

West Carolina Tel

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2018

CONNECTED

SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT

Red Rooster Emporium
keeps customers
coming back

HELPING HANDS

Volunteers work
to help families
in need

DRESSING FOR DINNER

A classic Southern dish
gets a makeover





BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Rural broadband is on our wish list

The federal government is not usually known for moving quickly. That said, the Rural Utilities Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has been working at a fast and furious pace the past several weeks on its e-Connectivity Pilot Program. This program could make \$600 million available in loans and grants to bring broadband to rural areas where service is desperately needed.

Now, let's hope the USDA is just as fast and furious when it comes to releasing funds to rural broadband providers who can continue to build networks in areas where connectivity is sorely needed.

Many of you reading this enjoy access to a reliable broadband network thanks to your local telecommunications provider. The cooperative and independent telcos who are part of NTCA have done a tremendous job of connecting their members and customers to some of the fastest internet service available in the country. Even so, rural America is home to many communities that are so remote, isolated and sparsely populated that extending service to them is a serious challenge.

Through NTCA, telcos like yours share their opinions and concerns with elected officials and agencies. We sent a letter to RUS stating that the rules of the e-Connectivity Pilot Program should be set in a way that makes sense and that prioritizes the most productive use of limited federal dollars.

Seeing progress that releases new dollars for rural broadband is definitely on our wish list this season. 📶

Groups study impact of broadband on rural prosperity

Several national associations, nonprofits and government agencies joined forces throughout 2018 to examine the impact of broadband on life in rural America.

The Farm Foundation, a nonpartisan agricultural policy institute, launched a project entitled "What's on the Horizon for E-Connectivity in Rural America." As part of this project, the group organized a series of E-Connectivity Listening Sessions in collaboration with CoBank, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"We want to identify the challenges rural communities now face in providing quality broadband services, as well as the innovative options being used to address those challenges," said Constance Cullman, Farm Foundation president and moderator of the listening sessions.

One of the sessions was in Birmingham, Alabama, in August. Among the panelists was Fred Johnson, executive vice president and general manager of Farmers Telecommunications Cooperative in Rainsville, Alabama. Johnson also serves on the board of directors for NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association.

Johnson applauded the effort to bring stakeholders together to share the accomplishments of small, rural broadband providers. "Closing the digital divide is a goal we all share, and creating partnerships to reinvest in our networks is an important component of achieving that goal," he said.

Also speaking at the Birmingham session was Jannine Miller, USDA's senior advisor for rural infrastructure. She discussed the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity that was formed in 2017. The task force identified over 100 recommendations for the federal government to consider in order to help improve life in rural America. The recommendations centered around five areas, with e-connectivity being central to all components (see illustration below).

More information about the listening sessions — including videos of the events — can be found at www.farmfoundation.org. 📺

RURAL BROADBAND: A KEY TO AMERICAN PROSPERITY



Source: USDA. The agency's full report can be found at www.usda.gov/ruralprosperity.

Always on

More than one-quarter of adults constantly online



Social media, text messages, gaming, weather reports, email and much more are daily parts of busy lives. But just how connected are we really to the online world?

For about 26 percent of the U.S. population, the answer to that question is dramatic — just more than a quarter of adults say they are online “almost constantly,” according to a Pew Research Center study released earlier this year.

The widespread use of smartphones and mobile devices has helped drive the sense of being online all the time, a result that is up from 21 percent in a similar 2015 poll.

While not everyone feels constantly connected, about 77 percent of Americans still go online daily. Forty-three percent go online several times a day, and about 8 percent go online only about once a day. Meanwhile, 11 percent connect several times weekly, and a similar percentage does not use the internet at all.

The biggest indicator of the time spent online is access to a mobile device. Of those who possess a smartphone or similar device, 89 percent go

online daily and 31 percent report almost constant use.

Meanwhile, of the people who do not have a mobile device, only 54 percent report daily online usage and only 5 percent are constantly connected.

