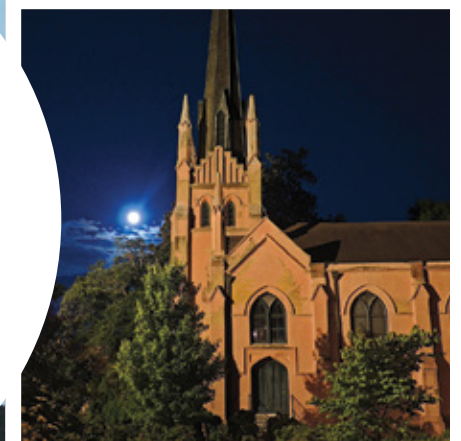
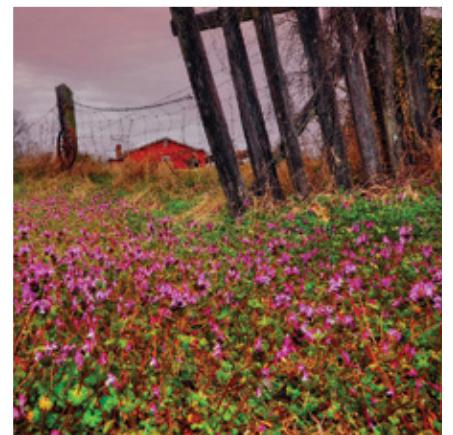


West Carolina Tel

JULY/AUGUST 2018

CONNECTED



BOLSTERING THE ECONOMY

WCTEL designated as
Smart Rural Community



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Telemedicine is key to rural health

Broadband internet access is making a real difference in the lives of people across rural America. I see it whenever I travel to the states where telecommunications companies like this one are building advanced networks to reach those in hard-to-serve regions.

Broadband supports efforts that are vital to a community's well-being, such as economic development, education and small-business growth. But broadband's greatest impact is perhaps seen in the delivery of health care.

Robust and sustainable broadband infrastructure is necessary for expanding access to health care in rural America. NTCA has been looking into telehealth applications for a number of years. We have hosted events on our own. We have worked with health care groups to learn about their challenges and to introduce them to our member telcos' capabilities. We have assisted our members in launching pilot projects of their own.

Telemedicine in rural America is truly a win-win proposition. Access to advanced services in a local community brings greater health care options to its residents. As a bonus, telemedicine also makes it easier to attract high-skilled labor, industry and economic development. NTCA is passionate about the role that our member telcos play in telemedicine — and I think we have only scratched the surface of possibilities.

Your local telecommunications provider, like hundreds of similar companies across rural America, is building the advanced broadband network that makes telemedicine possible. ☎

Money from home

Using the internet to start cottage industries

Ever been told you can sell those knit caps or great jewelry pieces you've made but don't want to invest the money it takes for a brick-and-mortar location? Look to the internet.

More and more people are finding ways to earn a living by building online businesses from their homes. According to Forbes, more than 52 percent of all small businesses in the U.S. are home-based, and most rely on the internet. These jobs can offer flexibility, independence and a way to skirt the traditional 9-to-5.

As more Americans board the microbusiness train, the economy is taking notice. While small, these microbusinesses employ 55 million people in the U.S. They also contribute more than \$1 trillion in earnings to the U.S. economy, according to Etsy, a global online marketplace for handcrafted and vintage pieces.

Many of these entrepreneurs are young, female and live in rural areas, too. Etsy recently polled its network of 1.7 million sellers around the world, and the results are eye-opening. Check out a few of these statistics from the 2017 Etsy Seller Census:



STUDY: Social media use is growing

But so are privacy concerns

BY JEN CALHOUN

About seven out of every 10 American adults use some kind of social media, but it doesn't mean they don't have worries about it.

A recent Pew Research Center study found that more Americans than ever use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms as part of their daily lives. They keep in touch with friends and family. They participate in civic and political activities. They even use social media for work or to share health and science research.

But the study found that as the number of likes and shares grows, so do concerns about privacy.

PRIVACY ANXIETY

Last year, only 9 percent of social media users were “very confident” that social media companies would protect their data, Pew research found. In fact, about half of the users polled “were not at all or not too confident their data was in safe hands”

And while many users said they wanted to do more to

protect their privacy, nearly two-thirds worried that current laws weren't good enough to do the job. In addition, nearly 65 percent said they support more regulation of advertisers.

