

# CONNECTED

A man and a woman are standing on a stage, smiling. The woman is wearing a red hat, a white knit sweater, and a red feathered scarf. She is holding a long, thin, gnarled branch. The man is wearing a black pirate hat with a white band, a black eye patch, a light-colored jacket, and a red feathered scarf. He is holding a large, fluffy, light-colored bird. The background is a stage with warm lighting and a balcony with red seats.

## DRAMATIC PURSUIT

Finding your comfort zone in the spotlight

**SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

The Village Grill

**WCTEL SECURITY**

Safeguarding your surroundings

# BROADBAND IS “OUR NEW MANIFEST DESTINY”

## FCC Commissioner Rosenworcel discusses the importance of broadband for rural communities

**D**uring her career, FCC Commissioner Jessica

Rosenworcel has seen the changes that fast broadband service can create throughout the country. Broadband can support economic growth, better health care services and a richer quality of life for area residents.

Rosenworcel recently shared her thoughts with us on how broadband can have a positive impact on rural areas such as those served by your telco.

**Q:** How do you view the role of broadband in today’s society?

**A:** I like to challenge my agency to think big. I like to push them to set big goals when it comes to broadband. Not just for urban America, but also for rural America and everywhere in between. That’s because broadband is not just a technology, it’s also a platform for opportunity. And extending its reach across our country, I like to think, is our new manifest destiny, because it is an essential part of civic and commercial life. No matter who you are or where you live, access to modern communications is what you need for a fair shot at 21st-century success. If you think about it, we’re a country that put a man on the moon — and we invented the Internet — so we know we can do audacious things. If we set big goals, anything short of trying to deliver high-speed broadband service



### ABOUT COMMISSIONER ROSENWORCEL

Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel brings nearly 20 years of public and private sector experience to her position on the Federal Communications Commission. Prior to her confirmation by the U.S. Senate in 2012, Rosenworcel worked under the direction of Senator John D. Rockefeller IV as Senior Communications Counsel for the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

to our communities is setting our goals too low. It will shortchange our children, our future and our digital economy. The challenge of our day is to make sure that it reaches everywhere, rural America included.

**Q:** What kind of changes are possible for rural health care when medical facilities use broadband?


**A:** It makes superior health care possible. It used to be that the folks at rural hospitals would have to spend so much time getting files back and forth to a larger city or that patients would have to take a long drive because they couldn’t receive the services they needed locally. Now, they can provide health care quickly. They can have consultations with experts in large cities through broadband. And using new technology offers more interactive work for those who are health care providers, while providing opportunities for local residents to age in place and get their health care from people they know and trust.

**Q:** The FCC has responsibilities for communications nationwide. What role do you see rural telcos playing in terms of addressing the challenges of economic development and education?

**A:** We’ve had a mandate since the Communications Act of 1934 to help get service everywhere in this country. It’s a principle we call Universal Service, and the USF evolves over time. When I was young, all that meant was having a copper telephone line into every home. But now, we need to make sure that’s a high-capacity broadband line. When we do that, there are many more opportunities for everyone. We might have businesses that want to locate in a rural area where it’s really easy to get high-speed service, and we might have people who can telework and want to work remotely. There are also opportunities for kids to be able to do homework and research online. So I think there’s a lot of economic and educational opportunities that will grow from having a fast network in rural areas.

**Q:** Broadband in large cities often grabs the headlines, but what story are you seeing play out among rural broadband providers?

**A:** Anyone who wants to build better infrastructure for this country deserves praise and our support, but sometimes it overshadows the good work that can come from trusted local companies in rural America. So we have

to praise the good when we see it. Rural telcos have a history of providing service; literally and figuratively they have been there from the ground up. They bring jobs, communications, a personal touch and world-class service to rural America. And I will be totally candid with you; they often deliver higher-speed service than I get at my home back in Washington, D.C. 

## ABOUT THE FCC

The Federal Communications Commission regulates interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. An independent U.S. government agency overseen by Congress, the commission is the United States' primary authority for communications laws, regulation and technological innovation.

## “WHAT’S WRONG WITH MY WI-FI?”

### Many things can impact the strength of the Wi-Fi signal in your home

With so many connected devices being used in homes today, a quality Wi-Fi network is more important than ever. When your Wi-Fi network is not performing properly, your first inclination may be to blame the speed of your Internet connection itself. However, there are many other factors that can cause your home's Wi-Fi network to seem sluggish and to perform poorly. Here are a few:



#### AGE

Older computers and gaming consoles can have slower processors, making it difficult for them to take advantage of the faster broadband speeds available today.



#### DEVICES

Every device connected to your Wi-Fi network is sharing your home's total bandwidth. When your family is using several connected devices (tablets, computers, gaming consoles, streaming devices, etc.) some users may experience slower performance.



#### DISTANCE

The further away you get from your router, the weaker the Wi-Fi signal will be. A laptop on the second floor and opposite end of your home will not get the same connection speed as one downstairs in the same room as the router.



#### INTERFERENCE

Some items in your home can interfere with your Wi-Fi performance even though they are not connected. The main culprit is your microwave oven. Others include Bluetooth devices (keyboard, mouse, headset), as well as fluorescent lights, cordless phones and some external computer monitors.