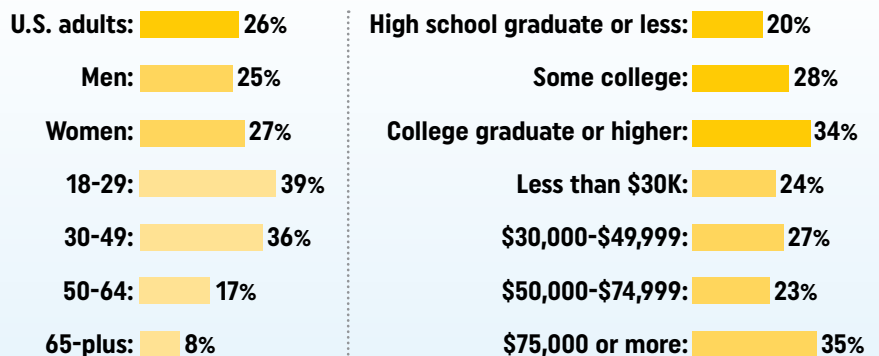
But when the poll added age into the mix, the results grew more interesting. Age matters less than it did three years earlier. Americans between the ages of 30 and 49 indicated the same rate of almost constant online use as younger adults: 36 percent to 39 percent for the younger generation. Meanwhile, the percentage of those between the ages of 50 and 64 who report constant online use has spiked from 12 percent to 17 percent since 2015.

Households with higher incomes and those who live in urban and suburban areas report almost constant online usage at a rate that is nearly double that of residents of rural areas, where only 15 percent report the highest usage.

As online tools become more useful and services better connect friends and families, the importance of access to fast, affordable internet connections continues to increase. 📶

A connected nation

The chart represents the percentage of Americans who describe themselves as being online “almost constantly,” according to a Pew Research Center poll.



Source: Pew Research Center analysts Andrew Perrin and Jingjing Jiang reported results of the study.

Thankful for world-class broadband in rural America

Lately, I've seen many commentators and public officials paint our nation's digital divide with a broad brush. "Urban areas have great internet connectivity, and rural areas don't," they say. I'm thankful those people are wrong.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

I always enjoy taking time at Thanksgiving to look back on the year and appreciate what we have, both personally and at WCTEL. We are truly blessed.

I'm thankful we live in a country where we can put so much energy into things like holidays, family get-togethers and football games instead of worrying about clean water or our general safety. Our country may not be perfect, but I'd certainly rather be here than anywhere else.

When I think about where we are, I'm thankful for our community. I appreciate the scenic beauty of our area and the genuine, hardworking and caring people who make up the backbone of the communities we serve.

I'm truly thankful for the team we have at WCTEL and the work they do every day to make sure we serve you the best way we can. This year in particular, I appreciate their hard work in serving our community. Whether it's volunteering at a community event, coaching a youth league team or participating in civic organizations, our people live to serve. I am also thankful for our advanced fiber network that allows us to provide the fastest and most reliable internet available today. The network that we have built has earned the designation of a "Smart Rural Community" for our area.

I'm also thankful for the modern conveniences our network provides. Whether it's streaming an unlimited catalog of quality entertainment, running a smart home or connecting with loved ones hundreds of miles away, we have amazing technology that previous generations could not have imagined.

It is clear to me that we need to continue telling this story, because I've seen or heard an oversimplification many times where a political leader or supposed expert talks about the disparity between the wonderful internet service found in urban areas and the primitive connections of rural America. Such a sweeping generalization is simply not accurate.

While it's true many communities in rural America are suffering from slow broadband speeds as a result of neglect from big corporate internet providers or isolated terrain, the fiber optic connections we offer are world-class. And we're working hard every day to bring those connections to more people in our region.

There are apartment complexes in Los Angeles and New York stuck with slower internet speeds than those we provide to rural areas in our community. Some businesses in Chicago and Seattle do not have the same access to high-speed broadband as small businesses in our service areas.

Broadband has become essential for modern life, and I don't believe people should have to sacrifice their connectivity just because they want to live in a rural area like ours. That's why our mission is the same as it's always been — to connect you with the best technology available today.

I'm thankful for the opportunity to help create such a network in our community, and I'm thankful for the trust you place in WCTEL. 📶

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

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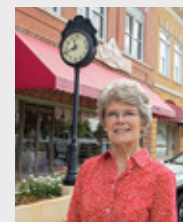
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WORDSOUTH
— A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY —

On the Cover:



Sharon Kohl's love of antiques and art led her to open Red Rooster Emporium and Art Gallery, a McCormick shopping treasure. See story Page 12.



WCTEL holds 66th Annual Member Meeting

The West Carolina Board of Directors held its annual member meeting at the Long Cane AME Community Development Center in Abbeville on Monday, Aug. 20, 2018.

WCTEL's attorney, Paul Agnew, verified that there was a quorum present. Incumbent board members Stan Keaton, Jane Stone and Wes McAllister were re-elected to represent Antreville/Lowndesville, Donalds and North McCormick, respectively.

Board president Wes McAllister gave a financial overview stating that WCTEL's assets grew in 2018, while liabilities decreased during that same time period.

