitally. Finishing the book, though, took a little extra inspiration.

Dotson went to selfpubbookcovers.com to find the cover art for “Forgive Their Sins.” She decided to purchase a cover after finding the photo that reminded her of the main character Madasin. Then, she



In addition to print, Dotson's books are available on e-readers, as well as through Amazon.



A'Sian Starr Dotson says publishing books today is not nearly as big of a challenge as it used to be.

knew the book had to become a reality. “I thought, ‘I have a cover now, so I have to finish the story,’” Dotson says. “I’ll admit, I did drag my feet a little bit.” She spent \$89 for the cover, and her 14-year-old son, Kalil Warren, helped out with a design for the back cover and the spine.

GOING TO PRINT

Initially, doing a paperback book seemed too expensive, but Dotson discovered she could save a lot of money by doing the formatting herself. After more research, and formatting everything for the e-book, Dotson looked into CreateSpace, which is a division of Amazon. “They help people who want a physical copy of the book. I saw that with a little tweaking, I could put it on paper,” Dotson says.

She believes the Times New Roman typeface looks more professional and flows nicely. “I wanted to make it reader-friendly, especially for people with glasses. Not everyone likes e-books,” Dotson says. But people with e-readers can change the size of the font to accommodate individual tastes.

FINDING AN AUDIENCE

In “Forgive Their Sins,” protagonist Madasin Lake has everything a typical teenage girl could want. She’s wealthy, popular and even has a secret lover. But, a paranormal turn of events throws Madasin’s life upside down.

Marketing can be a challenge for self-published authors. Dotson doesn’t have a personal assistant to help with the footwork involved in self-promotion. She has appeared on the “Southern Fried Morning Show with Benji Greeson,” and her e-book was listed as free for a week on Amazon. She also hosted a contest on her Facebook fan page to name a character in an upcoming book.

All the hard work and late nights are worth it when Dotson meets a fan or sees her book in print. “When I’m writing, if I feel it, I know my readers will feel it,” she says. “You don’t have anything to lose. If nobody but you and your friends read it, or even if it’s not published, go for it. You never know where your journey’s going to take you.”

Local radio provides community spirit and lots of laughs

BY MARIANN MARTIN

Take some local news, a downtown sidewalk, a few jokes and add in plenty of laughter. Drop it in hot grease and you have the “Southern Fried Morning Show.”

“We give people something to laugh at and help them through the day,” host Benji Greeson says. “And we have fun doing it.”

Abbeville’s local morning radio show, which celebrated its one-year anniversary in September, has become a beloved part of the surrounding community. People call, text, send emails and comment on the show’s Facebook page. In an era when many channels are switching to national shows, the mixture of music and talk brings in listeners from more than a dozen states.

In their studio in downtown Abbeville, co-hosts Greeson and Amy Botts discuss community events, bring in

guests to promote fund raisers, announce local birthdays and anniversaries and challenge each other to crazy competitions, like saying their ABCs in reverse or balancing a spoon on their nose. “It helps me get my own day started,” Botts says. “My favorite part is the reaction we get out of our listeners. Who doesn’t want to make someone happy?”

The show started last year after WZLA switched the channel to a country music station. Greeson says the owners came to him, looking for something to add variety to the morning music.

Greeson had interned for a radio show in high school, and he also does an afternoon sports show one day a week. He loves radio and was immediately interested in giving a morning show a try. “This has snowballed way bigger than I ever thought it would be,” he says.



The morning show’s studio near the square in Abbeville helps the hosts keep up with local happenings.

Botts, a longtime friend, was an almost accidental addition after she came in as a replacement guest. The two had a chemistry the audience loved. She now comes in for two hours every day. Being on a radio talk show was never something Botts thought she’d do, but she feels at home behind the microphone — as long as she doesn’t think about the hundreds of people listening.

“We stick out our necks sometimes, and it can get interesting,” she says. “But it has become second nature. I can’t imagine not doing this.”

These days, the two are often stopped in the grocery store or at their childrens’ sports games as people recognize them from the show. Kids want pictures with them, and their friends’ parents and grandparents stop to say hi. But they protest at the term “local celebrity.”

Realizing how important they are to the community and how many people listen to them every day keeps them accountable, Greeson says.

“We are that show that people in the community trust,” he says. “People here have embraced a local voice and a local outlook.”



Hosts Benji Greeson and Amy Botts say they love hearing the reactions their antics get from their listeners.

Southern Fried Morning Show

Tune in from 6-10 a.m. Monday through Friday:

WZLA 92.9 FM

www.wzlaradio.com

TuneIn Radio app

West Carolina TV channels 20 & 27

CLASSIC CHRISTMAS COOKIES

Cookies so good
Santa won't want
to leave

We all know that holiday cookies are a lot more than sugar, flour and eggs. They tell a story.

Remember walking into grandma's house only to see warm cookies she just took from the oven sitting on the counter?

Hope Barker has similar stories when she reminisces about baking cookies with her mom. Her favorite recipe is a simple one: sugar cookies.

"My mom and I used to make these when I was young," she recalls. The recipe came from an old cookbook — now so yellowed and worn with age that it's fallen apart, but, thankfully the pages were saved and are now kept in a folder.

She learned to cook at the apron strings of her mother, Glyndia Conley, and both grandmothers. "I can remember baking when I was in elementary school," Barker says. "My mom and I made sugar cookies to take to school parties. And Mamaw Essie (Conley) taught me how to bake and decorate cakes. From Mamaw Nora (Cottle), I learned how to make stack pies — very thin apple pies stacked and sliced like a cake."