## RURAL CONNECTIONS

BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA—THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

## Partnering for rural health care

The importance of health care to rural citizens has long been on the minds of three groups: NRECA, the association representing the nation's rural electric cooperatives; NRHA, the association representing health care providers and institutions in rural America; and us, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. While we all would acknowledge that access to health care is vital for a rural community's well-being, we had not figured out a way to combine and intersect to further that goal. Until now.

Leaders from NTCA, NRECA and NRHA met earlier this year and agreed that we have a lot of interests in common. Instead of shooting off in different directions as we try to address rural health care, telemedicine and support for rural facilities, we could be more powerful working together — so that is what we are going to try to do.

In our initial meeting with these two groups, we learned that 673 rural hospitals are vulnerable to closures. I was impressed by NRHA's efforts to promote federal legislation to save rural hospitals. When a rural hospital closes, the economy of a rural community erodes. How might broadband play a role in keeping essential services supported, or even assist in the transition from traditional to telemedicine care? I think there are some really interesting places to take this partnership, and we're willing to devote the time and energy to do just that. I will keep you posted as these talks progress. 

# Saluting small businesses

Small businesses are the backbone of our community, and that's why we're excited to celebrate National Small Business Week May 1-7. But while we're happy to celebrate them, we're even happier to support them with the network they need.



**JEFF WILSON**  
Chief Executive Officer

Nationwide, small businesses account for about half of the private sector jobs — and our area is no exception. Small businesses bake, repair, sell, install, design, service, grill, build, sew, paint, grow, harvest and manufacture much of what gives our community its unique identity.

These small business owners and employees have decided to dedicate their working lives to providing goods and services to people in our community. Were it not for them, in many cases local residents would have to do without those products or travel long distances for those services. And without the leadership and generosity of many small business owners in our area, local festivals, nonprofit groups and civic projects might not exist.

In the telco world, we're a small business compared to the billion-dollar national communications companies. Just like those small businesses in our communities, we're committed to providing high-quality services that might not exist here without us.

And just like those small business owners, we're a part of this community. In fact, we're working hard every day to support those small business owners and give them access to advanced technology.

A 2010 study of small business owners by the Small Business Administration found that businessmen and women believed Internet access is as essential to their business as other utilities such as water, sewer and electricity. In the six years since that study, I think it's safe to say that broadband access has grown even more important.

The same 2010 study predicted that a fiber network was the best way to meet the increasing demands of small businesses. That's why I'm proud that we've built our all-fiber network to meet those needs. In 2016, small business success means connecting to customers both near and far through the Internet.

I like to think about it like this — in order to keep doing what they do best, small business owners need to stream training videos, search for addresses, browse industry websites, promote their business with Web ads, interact with customers on social media, swipe credit cards, post job ads, update their accounting records, send files to vendors, order supplies and research customer trends.

Our network is what enables them to do that. We're one small business helping many other small businesses. I'm proud we are their trusted technology partner; I'm proud of the important role they play in our community; and I'm proud of the network we've built to help them compete, succeed and grow. ☺



See Page 13 for a spotlight on our Small Business of the Year!

The West Carolina Tel Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by West Carolina Telephone, © 2016. 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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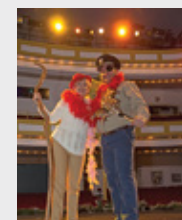
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Produced for West Carolina Tel by:



#### On the Cover:



Judy Cannon and Brian Sorrow frequently take the stage in performances at the Abbeville Opera House. See story Page 8.

# New interim board member



On March 7, 2016, the board of directors selected Mr. Robert Hester to serve on the board of directors representing Area 6 — Calhoun Falls — for the unexpired term ending August 2017. The board deliberated over several candidates who expressed interest, guided by the combination of qualifications, community involvement and respect.

When this term expires, the membership will elect the board representative from the nominating committee recommendation(s) as well as any qualified petition candidates that are filed. Both

the nominating committee report and the petition candidates will be on the ballot sent to all members. All members will be informed of the election process and will have an opportunity to participate and vote.

Hester was raised in Calhoun Falls and returned to the area after a distinguished military career. He graduated from West Point with a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering. For 20 years, Hester served in various levels of the United States Army, followed by 13 years as an information technology consultant for the military. Hester returned to the area three years ago to work the family farm. He has joined numerous local service groups and civic organizations.



## Mark your Calendars!

### SPRING FESTIVAL IN ABBEVILLE

- » **May 5** @ 5-10 p.m.
- » **May 6** @ 4-11 p.m.
- » **May 7** @ 11 a.m.-11 p.m.

### MAY TECHLINK: DIGITAL SPRING CLEANING

- » **May 9** @ 2:30-3:30 p.m. – Abbeville
- » **May 10** @ 2:30-3:30 p.m. – Iva
- » **May 12** @ 2:30-3:30 p.m. – McCormick

### WCTEL RELAY FOR LIFE

- » **June 3** — Downtown Abbeville on the square — 6 p.m. to Midnight  
*WCTEL has raised \$10,000 for the last 4 years.*

### JUNE TECHLINK: PINTEREST

- » **June 6** @ 2:30-3:30 p.m. – Abbeville
- » **June 7** @ 2:30-3:30 p.m. – Iva
- » **June 9** @ 2:30-3:30 p.m. – McCormick

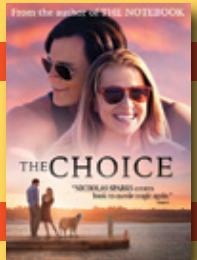


## Video on Demand New Release Schedule

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."