CEO, Jeff Wilson, announced that WCTEL was awarded the Smart Rural Community designation by NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association. This designation is an acknowledgement of the advanced network that is available to our community. Finally, Wilson touched on WCTEL's investment in the community through its involvement and participation in many local events.

WCTEL would like to thank each and every member who makes up our cooperative and especially those who were able to attend the meeting.



WCFIBER now has an office in Greenwood

Located at 1303 Montague Ave. Ext.

Open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

WCTEL Customers can also visit this office to pay bills/order services/etc.

Don't miss Video on Demand



For a small fee, WCTEL's Video on Demand service gives you access to new releases as many as eight weeks before Netflix or Redbox. 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."



Solo: A Star Wars Story

Before he stole Princess Leia's heart, a younger Han Solo learns to survive in a lawless galaxy.



Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again

After a 10-year hiatus, the entire cast returns in this singalong sequel.



Ocean's 8

Sandra Bullock stars as Debbie Ocean, and she has her own crew of criminals for a high-stakes heist.

Don't miss these other releases coming soon to Video on Demand:

- Adrift
- Ant-Man and the Wasp
- Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot
- Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom
- Love, Gilda
- Superfly
- Teen Titans Go! To the Movies
- Won't You Be My Neighbor?

Ober Gatlinburg in Tennessee, a classic Southern destination, offers great skiing and, possibly, even better views.

Let it snow Time to hit the slopes

Ski resorts can offer hours or even days of entertainment. From the most daring skiers to those preferring the bunny slopes, winters in the South play host to some fun adventures. The destinations offer a flurry of activities to maximize the time you spend on the slopes, whether skiing, snowboarding or tubing.

Ober Gatlinburg

1339 Ski Mountain Road, Gatlinburg, Tennessee

Expect to find restaurants; a multitude of shops; a play area for the little ones; one of the largest trams in the country; a coaster full of dips, zigzags and turns through the treetops; and more. Then, stay in one of a dozen partner hotels, campgrounds or rental cabins.

Oh, and don't forget the 10 trails and three lifts, plus the Mighty Carpet lift in the ski school area for skiing and snowboarding. There's snow tubing, too. While Ober Gatlinburg is an exciting way for skiers to satisfy their cravings for the slopes, non-skiers can shop until they drop. And everyone can enjoy hot food and cold drinks on a cold winter's day.

- **Lift tickets:** Adults: \$36. Juniors (ages 6-11) and seniors: \$30. 5 and under: Free with paying adult. Rates may be higher on weekends and holidays. Look for discounts after 3 p.m. and twilight skiing until 10 p.m.
- **Phone:** 865-436-5423
- **Online:** obergatlinburg.com

Cloudmont Ski Resort

721 County Road 614, Mentone, Alabama

High atop Lookout Mountain, Cloudmont has offered hours of fun for skiers for more than 40 years. The resort has two 1,000-foot beginner and intermediate slopes. And while they may not be the biggest in the South, the slopes are a good place to learn the sport or to practice for the big leagues. When weather permits, you'll ski on natural snow.

Rental gear, including snowboards, is available in the ski lodge. Lessons are offered as well. Call ahead for snow reports.

If you're hungry, pack up your skis and head 3 miles down the road into the heart of Mentone, where you'll find a number of restaurants, including the Wildflower Cafe, the Greenleaf Grill and the Plowshares Bistro.

- **Lift tickets:** Adults: \$29. Children: \$22.

Prices are higher on weekends and holidays. Half-day tickets are available.

- **Phone:** 256-634-4344

- **Online:** www.cloudmont.com

Winterplace Ski Resort

100 Old Flat Top Mountain Road
Ghent, West Virginia

Almost the entire state of West Virginia is in the Appalachian Mountain range, making the Mountain State a great one for skiing, and it boasts a large number of ski resorts. Winterplace is the southernmost resort, and it offers 90 acres of fun. The longest run of the 27 trails is more than a mile long, and the views of the surrounding mountains are beautiful. There are 10 lifts to take you to the top. All but one of the slopes are open for nighttime skiing, as are the two terrain parks and the largest snow tubing park in the state. There's also a snow tubing park for children who are under 45 inches tall.

When you've had your fill of the snow, warm up with a cup of hot chocolate in front of a roaring fire at The Mountain House, one of several eateries. The Cabins at Winterplace offer lodging right on the property, and they include a free,



Don't ski? Not a problem. Destinations such as Winterplace Ski Resort in West Virginia offer something for everyone.

hearty breakfast designed to provide fuel for your day in the snow.

- **Lift tickets:** Adults: \$54. Students and seniors: \$35. Prices are higher on weekends and holidays.