It's not just privacy that worries them either. Pew research found that only 5 percent of users trust all of the information that comes to them on social media. They also don't like the harassment, political bickering, disrespect and incivility that can come with a day in the life of Twitter or Facebook.

HARD HABIT TO BREAK


But if social media is so troublesome, why are people sticking with it?

Maybe it's because they feel like they have to, Pew experts suggest. Let's face it; social media is an easy and convenient way to stay connected to our friends, families and the organizations we love. As a

result, some users find it hard to stop. Social media is part of their everyday lives.

NEW RULES

However, some privacy advocates say change is coming. One example is the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, which was adopted in April 2016 and went into effect in May of this year.

The regulation offers data protection and privacy for all those in the European Union, but it could also have a positive effect on U.S. social media users. Pew experts say the GDPR “will give users — even Americans — greater protection about what data tech firms can collect, the data that can be used and how consumers can be given more opportunities to see what is happening with their information.” 



Percent of adults who say they use social media sites, by age

18-29 year olds

56% → 88%
2008 2018

30-49 year olds

18% → 78%
2008 2018

50-64 year olds

6% → 64%

2008 2018

65+ year olds

2% → 37%
2008 2018

SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Are you well-connected?

Stop and count with me for a moment. How many internet-connected devices do you have in your home?



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

For many of us, smartphones and computers are the first obvious devices that come to mind, but what other devices are there? How about tablets? Any smart TVs or streaming boxes like Roku or Amazon Fire TV? If you have children at home, what about their game systems, computers and other devices? Maybe you've gotten into the smart home technology and have some of the bulbs, security cameras or outlets.

When you think about all of the things we use regularly that depend on the internet, the answer to my questions can add up quickly.

In fact, depending on which source you use, most North American households have between five and 10 connected devices. Some experts believe that number will grow to as many as 50 devices in less than five years!

Whatever your number of connected devices happens to be, know this: There is no better network to handle a family using multiple connected devices than the type of fiber optic network WCTEL is building for our members.

Approximately 85 percent of the WCTEL area is served over fiber and we are in the process of converting the remaining customers over to fiber. We have invested millions of dollars in our region to build a world-class fiber optic network.

While there are many benefits to a fiber connection — including reliability and increased home value — I'd like to discuss the capacity your fiber connection will afford your family.

While we often talk about an internet connection's speed, we really mean the speed at which things download. The bits and bytes are moving at the same speed no matter your connection, but it's the capacity (how many bits and bytes can pass through each second) that matters.

I often tell people to think of internet service like plumbing. Each file you are trying to download is like a bathtub filling up. The bits of data that make up the file flow through your modem and router just like water into a tub. Filling a tub from the spout is much faster than filling it with a sink sprayer because the spout has more capacity to let more water through. Similarly, a smaller connection is going to limit the amount of data that can pass through when compared to a bigger connection.

To follow that analogy, it's also important to consider how many faucets you're going to be using at the same time. If you open all of your faucets, the water pressure is going to dip significantly, and it's going to take a lot longer to fill each tub or sink. For broadband, the same thing happens with multiple devices on a network. If you have three tablets, a game system, two computers, four phones and a streaming TV using your connection, each one is going to be slower — unless you have a high-capacity connection via fiber optics.

As we continue to improve our network, we're looking down the road at the future. We see families in our area continuing to add the latest technology in their homes, which drives up the demand for broadband capacity. The fiber network we're building is the only way we can be sure we have the capacity to serve you today and in the future. ☎

West Carolina Tel

CONNECTED

JULY/AUGUST 2018

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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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WORDSOUTH
— A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY —

On the Cover:



WCTEL's broadband connection helped win an award from NTCA and continues to improve the lives of WCTEL members and the community. See story Page 12.

WCTEL welcomes new employees



Will New, Cable Locator/Splicer; Andy Davis, Install & Repair Technician; Matt Lee, Cable Locator/Splicer

Supporting Relay for Life

WCTEL's Relay for Life team, which raised \$11,000 for 2018, dedicated its fundraising activities to the memory of a dear co-worker and friend, Laurie Wolfe, who lost her battle with cancer last year. The Abbeville/McCormick Relay for Life was May 18 at the Livery Stable in Abbeville, South Carolina. The event offered food, activities, entertainment and the opportunity to honor those who have battled cancer.