### May 3

- The 5th Wave
- The Choice
- Joy\*



### May 4

- Star Wars: The Force Awakens

### May 10

- Where to Invade Next
- The Boy (2016)\*
- Deadpool\*
- Mustang



### May 17

- The Witch
- The Mermaid (Mei Ren Yu)
- Dirty Grandpa

### May 24

- Zoolander 2
- Risen



### May 27

- Gods of Egypt

### May 31

- Race
- Under the Gun
- Pride and Prejudice and Zombies
- Triple Nine\*

### June 7

- 13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi
- Hail, Caesar!\*
- London Has Fallen\*

WCTEL recognizes the Township of McCormick, which celebrated its 100-year anniversary in February.



# Magnificent MUSEUMS

BY ANNE BRALY

Photo courtesy of Thinkery

**F**inding appropriate activities for kids when families travel can be one of the most difficult aspects of a summer vacation. That's where children's museums can help, offering at least a few hours of entertainment for the young ones. It's a win-win experience, fostering education while offering parents a well-deserved break. Here are some Southern favorites.

## CREATIVE DISCOVERY MUSEUM

321 Chestnut St., Chattanooga, Tennessee  
Contact: 423-756-2738; [www.cdmfun.org](http://www.cdmfun.org)

An anchor of Chattanooga's exciting riverfront district, the Creative Discovery Museum offers kids a one-of-a-kind experience, where they explore art, science, music, engineering and more. Young visitors investigate the world around them through dozens of interactive exhibits.

Newest exhibit: "Make It" encourages children to put on their tinker's hats and learn basic woodworking, sewing and construction skills.

Most popular: Kids love making a splash and climbing the two-story structure in "RiverPlay" while learning about the power of water and how a river works.

- Summer hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. seven days a week
- Restaurant: Cafe Dino-Mite
- Tickets: \$12.95 (ages 2 and up)
- Bonus: It's within easy walking distance of the Tennessee Aquarium and IMAX 3D Theater.



## TECH-SAVVY TRAVELER:

School is almost out for the summer, but that doesn't mean the learning has to stop. Mobile apps and e-books can keep your kids engaged in the reading, art, math and music skills they learned at school. Browse your tablet's device store for apps from well-known brands like **PBS**, **Crayola** and **Duplo** for fun, educational games. Amazon's Kindle store even has a full line of interactive books from **Dr. Seuss**. And best of all, the books and games stay nice and organized on your tablet instead of flying all over the back seat!



## EDVENTURE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

211 Gervais St., Columbia, South Carolina  
Contact: 803-779-3100; [www.edventure.org](http://www.edventure.org)

EdVenture is an all-compassing experience for kids with more than 350 interactive and hands-on exhibits, including an amazing anatomical journey through Big Eddie, the world's largest child. "We're the perfect destination for curious minds," says Kristy Barnes, director of marketing.

Newest exhibit: "Blooming Butterflies" teaches children the life cycle of butterflies, from cocoon to flight.

Most popular: Slide down the fire pole, hop on the fire truck and sound the alarm! It's "Dalmatian Station," an exhibit focusing on fire safety.

- Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday (summer hours), noon-5 p.m. Sunday
- Restaurant: Canalfront Cafe
- Tickets: \$11.50 (ages 2 and up)
- Bonus: The Columbia Riverwalk, a 4.5-mile stretch of greenway along the Congaree River, is within walking distance and ideal for picnicking.



Photo courtesy of EarlyWorks Children's Museum.

The EarlyWorks Museum • Huntsville, AL

## THE EARLYWORKS FAMILY OF MUSEUMS

404 Madison St. SE, 320 Church St. NW,  
109 Gates Ave. SE, Huntsville, Alabama  
Contact: 256-564-8100; [www.earlyworks.com](http://www.earlyworks.com)

A three-in-one explosion of fun and education can be experienced with a visit to Huntsville's EarlyWorks Family of Museums: The EarlyWorks Children's Museum, the Alabama Constitution Village and the Historic Huntsville Depot. Each offer a taste of history based on how Alabama became the state it is

today. "There's something for everyone to enjoy," says Amanda Cook, educational services manager.

Newest exhibit: "Dog Days of Summer" teaches the history of our canine companions — where they originated, presidential pooches and the most popular breeds. Kids can play dog games, too.

Most popular: "The Talking Tree" at the EarlyWorks Children's Museum lets kids enjoy sitting around a tree and listening to stories of the olden days.

- Hours: EarlyWorks Children's Museum — 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (summer hours), Huntsville Depot and Museum — 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily (park hours) and 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday (museum hours, closed in January and February), Alabama Constitution Village — 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Saturday (summer hours, closed in January and February)
- Restaurant: None, but picnic tables on-site
- Tickets: \$5-12 depending on age and museum
- Bonus: Bundle your fun with ticket packages for all three museums — \$5 (children 1-3), \$20 (ages 4-17 and seniors 55-plus) and \$25 (adults 18-54).



Photo courtesy of Amazement Square.