- **Phone:** 304-787-3221

- **Online:** www.winterplace.com

Sapphire Valley Ski Resort

127 Cherokee Trail
Sapphire Valley, North Carolina

Just a hop, skip and a jump across the South Carolina border, Sapphire Valley is a gem of a resort for snow lovers. Take a ride up the mountain on a state-of-the-art quad lift. Then, ski down a heart-stopping 1,600-foot run with a 200-foot vertical drop. For the less-skilled, there's a learning slope as well as a park for tubing with multiple lanes that will give you the thrill of downhill action at a safe pace. A magic carpet-style moving sidewalk will get you to the top. You can also enjoy the thrill of a zip line that will take you racing over the valley in its wintertime beauty.

Sapphire Valley is a resort for all seasons, with plenty of homes available for rent, as well as hotels and restaurants. Sapphire Valley Ski Resort also offers lessons, and there's a rental shop for all your equipment needs.

- **Lift tickets:** Adults: \$40. Children: \$23.

Complimentary for skiers over 65.

- **Phone:** 828-743-7663

- **Online:** www.skisapphirevalley.com

Wolf Ridge Ski Resort

2578 Valley View Circle
Mars Hill, North Carolina

Nestled in the scenic Blue Ridge Mountains, Wolf Ridge is smaller than the nearby resorts at Beech Mountain and Sugar Mountain. But if you're looking for a laid-back experience that still offers tremendous challenges, this is the place. Just 30 minutes north of Asheville, Wolf Ridge, at an elevation of 4,700 feet, has 72 acres of skiable terrain. Ski and snowboarding equipment is available to rent. Wolf Ridge's Snow Sports School offers private lessons to people ages 5 and over and group lessons to ages 8 and over.

There are 15 runs, a terrain park, two seated lifts and two surface lifts. When you get to the top, take a second to enjoy incredible views. When you come down, warm your toes in front of a crackling fire in one of the two lodges.

Wolf Ridge is right off Interstate 26, the first road in the state to be designated a scenic highway. Stay the night in one of the luxury townhomes, each of which has amazing views.

- **Lift tickets:** Adults: \$42. Students: \$33.

Free for skiers 65 and over and for children under 5. Rates are higher on weekends.

- **Phone:** 828-689-4111

- **Online:** www.skiwolfridgenc.com



Put up the skis and snowboards and enjoy a roller coaster at Ober Gatlinburg. Then, head inside for warm food.



HI! I'M AMANDA CLARK.

This column, which appears in each issue, will allow you to read about technology and learn simple tips to get the most out of your electronics. For more tips or help with your devices, be sure to read this column in future publications. I'm always happy to help!

DEVICE OF THE MONTH



Sony's 4K Blu-ray

Streaming offers the easiest and most practical way to watch movies and TV shows. But if you invest in a high-quality television, there's no better way to show it off than with a 4K Blu-ray. Sony's UBP-X700 upscales your old DVDs to HD, comes with access to your favorite apps, including 4K Netflix and Amazon, and supports Dolby Vision HDR: \$249.99 MSRP.

Tune in

TVs for today's viewing needs

More than 90 years after televisions first became commercially available, you might think buying one would be as easy as picking a toaster. But if you're in the market for a new TV, it's easy to get bogged down in resolutions, audio standards, acronyms and initials.

Considering what's most important to you — clarity, bright colors, deep blacks — will help you choose how best to spend your money.

4K OR HD: A 4K TV is fast becoming the default selection as prices continue to drop. While not all 4K sets are created equal, all do provide much better image quality than 1080p HD displays. Finding 4K content comes at a cost, though. Expect to pay a premium for the higher resolution from streaming services such as Netflix or through the purchase of an ultra-HD Blu-ray player.

SMART TV: Smart TVs connect to the internet, and most offer all your favorite streaming services without the need for additional accessories such as an Apple TV or Roku. While a Smart TV's interface and flexibility may fall short of the dedicated devices, they get the job done.

LED OR OLED: LEDs — light-emitting diodes — are what light up your TV. Depending on the size of the screen, a typical HD TV can have thousands of LEDs. An OLED, or organic light-emitting diode, is much smaller than an LED, and a TV may have millions of them. OLED TVs have the edge when displaying deep, dark blacks in images. The size of the OLEDs also means these TVs can be impressively thin, light and less power hungry. OLEDs also offer a wider viewing angle, with better results when viewed from the side than with LEDs.

So why pick an LED TV? Price is probably the biggest factor. OLEDs are still top-of-the-line devices and are priced accordingly. They also can't yet match LEDs for brightness or better all-around value.