She honed these techniques and soon became known for her baking skills in her town of West Liberty, Kentucky, so much so that she opened a bakery business that she operated from her home, making cookies and cakes for weddings, birthdays, holidays and other special events.

Hope Barker, of West Liberty, Kentucky, makes family cookie recipes her own.



During the holidays, cookies are in demand. Not only are they scrumptious, but just about everyone loves them, too. They make great gifts from the kitchen, and if you arrange them on a beautiful platter, they can become your centerpiece.

"Cookies are easy to make and easy to package," Barker says. "They don't require plates and forks, so they are more convenient than many other desserts. Also, because they are less time-consuming, you can make a variety in less time than many other desserts. They can be decorated many different ways. And who doesn't love to get a plate of pretty cookies?"

But there is one big mistake some less-practiced cooks often make when baking cookies — overbaking.

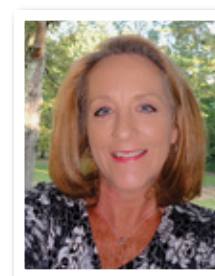
"If you leave them in the oven until they 'look' done, they are going to be overdone," Barker warns. "The heat in the cookies will continue to bake them after you have taken them out of the oven."

She says the best outcome for pretty cookies is to start with the right equipment

— a good, heavy cookie sheet lined with parchment paper. "This will keep them from sticking to the cookie sheet and help them to brown more evenly on the bottom," she says. And when finished, remove them from the oven and let them cool completely before putting them in a sealed, airtight container to keep them moist.

Barker no longer caters, but she continues to do a lot of baking during the holidays for family, coworkers and friends.

Cookies, she says, just seem to be a universal sign of welcome, good wishes and happy holidays. 🍪



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.

Sugar cookies are a delicious and versatile classic during the holiday season. This is Hope Barker's favorite recipe. They can be made as drop cookies or chilled and rolled for cut-out cookies. You can use the fresh dough and roll balls of it in cinnamon sugar to make Snickerdoodles, or use it as a crust for a fruit pizza.

CLASSIC SUGAR COOKIES

- 2/3 cup shortening
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3 1/2 cups self-rising flour
- 1/4 cup milk
- Additional sugar (optional)

Cream together the shortening and sugar. Add the eggs and vanilla and mix very well. Add flour and milk alternately, beginning and ending with flour. Make sure all ingredients are well-incorporated.

For drop cookies, scoop fresh dough into 1-inch balls and place a couple inches apart on a parchment paper-lined cookie sheet. Smear a small amount of shortening on the bottom of a glass, dip the glass into the sugar of your choice and flatten each dough ball into a disk about 1/4-inch thick. Continue to dip the glass into sugar and flatten the dough balls until all are flattened into disks. Sugar can be sprinkled on cookies at this point, if desired. Bake the cookies at 400 degrees for 8-10 minutes. Remove from the oven when they begin to color at the edges.

For rolled and cut cookies, refrigerate the dough for at least 3 hours or overnight. Roll out portions of the dough on a floured surface to about 1/4-inch thick and cut into desired shapes. Sugar can be sprinkled on cookies at this point, if desired. Place the cookies at least 1 inch apart on a parch-



ment paper-lined cookie sheet. Bake at 400 degrees for 8-10 minutes, depending on the size/thickness of the cookies. Remove from the oven when they begin to color at the edges.

SUGAR COOKIE VARIATIONS

Frosted Cookies

Bake either the rolled or drop cookies. Prepare your favorite frosting recipe (or buy canned frosting) and frost the cooled cookies. Frosting can be tinted with different colors and piped on in seasonal designs.

Snickerdoodles

When making the drop cookies, mix together 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon with 1 cup granulated sugar. Roll each ball of dough in the cinnamon-sugar mixture and then put onto the cookie sheet. Flatten with the bottom of a glass into a disk shape and bake as directed.

Maple Cookies

Replace the vanilla flavoring in the recipe with maple flavoring. Make rolled cookies with no sugar on the tops. On the stovetop, stir together 1/4 cup butter and 1/2 cup brown sugar in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil and let boil for 2 minutes. Remove from heat and add 2 tablespoons milk; stir well. (Be careful as the mixture will splatter a little when

you add the milk.) Put saucepan back on stove and bring back to a boil. Remove from heat. Pour the mixture over 1 1/2 cups of sifted powdered sugar and mix on low/medium speed until smooth. Drizzle the warm frosting over the cookies with a spoon. Allow to cool completely.

Jell-O Cookies

Make rolled cookies with no sugar on the tops. When the cookies come out of the oven, spread a thin layer of light corn syrup on the tops with a spoon. Immediately sprinkle with Jell-O gelatin powder of your choice. Allow to cool completely.

Fruit Pizza

Use about a half batch of the dough and spread evenly in a greased jelly roll pan. This will be the crust. Bake at 400 degrees for 10-15 minutes, or until the dough begins to get some color at the edges and on top. Let the crust cool completely. Mix together 8 ounces softened cream cheese with 7 ounces marshmallow creme. Spread this over the crust. Cut up about 4 cups of fresh fruit (strawberries, kiwi, bananas, mandarin oranges, grapes, apples, etc.) and stir together with a package of strawberry fruit gel. Spread the fruit mixture over the cream cheese mixture. Refrigerate before slicing and serving. 📄



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