Amazement Square • Lynchburg, VA

## AMAZEMENT SQUARE, THE RIGHTMIRE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

27 Ninth St., Lynchburg, Virginia  
Contact: 434-845-1888;  
[www.amazementsquare.com](http://www.amazementsquare.com)

An award-winning museum with 29,000 square feet of interactive fun. Guests can paint the walls, explore life

on the farm, float a boat down the James River or rock out onstage in their own band. It's a stimulating space for children to gather.

Newest exhibit: "The League of Healthy Heroes" encourages a balanced diet and active lifestyle by pitting a healthy body against three villains: Sofablix, Junk Monster and Screen Blob.

Most popular: "On the James" is a replica model of the James River. Children float boats with locks and channels to maneuver along the way.

- Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 1-5 p.m. Sunday
- Restaurant: A cafe inside the Kidz Warehouse Museum Shop offering snack options
- Tickets: \$9 (ages 1-59), \$6 (ages 60-plus)

Bonus: The neighboring Craddock-Terry Hotel offers a package deal that includes free admission for two to the museum.

## THINKERY

1830 Simond Ave., Austin, Texas  
Contact: 512-469-6200; [thinkeryaustin.org](http://thinkeryaustin.org)

Austin's new home for the "how and why," Thinkery is a place where science and children play side by side. "It's a place for a new generation of innovators," says spokeswoman Adrienne Longenecker.

Newest exhibit: "Space 8" is designed for children 8 and up. The exhibit deepens their understanding of science, technology, engineering, art and math through old and new technologies.

Most popular: In the "Currents" exhibit, children and parents get wet exploring concepts of fluid dynamics, engaging visitors in aquatic investigations.

- Museum hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday-Sunday
- Restaurant: SNAP Kitchen
- Tickets: \$9 (ages 2 and up), \$1 off for seniors
- Bonus: Mueller Lake Park is directly across the street with lots of play and picnic areas. ☞

# The curtain calling

BY LISA SAVAGE

**T**he path to the Abbeville Opera House stage is unique to each performer. While a love of music guided the way for Judy Cannon, the urge to overcome the fear of public speaking motivated Brian Sorrow.

While their inspiration differed, their love and devotion to Abbeville's landmark theater is much the same for the two WCTEL employees.

"I have always felt at home on the stage even though I don't consider myself a good actress," says Cannon, an employee at WCTEL since 1972.

"Being in a play gives you a chance to become someone else," she says. In fact, it was Cannon's love and devotion to music and theater that inspired Sorrow to seek a role himself.

"I could never speak in front of a crowd, and they looked like they were having a good time," the 19-year employee says. He wanted to overcome his fear, so he reached out to Cannon for guidance.

The next auditions were for "A Christmas Carol" in 2010, and Sorrow got the role of the minister. "I thought, 'Even if I can't do this, I'll have a really



Brian Sorrow is in his sixth year as an actor and is on the board of directors for the Abbeville Opera House. Judy Cannon has been involved in community theater since childhood, and was named Abbeville Woman of the Year in 1982 for her many contributions to local events.

good time," he says. But he did it and was hooked.

Cannon's love for the stage began much earlier. She has been singing for as long as she can remember.

"My mother always said I was born singing," Cannon says. "If it weren't for her, I would not have had all the opportunities to use and enjoy my musical abilities, so I'd like for all the credit to be given to her."

Cannon's love for the stage began at age 4, when she was a contestant in the Little River Electric Co-op talent contest. She sang "Singin' in the Rain" and won first place. She continued to participate in many local and state contests throughout her childhood and landed her first role in the play "The Sound of Music" at 12 years old.

She started her first job as organist at the Abbeville Episcopal Church at 14 years old and has continued as an organist, pianist or choir director at several churches in Abbeville and Greenwood.

In 1970, at 17, she won the title of Miss Abbeville and participated in the Miss South Carolina pageant that summer.

Cannon got married, and her participation in plays and contests ceased as she devoted her music to church, funerals and weddings. In 1982, she was named Abbeville Woman of the Year for her musical contributions.

She has occasionally returned





Brian Sorrow (center) played the butler in the 2014 presentation of "Ten Little Indians."

Photo courtesy of Shawn M. Knox Photography.



Judy Cannon played Glinda the good witch in a performance of the Wizard of Oz.

to the Abbeville Opera House for numerous productions, and even served on the board of directors for two terms.

"I have let several years go by without trying out for a play, and I do miss it," she says. She and her husband continue to support the Opera House as season ticket holders.

It seems almost as if Sorrow has picked up where Cannon left off with the theater.

He has been on the board of directors since 2011 and helps out with just about anything that needs to be done, such as set construction, lighting and sound or by serving as an usher.

"I love to see it all come together," he says. "From the first read through to the final show is great."

He says he doesn't consider himself an actor, but he loves

every aspect of what the theater represents. He says his biggest struggle is with accents.

"If I have a role that has a British accent, it's going to be from Southern England," the Abbeville native says. "I can't change that."

He has been involved in many plays, including the role of a man who ran an insane asylum. In another role, he was murdered onstage.

Sorrow also has many other activities to keep him busy. He is involved with his college-aged children and currently attends Piedmont Technical College studying computer technology. He continues at WCTEL as the business service technician.

He said now he doesn't let his male ego stop him from his involvement in the theater,

and he loves most typical guy things, like sports and NASCAR.


He recently got involved with go-karts. Now, he and his son race go-karts — a sport that started as a hobby.

"Now it's work," he says. "I do stay busy and keep a full plate."