HDR: HDR, or High Dynamic Range, provides a higher level of contrast between light and dark in 4K TVs. In practice, HDR provides more vivid images and colors that pop. There are two major competing players in the market, Dolby Vision and HDR10. While HDR10 is supported by more televisions, Dolby Vision is considered superior. 📺



A little piece of paradise

Red Rooster Emporium and Art Gallery brings delight

BY JEN CALHOUN

While rummaging through antique shops in Florida with her mother years ago, Shaaron Kohl grew curious.

“Why didn’t the owner highlight that beautiful window with some of their pieces? Why wasn’t the lighting better to attract more shoppers? Why wasn’t it very clean?” she thought.

“I was critiquing them is what I was doing,” says Kohl, a retired emergency room nurse and owner of Red Rooster Emporium and Art Gallery at 118 S. Main St. in McCormick. “So, one day, this little voice in my head said, ‘Well, if you think you’re so hot, why don’t you open a shop?’”

It took a few years, but Kohl finally managed to silence that voice in her head. In 2004, it led her to open her first store, Red Rooster Antiques, in a 1,000-square-foot space in downtown McCormick. But she didn’t stop there.

FROM ANTIQUES TO BOUTIQUES

Three years after starting the antiques shop, Kohl decided to move the business to a bigger building down the street. The 8,000-square-foot space dwarfed her previous location and seemed like a good idea at the time, she says with a laugh.

To make it work, she added vendors.



Customers from all over enjoy shopping at the Red Rooster.

The 40 or so sellers took the store from a small antiques and collectibles shop to a full-fledged emporium selling handcrafted porcelain pieces, home decor, inexpensive furniture and even thrift items.

And that’s just downstairs. Upstairs, Kohl added an art gallery to feature the work of local and regional artists who live within an hour’s drive of McCormick. “We have a big pool of talented people here,” says Kohl, who is a member of the McCormick Arts Council at the Keturah. “This is a good way to get them out there.”

Art pieces can include anything from wall art to three-dimensional pieces, such as sculpture, pottery and jewelry. Kohl also collaborates with the arts council to highlight various artists a few times a year during the Art Trot events. The showcases let people check out local art at some of the downtown shops while sipping wine, socializing and shopping.

Advertising includes a steady following on Facebook, she says. But mostly, people come because of word-of-mouth. “They find us, and they love it,” she says. “If and when they’re back in the area, they always make sure they come to the Red Rooster. It’s a compliment, and it’s humbling to me that they think so highly of this shop. It’s just a fun place to come to, I guess.”



If you go

Red Rooster Emporium and Art Gallery is at 118 S. Main St. in McCormick. The 8,000-square-foot emporium is open year-round, six days a week, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. There’s something for everybody, in every price range. Downstairs, you’ll find items ranging from furniture and home supplies to handmade items, such as woven baskets, exquisite porcelain and specially crafted children’s clothing. Upstairs, you can see and buy original artwork created by regional artists. For more information and the latest finds, check out the Red Rooster Emporium Facebook page.

RELEASE YOUR INNER *Fashionista*

The latest styles are only a few clicks away

BY PATRICK SMITH

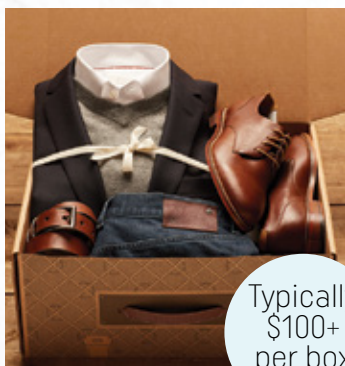
Sometimes it's tough to find the latest designer clothes around town. And remember the last time you hit the mall? It was miles away, you couldn't find anything that matched your style, and you searched endlessly to find your size. If that scenario rings a bell, it's time for an online fashion subscription. You'll get your perfect style and fit every time without the drive.

The latest fashion trends you see online and in magazines can be delivered to your doorstep with no hassle. And if you don't like what came your way in the latest shipment, relax. Most of the time you can return or exchange it. It's stress-free shopping.

Whether you live in a fashion capital like New York City or a rural town that barely makes it onto a map, the power of a high-speed internet connection means you can always dress to impress.

In the past two issues, we featured several food and pet subscription services — look back if you missed it. If you're curious about other online subscriptions out there, don't wait on us. Check them out for yourself. Everything from hot sauces to geeky toys and candles to kids' school kits is shipping out daily.

HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE ONLINE FASHION SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES:



Typically
\$100+
per box

TRUNK CLUB

Operated by Nordstrom, Trunk Club provides high-quality fashion without the struggle of putting together an impeccably matched outfit. Professional stylists for men and women fill your box with everything you need: shirts, earrings, belts, jackets, shoes, sunglasses, handbags and more. You choose your style, price range and frequency, and they do the hard work for you.



Typically
\$100+
per box

STITCH FIX

Stitch Fix brings you five hand-selected clothing items that match your personal style profile in every box. There's no subscription required, and you'll find a mix of familiar brand names, along with new ones, to keep you up to date with the most popular trends for men and women. The service includes free returns and has options for children.



As low as
\$59
per box

YOGA CLUB


Honestly, what's more comfortable than yoga pants? Keep up with the newest styles by ordering through Yoga Club. You'll save up to 60 percent off retail prices. From just pants to full outfits for your workout, Yoga Club keeps you feeling stylish and comfortable for your next trip to the gym.



Typically
\$100+
per box

RACHEL ZOE

Ladies, start planning your seasonal wardrobe around Rachel Zoe's Box of Style. With a new shipment of several items each quarter, Rachel Zoe brings you everything you need to stay on the cutting edge of sophistication and glamour. A typical box may include a necklace, fragrance, makeup and beauty items, wallet clutch, and more.

*Note: Items from Rachel Zoe cannot be returned. 

GET SMART

The latest connected devices
supercharge your home

The holidays are the perfect time to stock up and make your home "smarter" with a variety of devices that allow you to automate and remotely control door locks, lights, household systems and more.

Here are five gadgets that can make your life around the house easier — or at least more fun. Remember, the smart home experience is better with a high-speed broadband connection.

SMART HUB: You can control many smart devices through individual phone apps, but to truly take advantage of a smart home setup, you need a hub. While some hubs run everything through an easy-to-use app — such as the Wink Hub, \$69 — there's something cool about controlling your devices with voice commands through an Apple HomePod, \$349; Google Home, \$129; or Amazon Echo, \$99.99.

The hub you choose will determine the other smart gadgets you buy since there are competing communication standards.



SMART THERMOSTAT: A smart thermostat is not only handy — the devices are capable of learning your routine and effectively program themselves — but it can help you save money by heating and cooling your home more efficiently. One of the most popular options is the Nest thermostat, which starts at \$169. With its new temperature sensors, which can be placed in different rooms, you can tell the thermostat a specific area of the home, such as the baby's room or the kitchen, to maintain a specific temperature.

SMART LOCK: The many features that smart locks offer include unlocking with your phone, responding to voice commands and linking to other devices, such as unlocking the door if the smoke detector goes off. The new Kwikset Kevo, \$314 for all features, also adds a neat new option. To open your door, you just need to touch the lock — even with the side of your finger or your elbow. It's a lifesaver if you're juggling kids or some last-minute gifts.



SMART LIGHTS: If you want remotely controlled outdoor Christmas lights, the easiest solution is to connect them to something like the iHome iSP100 Outdoor SmartPlug, \$39.99. The plug connects through your Wi-Fi network, is compatible with all digital assistants and is resistant to dirt, dust and rain. If you have an Echo, the company Light Rhapsody makes indoor holiday lights, \$59.99, that use Alexa to set different colors, add effects, change brightness, dance to music and turn the lights on or off.



SMART TOY: Speaking of gifts, how about the DropMix Music Gaming System, \$69.99, by Harmonix, the people who created "Rock Band." The DropMix Music Gaming System is played by placing color-coded cards on the board and building musical tracks using elements from songs. The game comes with 60 cards with music by popular artists, and more packs are available in different genres, including hip-hop and rock. 🎮



A team of dedicated volunteers work at the Helping Hands thrift store. Front row, from left, are: Rita Danna, board member and Toni Andrews. Back row, from left are: Judy Taylor, Debbie White, Madge Krotzer, Marianne Chalifour and Emilee Groh.



Each week several volunteers work at the Food Pantry in McCormick. Volunteers, from left, are: Ann Francavilla, coordinator, Chris Hogarth, Christine Benedetto, Melody Wilt, John Greiger, Ellen Jankowski and Sue Heffner.



Helping Hands volunteers, from left, are: Stephany Klein, co-manager Ellen Zimmermann and board member Rita Danna.



Helping Hands

BY JOHN CLAYTON

Volunteers decorate the McCormick Helping Hands United storefront for the holidays around the same time the air near the Savannah River turns cold, reminding local residents that winter is out there and that Santa Claus is coming to town.

But the true spirit of the holidays lives year-round behind the thrift store's facade on North Main Street in McCormick as the volunteer-run shop supports itself and the Helping Hands Food Bank. The organization, which began in 1998, is celebrating 20 years of helping local residents through tough times, big and small.