Sorrow will continue to

spread his wings at the Opera House.

Cannon, WCTEL's accounting supervisor, says retirement is approaching and that she has been blessed with a wonderful husband and their children and grandchildren.

"Who knows, maybe I'll even be back on the Abbeville Opera House stage," she says. 

## Living history

### The Abbeville Opera House continues to thrill

The Abbeville Opera House opened its doors in 1908, and there were more than 260 live performances in the first five years of its existence.

The Opera House now attracts more than 17,000 patrons annually, and it is considered the Official State Theatre of South Carolina.

It's also considered one of the catalysts for the revitalization of the historic area in Abbeville and will conclude its 107th season with performances of "The Miracle Worker," the story of Annie Sullivan, the teacher for blind and mute Helen Keller.

Performances are on April 15, 16, 22 and 23. The summer season kicks off with "Dial 'M' For Murder" by Frederick Knott, with performances on June 10, 11, 17, 18, 24 and 25. Then, "The Marriage-Go-Round" by Leslie Stevens is July 8, 9, 15, 16, 22 and 23. Performances of "Daddy's Dyin' Who's Got the Will?" by Del Shores are scheduled for Aug. 5, 6, 12, 13, 19 and 20.

For more information about Abbeville Opera House, visit their website at [www.abbevilleoperahouse.com](http://www.abbevilleoperahouse.com).



Judy Cannon and Brian Sorrow have performed in several performances at the Abbeville Opera House.

Jeff Clark

# HITTING *the* TRAIL

A Q&A with Jeff Clark, a blogger from western North Carolina, who writes about his adventures hiking our nation's trails.

Check out his blog, *Meanderthals*, at

[HTTP://INTERNETBROTHERS.ORG](http://internetbrothers.org)



**Q: What do readers find at your blog?**

**Jeff Clark:** Meanderthals is a series of trail reports for many of the best hikes in western North Carolina and the surrounding region. Most posts on my blog are about hikes available in this area. Occasionally, however, I do branch out to other parts of the country. For example, I love the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and the red rock desert and canyons of the Southwest.

**Q: When did you begin blogging and how has it changed your life?**

**JC:** In 2000, I started a blog about the curves that life can throw you. It ran until 2007. Then, I took a break. In 2011, I returned to the blogging fraternity when I introduced Meanderthals. Blogging hasn't changed my life. It has enabled me to journal it.

**Q: What sparked your interest in the outdoors, and when did you first start hiking?**

**JC:** I developed an interest in wild places and things on a cross-country family trip right before I started high school. I've now hiked for 40 years, and it's become my primary passion in the last 10.

**Q: Do you often set out for a day hike, or do you enjoy making your hikes a multi-day escape?**

**JC:** When I was younger, I would occasionally combine hiking with camping, but never more than a few days at a time. Despite my love of the outdoors, "roughing it" has never really been my thing. A year ago I purchased a Subaru Outback. I can now sleep overnight in my car, enabling me to go farther afield in search of trails.

**Q: What's a good, easy but beautiful hike for a beginner?**

**JC:** Grassy Ridge in the Roan Highlands. It's located along the North Carolina and Tennessee state line, where Pisgah and Cherokee National Forests merge. The month of June simply isn't complete without a visit to Roan Highlands for the annual rhododendron and azalea blooms.

**What is the most important gear to take, even if you're just going to be out for a few hours?**

**JC:** A companion in case of emergency, preferably someone with more experience and the 10 essentials: food, water, sun-block, a change of dry clothes, flashlight, matches and fire starter, map, compass, pocket knife and first-aid kit.

**OTHER HIKING BLOGS YOU MIGHT LIKE:**

▶ [HTTP://YOUROUTDOORFAMILY.COM](http://youroutdoorfamily.com)

This blog bundles favorite places for outdoor activities, from hiking to biking to zip lining.

▶ [HTTP://THEOUTCASTSHIKEAGAIN.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://theoutcastshikeagain.blogspot.com)

This group of bloggers from the Murfreesboro, Tennessee, fire department write about their quests to tackle the trails of Tennessee and beyond.

**Q: Is it a good idea to take young ones along? If so, what's the best kind of hike for them?**

**JC:** Absolutely! Getting children interested in wild places early in life will usually keep them interested forever. The wilderness is a better tool for nurturing than are television and video games. ☺

# GO-TO SUMMER GADGETS for the great outdoors

Whether you're planning the perfect summer party with guests or simply spending time with the family, we've found a few gadgets that will make your summer backyard experience into the ultimate staycation location.

By JENNIFER CALHOUN

## GRILLBOT

Take the ill out of scrubbing the grill. Outdoor grilling is great until it comes to cleaning the mess left behind by those char-grilled masterpieces. But now that we're fully locked in the 21st century, it's time to stop scrubbing and leave the mess to someone — or something — else. Try the Grillbot, (\$129.95, grillbots.com) a robotic grill cleaner that works with the touch of a button. Whether your grill needs a light scrub or a deep clean, the Grillbot can do the job that you'd rather not. The robot offers replaceable, dishwasher-safe wire brushes that pop off for easy cleaning, a rechargeable battery, three electric motors, an LCD alarm and timer and a chip that controls movement, speed and direction of the brushes. The Grillbot comes in four colors, blue (shown), red, orange and black.