"I think sometimes if you just do one thing to show people somebody cares, I think you can change their lives," Helping Hands Board of Trustees member Rita Danna says.

Thrift store and food bank work together for needy

The Helping Hands Thrift Store, which has taken over two connected spaces on South Main Street, accepts donations of clothing, household and other items and sells them to the public. The store is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The money it generates goes to purchase items for the Helping Hands Food Bank.

Ellen Zimmerman, who co-manages the thrift store, along with Pat Kuech, says the holidays turn busy for the store and for the food bank. There are more donations, more

Food Pantry volunteer Ellen Jankowski ensures that food bags are ready for families in need.



shoppers and more people who are in need of food during the holidays. Around 90 volunteers share in staffing both the store and the food bank.

"We get a lot of Christmas donations," Zimmerman says, referring to her cadre of volunteers as "our girls."

"They do a great job with everything," she says. "We have some who will decorate the windows, and they will put out the decorations and Christmas things throughout the store."

It's all very festive, like any department store on any Main Street, but with a more serious mission than simply to profit.

During the Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter holidays, Helping Hands Food Bank volunteers fill gift bags with food and a ticket that can be redeemed for a ham or turkey at McCormick's Food Lion, which makes regular donations to the pantry. "Then, they deliver the bags to the families," Zimmerman says.

The thrift store accepts toys that people can purchase on a budget as well as clothing for adults and children and even Christmas decorations during the holidays.

Beyond the holidays, Danna says Helping Hands has been there to supply clothing and food for victims of domestic violence and fires or simply to provide an outfit suitable for a job interview.

"The way I feel, I'm no longer working, and if I can do something positive every day, I want to help where I can," Danna says. "We do it because we think it's right,"

Helping Hands has actually extended its reach beyond food and clothing for the needy. The organization is involved with a number of charities, including a local backpack ministry that helps children in need with backpacks and other supplies for school each year.

"Being successful helps us support all those things," says volunteer Sue Mitchell. "I don't think that when this was started the vision was anything like what it has become."

Volunteer Toni Andrews says Helping Hands has gone beyond helping the needy and has helped bring the community together from the affluent Savannah Lakes retirement community to the working residents of McCormick.

"I like volunteering because it gives me something to do and feel good about," Andrews says. "Back in the day, we'd hear, 'It's only Savannah Lakes,' but it's not. It's everybody. It's the whole community." 🗨️

MCCORMICK HELPING HANDS UNITED

Food Pantry, 211 South Main Street, McCormick

Thrift Store, 122 North Main Street, McCormick.

Hours: 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Christmas Angel Tree brightens holidays for hundreds

Sometimes, it's a new bicycle or the latest hot video game. Or maybe the Christmas wish is as simple and ordinary as a new coat or a pair of shoes.

Whatever it may be, Abbeville's Christmas Angel Tree has been in the business of making holiday wishes come true since 1989. This year marks the 30th edition of the Christmas Angel Tree, which helps provide presents for needy children throughout WCTEL's coverage area. WCTEL has been a long-time supporter of the Christmas Angel Tree, and WCTEL employee Tim Simpson has spearheaded an associated bike ministry, which delivers bicycles to area children each year.

"Businesses, community groups, churches and individuals work together to provide a brighter Christmas for needy children," Christmas Angel Tree coordinator Lori Glace says. "So many people are involved, young and old, and everyone makes a difference. It's much more than anything we could do alone. Working together makes such a tremendous difference."

When the Christmas Angel Tree began in 1989 under the auspices of Main Street United Methodist Church in Abbeville, it provided gifts for 78 children in the immediate area. This past year, the effort, which remains faith-based, reached more than 600 needy children, Glace says.

"To see how God has worked and provided is absolutely phenomenal," she says.

A small army of volunteers reports for duty for an entire week in early December, working from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. each day, wrapping gifts and organizing them for delivery.

Glace says anyone interested can sponsor a Christmas Angel Tree child by donating toys or by making monetary donations, adding that donations are accepted year-round and up until Christmas Day. "An amazing number of volunteers and people come together each year for the children," she says.

Anyone interested in participating in the Christmas Angel Tree initiative can contact Glace at lglace@wctel.net.

Stuffed for the holidays

Enjoy a classic side dish

You could say Mindy Merrell is an expert when it comes to making holiday dressing. Not only is it one of her favorite side dishes during the season, but she also worked for a dozen years as the director of culinary services for Martha White's public relations company. One of her responsibilities was working in the test kitchen to create new recipes using the company's cornbread mix.

"It was fun. I love test kitchen creativity and working within parameters," she says. "Why don't we make dressing more often? It's so delicious and easy to make ahead."

"Traditionally, many families in the South had chicken and dressing for Sunday dinner, so it wasn't just relegated to the holidays. In fact, we were always reminding folks that cornbread dressing is a wonderful side dish for any meat."

Merrell is such a fan of dressing that she actually considers turkey the side dish. "Dressing is an economical vehicle for making something wonderful with leftovers and stretching the menu," she says. "And there's so much room for creativity. I know lots of families must have the same recipes for the holidays, but not me. I'm always tinkering and using what's on hand or what sounds fun at the moment."

And here's a word of advice: "Do not use those bags of

crumbs," she says. "And I don't like my dressing sweet, so there's no using a sweet cornbread mix or putting sugar in the batter."

Follow the instructions on a bag of any Southern, self-rising cornmeal mix and make a pan of real cornbread. Everyone living in the South should absolutely know how to do this.

"I've heard that an iron skillet is one of the most popular wedding gifts now, so there's no excuse for young folks not knowing how to make it."

"Also, whenever we have leftover cornbread, I just put it in a bag in the freezer and use these leftovers for a pan of dressing later. I do the same with biscuits and any other kind of bread. They all work. It just depends on which you like."

Merrell says it's OK to use more than one type of bread in a bowl of stuffing and that adding wheat bread gives it a softer texture. Once you've



More on Mindy ...

In 2014, Mindy Merrell was the winner of TV Food Network's popular cooking show "Chopped." She and her husband, R.B. Quinn, are both food writers in Nashville. You can follow them on their recipe website: www.rbandmindy.com.

combined the bread, decide on the seasonings.

"Traditionally, that would be lots of sauteed celery, onions and sage," she says. "Moisten it with broth and beaten eggs to hold it together, bake and that's it. You can't get any easier than that, so why overdo?"



FOOD EDITOR
ANNE P. BRALY
IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.

MINDY MERRELL'S FAVORITE STUFFING

- 1 1/2 sticks butter, divided
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 2 cups chopped celery
- 5 to 6 cups crumbled cornbread from a skillet of cornbread made with 2 cups self-rising cornmeal mix or self-rising cornmeal
- 3 cups stale, toasted or fresh bread cubes. Regular bread helps hold the dressing together and gives it a softer texture. You can also use leftover biscuits.
- A handful of fresh chopped parsley
- Other fresh herbs as you like — fresh chopped sage, marjoram, thyme and/or rosemary. If you go with dried herbs, use about 1 teaspoon each of rubbed sage, marjoram, thyme and/or rosemary.
- A generous amount of black pepper
- 3 to 4 cups chicken or turkey broth, homemade or canned
- 2 eggs, beaten

Melt 1 stick of the butter in a large skillet. Cook the onions and celery in the butter over medium heat until soft and caramelized, about 20 minutes.

Combine the crumbled cornbread and bread cubes in a large mixing bowl. Stir in the cooked vegetables, parsley, herbs and black pepper. Blend well. Taste it before you add the eggs and broth to test for seasonings. Stir in the broth and eggs. Add enough broth so that the mixture is moist, but not soupy.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking pan with 1-2 tablespoons of the remaining butter. Pour the dressing into the prepared dish. Dot with the remaining butter.

Bake the dressing right away, or cover and refrigerate overnight and cook the next day. Cover lightly with foil and bake in an oven heated to 375 F. Baking time

will vary — if baked right away it should take about 45 minutes. If it's just out of the refrigerator, it will take closer to an hour. If you have other things in the oven, a lower temperature won't matter. Just make sure you brown at the end by removing the foil during the last 15 minutes for a nice crispy brown top.

To be sure the dressing is cooked through, check the internal temperature with an instant-read thermometer. It should read at least 165 F.

Leftovers reheat well in the microwave or oven. Or, crisp them up in an iron skillet for breakfast and serve with runny eggs! 🍳



Dressing add-ins

Mindy Merrell says dressing is one of those dishes that opens itself up to versatility. "It's a blank canvas, so change it up to match the theme of your menu," she says.

- Italian — Add a pound of cooked and crumbled Italian sausage. Add some rosemary, red bell pepper and pine nuts.
- Sausage, apple and pecan — Add a finely chopped apple, 1 pound of cooked and crumbled sausage, and 1 cup of toasted pecans to the mix.
- Leek and country ham — Use leeks instead of onions and add bits of country ham.
- Clams or oysters — Add fresh chopped clams or oysters to the mix and a sautéed green bell pepper.



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