Smart Sprinkler Controller (\$224.95 at Amazon.com) can take the tension out of getting a lush landscape. This techno gadget connects to your Wi-Fi network, monitors the weather, manages your sprinkler system remotely, sends water usage reports and incorporates local water restriction schedules by the day or hour. At the same time, it also creates and manages watering schedules to keep your lawn green.

## SOJI POD SOLAR LANTERNS

Consider giving your yard a colorful makeover after the sun sets with Soji Pod Solar Lanterns (\$26.99 at allsopgarden.com.) Forget the fairy lights and try out these nylon-covered, oblong lanterns to give your yard a touch of the Far East. The 15-inch high lanterns collect light all day through their solar panels and feature dual LED lights and AAA rechargeable batteries so you can enhance the beauty of those summer nights in an eco-friendly way.



## MISTO OUTDOOR MISTING FAN

Stay cool all summer with the Lasko 7050 Misto Outdoor Misting Fan (\$115 at Amazon.com.) This portable, but sturdy, misting fan hooks to your garden hose to reduce the nearby air temperature by about 25 degrees. Use it on your deck, at a picnic or while playing sports. The fan offers a 90-degree

pivot to direct mist flow, automatic louvers to create a wide sweep and three speeds.

## SKYDROP SMART SPRINKLER CONTROLLER

Want to go greener while also getting a greener lawn? The Skydrop



## SHOWER CREATURES

While originally for the shower, Shower Creatures (\$30 at thegrommet.com) are funky, water-resistant Wi-Fi speakers that are good anywhere water might be present. Kids, as well as

adults, will love the adorable, snail- and octopus-shaped speakers that power on with a 30-foot range. Hard-gripping suction cups adhere them to even the slickest surfaces, and the six-hour battery life will keep you jamming well into the night. The Shower Creatures also feature a built-in microphone so you can answer your phone without using your hands. 📞

# Protecting what matters most

BY MATT LEDGER

Whenever a door opens in Jim Alewine's home, the family's 19-year-old, yellow-headed Amazon parrot, Deacon, makes a squeal mimicking the security system.

"He's got the sounds down," says Alewine, laughing. In fact, the security system provided by WCTEL is ingrained in the family's day-to-day life. And it does far more than entertain Deacon.

Alewine, who spent a 30-year career as an electronic technician, lives with his wife, Robbie, in Abbeville.

Before installing the security system, Alewine slept facing the bedroom door as a precaution. Now, he sleeps much better, knowing authorities will be alerted and called within seconds of any intrusion.

"We're about as rural as it gets," Alewine says. "It's an added sense of security for my wife, and I wish that I would have done it a long time ago."

## CUSTOMIZED SECURITY

The system also provides additional assurance when his young grandchildren visit. Elan, 10, and Liam, 3, stay so often that Alewine decorated their bedroom like Batman's cave.

And modern security systems, such as those provided by WCTEL, can do more than

guard against potential intruders.

For example, if the boys try to sneak out to use the backyard pool, the system sounds an alert announcing which door opened. "They won't make it more than a few steps. If I hear that alert while they're here, I'll come running," Alewine says.

The wireless security system also has a battery backup, which can keep the system operating if the home loses power. The system will alert homeowners of a power outage, and sound again once electricity is restored.

Also, WCTEL members can opt to add exterior security lights and cameras to further protect their property. As a



Jim Alewine operates the control panel for the WCTEL security system that was installed in 2015.

longtime volunteer firefighter, Alewine already knows the importance of using carbon monoxide and smoke detectors. These are among the system upgrades he is considering for 2016.

## EASE OF USE

The system routes all alerts to the homeowner's mobile phone, which provides an additional layer of security. For example, imagine a family on vacation. A burglary back home would not only immedi-

ately alert authorities, but also send a message to the family's mobile devices. There's less risk of the family returning at the wrong moment to an unwelcome surprise.

And when it comes to day-to-day use, activating and deactivating the system is as simple as the push of a button. "The key fobs just take all the work out of it," Alewine says, making the security system as easy to operate as locking your vehicle in a parking lot.

"West Carolina Telephone has a high standard that you can always count on," he says, impressed with the wireless Honeywell equipment selected by the telco.

The system is part of their lives, including Deacon's. The parrot will squeal like a siren each time a door alert sounds. "He always says it's the back door. I just laugh and tell him that he's lying," Alewine says. "Then, he'll laugh at me, exactly like my wife." 🗨️



Jim Alewine's parrot Deacon always repeats the security prompts from the WCTEL security system installed in the home.

# Eating local at the Village Grill

## A fresh approach to food



Bill and Molly Savitz have operated The Village Grill for more than two decades. WCTEL's Director of Business Solutions Chuck Nash presented the award for Small Business of the Year for 2016.

### What led you to start this business?

Growing up, Bill Savitz loved to cook bacon and grits for his family. As a teen, and later as a college student, he sharpened those skills to become a seasoned kitchen veteran. "I always had a dream of owning my own restaurant" he says. "I continued learning until I opened in 1992."

### What is the best part of your job?

"Seeing people enjoy the food that we serve them," Savitz says. "When people compliment us on a dish, that's where all the hard work finds satisfaction." He still spends most of his time in the kitchen.

### Why is it important to shop local?

With a focus on freshness, The Village Grill locally sources several items for the menu. "Buying locally helps support our farmers and their families," Savitz says. "I build a relationship with the people that I buy from."



### THE VILLAGE GRILL

**Owner:** Bill and Molly Savitz

**Year Founded:** 1992

**Description:** The Village Grill has a commitment to quality meals with fine dining in a casual atmosphere. "We cater to a wide variety of tastes," Savitz says. It's Abbeville's top-ranked restaurant, according to customer reviews on TripAdvisor.com. Dinner specials are promoted on the restaurant's Facebook page.

**Location:**  
110 Trinity St., Abbeville

**Phone number:**  
864-366-2500

**Website:**  
[www.abbevillevillagegrill.com](http://www.abbevillevillagegrill.com)

*"The Village Grill is a great example of how our fiber technology is making an impact in local businesses. They efficiently use social media to promote chalkboard menus of their tasty weekly specials. They're incredible customers, and we're proud to have them as the Small Business of the Year."*

**-WCTEL**



## CELEBRATING NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

May 1-7 is National Small Business Week. America's 28 million small businesses account for about half of all jobs in the private sector. WCTEL is proud to celebrate their contributions by spotlighting our Small Business of the Year. Congratulations to **The Village Grill** and to all the small businesses we are honored to serve!

# THE TASTE OF SPRING — LUSH, FRESH STRAWBERRIES

There is just one thing wrong with fresh local strawberries: The season doesn't last long enough. Mother Nature opens the window just a bit, allowing us to reach in and grab the sweet, red juicy berries before she shuts the season. It's almost gone before it begins.

"Fresh, locally grown strawberries are eagerly anticipated every year," says Bill McCartney, owner of The Red Door Art Cafe in Cullman, Alabama, home of one of the biggest strawberry festivals in the South. Since 1939, it's been happening around the first of May — this year May 6-7. Expect to find some of the biggest and best strawberries in North Alabama.

"Of course we can buy strawberries in grocery stores all year; however, they're a poor relative to local warm, luscious berries picked and sold at our farmers markets," McCartney says, adding that it's these berries his customers crave. "We have locals and tourists come to The Red Door to enjoy our classic berries and cream.

"The quality and taste of Cullman County strawberries are so much better than what grocers ship from 'somewhere,'" McCartney adds. "And while we may use strawberries as garnish or in fruit cups throughout the year, we only shine the spotlight on our strawberry concoctions during our local growing season."

The Red Door Art Cafe opened in a historic 1898 home in late 2014, more as a place to feature local art than as an eatery. But in the short time the cafe has been open, it has evolved into a bit of both. It features both culinary and visual arts, and it supports area nonprofits. After bills are paid and payroll is met, all proceeds are donated to charity.

"All of our recipes are influenced by what I have done for years at home," McCartney says. "In particular our hamburgers reflect our family cooking. Customers tell us that we have the best hamburgers in Cullman."

Buying local, including the strawberries



In North Alabama, nobody knows what to do with strawberries better than Bill McCartney.

McCartney purchases from local markets and farms, is a signature at The Red Door.

"Cullman has led Alabama in agricultural production for decades, and it's only natural that buying locally grown produce is part of what we do," McCartney says. "It's a win-win-win proposition for The Red Door, its customers and its producers."


The Cullman Strawberry Festival brings fantastic crowds to the town, and it's during the festival that The Red Door Art Cafe rolls out its berry best.

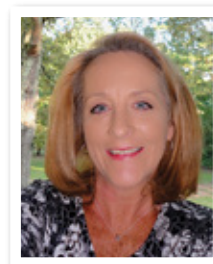
"We had two or three strawberry offerings last year and plan to make a much bigger splash this year," McCartney says.

Additions to the menu will include homemade strawberry shortcake. Also, expect strawberry "babies," which are luscious berries sweetened with honey and orange zest and tucked between pastry rounds. Another treat will be strawberry Napoleons, berries layered between sheets of flaky phyllo dough drizzled with honey yogurt.

McCartney grew up in the city, the son of a NASA engineer. He credits his mother for instilling in him an appreciation for farms and what farmers do for us. "As a kid, our family would make annual trips to pick strawberries and other fruits and vegetables," he says. "On the way home from picking, we would talk about all the ways we wanted to prepare them."

And it's some of these ideas that laid a tasty foundation for his future in the restaurant business.

"Customers start looking for our desserts using real Cullman strawberries as soon as the jonquils start blooming," he says. "The Red Door Art Cafe and big, red strawberries are a natural fit." 



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

## RED DOOR SOUTHERN STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE

- 32 ounces fresh strawberries
- 12 Pillsbury frozen biscuits
- 1 cup whipping cream
- 3/4 cup powdered sugar, divided
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract (more if you like vanilla)
- Fresh mint sprigs

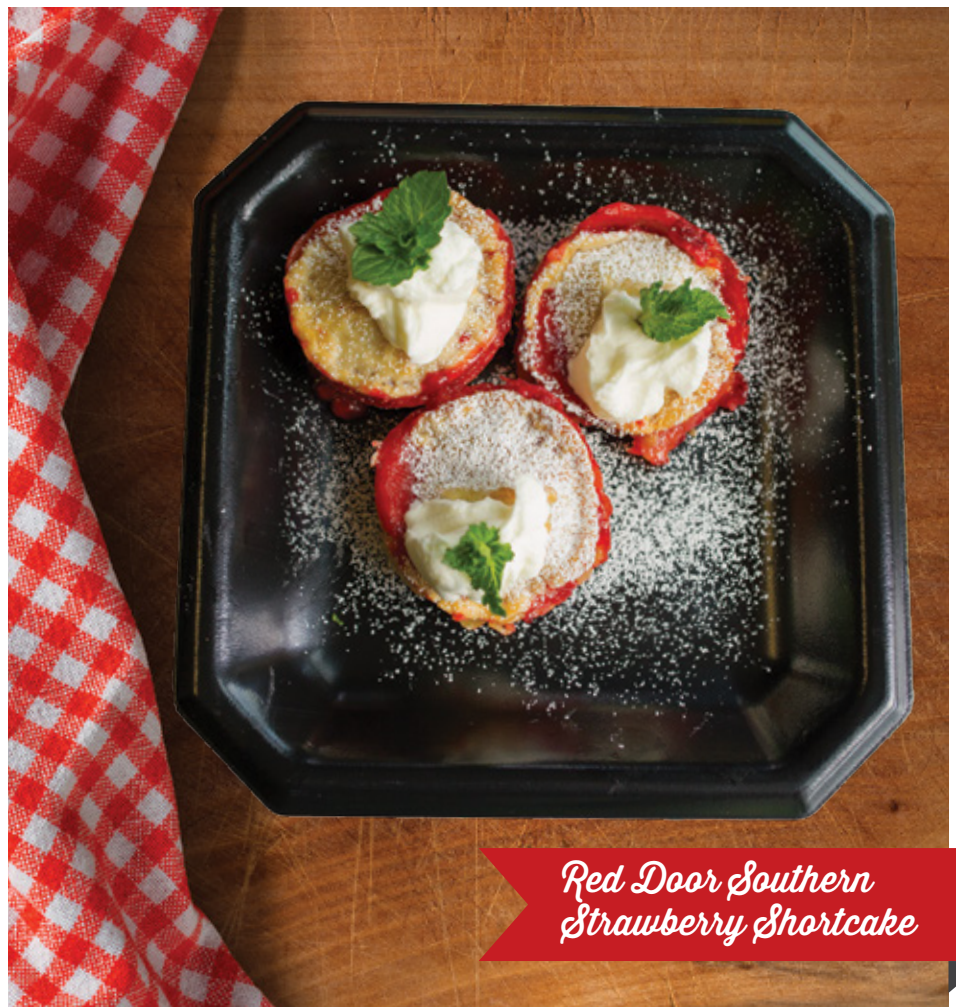
Bake biscuits according to package directions, then set them aside to cool. Halve strawberries and combine with 1/2 cup powdered sugar. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours to macerate. Beat whipping cream with an electric mixer until it begins to stiffen. Add remaining powdered sugar and vanilla. Continue beating until soft peaks form. Cover and chill while strawberries macerate. To serve, split biscuits in half. Divide the berry mixture and place on biscuit bottoms; top with a rounded tablespoon of chilled whipped cream and cover with tops. Makes 12 servings.

*Note: If there is extra whipped cream, put a dollop on the top with a sprig of mint or garnish with mint, however it looks good to you.*

## RED DOOR STRAWBERRY BABIES

- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1/2 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/2 tablespoon arrowroot or 1 tablespoon cornstarch (see note)
- Zest of half an orange
- 1 1/4 cups diced strawberries
- Cooking spray
- 2 refrigerated pie crusts
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon water

Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Whisk together the honey, lemon juice, arrowroot (or corn starch) and orange zest until smooth. Stir in the strawberries and set aside. Spray a muffin tin with cooking spray. Using a biscuit cutter, cut out 12 (3-inch) and 12 (2-inch) circles of dough. Press the 3-inch circles of dough into the muffin cups. Beat the egg and



*Red Door Southern Strawberry Shortcake*

water together to make an egg wash. Divide the filling among the 12 muffin cups. Brush the top edge of the bottom crusts with egg wash and place the 2-inch tops on each. Crimp edges of dough together with a fork, then brush tops with egg for a nice finish. Cut 1/4-inch slits in the tops of each so steam can escape. Bake for 14 minutes or until golden brown. Cool for 30 minutes before removing from pan. Makes 12 servings.

*Note: If you can find it, arrowroot typically works better with acidic ingredients.*

## RED DOOR STRAWBERRY NAPOLEONS

- 16 ounces strawberries, sliced in rounds
- 10 ounces plain yogurt
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 4 frozen phyllo sheets

Vegetable cooking spray

- 1 teaspoon sugar
- Mint sprigs, for garnish

Stir together yogurt and honey, cover and place in refrigerator. Combine strawberries and 2 tablespoons sugar; cover and refrigerate for about an hour to macerate. Place 1 sheet of thawed phyllo on work surface. Spray with cooking spray and sprinkle with 1/4 teaspoon sugar. Place a second sheet over first one and repeat. Cut stacked phyllo into 6 rectangles. Repeat procedure with two remaining sheets of phyllo. Place phyllo on cookie sheets and bake at 450 degrees until browned, 10-12 minutes. Divide strawberries onto six rectangles. Drizzle with half of the yogurt-honey mixture. Top with remaining phyllo rectangles and drizzle with remaining yogurt-honey mixture. Garnish with mint. Makes 6 servings. 📖



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