SAVE THE DATE!

2018 ANNUAL MEETING

MONDAY, AUGUST 20, 2018 • 3 P.M.

LONG CANE AME
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTER
8 Long Cane AME Road, Abbeville, SC 29620

FREE GIFTS ★ FREE FOOD ★ GREAT FELLOWSHIP

All WCTEL members are invited. See you there!

Happy Fourth of July!

The WCTEL offices will be closed Wednesday, July 4, to celebrate Independence Day. Have a safe and happy holiday!

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."



A Wrinkle in Time

Reese Witherspoon heads up an all-star cast for this sci-fi adventure about a young girl traveling the galaxy in search of her father.



Game Night

Jason Bateman and Rachel McAdams star in this comedy as a couple that host a murder mystery party for friends.



Peter Rabbit

Peter Rabbit and his family must change their ways to regain the trust of their neighbors and win back Old McGregor's Manor House.

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

- I Can Only Imagine
- Love, Simon
- Midnight Sun
- Pacific Rim: Uprising
- Paul, Apostle of Christ
- Red Sparrow
- Sherlock Gnomes
- Tomb Raider



A Republic P-47 Thunderbolt from the Tennessee Museum of Aviation.

Photo courtesy of Tennessee Museum of Aviation.

Flying High

Flight museums around the South take us into the sky, celebrating the history, as well as the future, of flight. Some exhibits immerse us in active simulations, and others challenge us with interactive designs. Still others tell impactful stories. All share a common mission, though, offering insights into how American history is inextricably linked to the early pioneers of our skies. Here are some of the museums that soar high in offering education and fun for children and adults.

Tennessee Museum of Aviation

135 Air Museum Way • Sevierville, Tennessee

Children will love being the pilot as they climb in the cockpit and get their hands on the controls of an authentic A-4 Skyhawk from the Vietnam War era. Aviation enthusiasts will appreciate the massive, 35,000-square-foot hangar with all of its aircraft engines, cockpits, military vehicles and restored vintage Warbirds. These aircraft make up the foundation of the Tennessee Museum of Aviation and were flown on missions during World War II.

"They are most impressive, and a number of the Warbirds are still airworthy," says Rhonda Melton, operations coordinator.

Among the aircraft within the museum are two Republic P-47 Thunderbolts — there are less than a dozen of these World War II fighters remaining in the world. Another favorite exhibit is the Douglas A-1H Skyraider, complete with battle scars received from its service during Vietnam.

A new "Faith and Courage" exhibit pays tribute to U.S. Military Chaplains from World War II through the present. And a 52-foot display traces milestones in the history of pre-Wright Brothers aviation,

including timelines of military aviation. The wall also features the Volunteer State's contributions to flight, making the Tennessee Museum of Aviation Tennessee's official repository and archive of aviation history.

- **Admission:** Adults: \$12.75. Seniors: \$9.75. Ages 6-12: \$6.75. Children under 6: free.
- **Information:** 866-286-8738 or online at www.tnairmuseum.com.

Southern Museum of Flight

4343 73rd St. N • Birmingham, Alabama

A visit to the Southern Museum of Flight is a walk through time. Learn about a pilot in 1953 who defected from North Korea to an air base in South Korea. Or see a 1925 crop duster flown by Huff-Daland, the company that would become Delta Airlines.

The level of detail in the exhibits, combined with their scale — the Korean defection exhibit spans 150 feet — provides visitors with an immersive experience, says museum curator Wayne Novy. And there are a number of activities for children, including sitting in aircraft cockpits, operating the controls of a full-size airplane, and building and flying their own balsa glider.

- **Admission:** Adults: \$7. Seniors and students: \$6. Kids under 3 and active military and their families: free.
- **Information:** 205-833-8226 or online at www.southernmuseumofflight.org.

The Aviation Museum of Kentucky

4029 Airport Road at Blue Grass Airport
Lexington, Kentucky

The Bluegrass State is well-grounded in aviation history. Matthew Sellers, of Carter County, Kentucky, invented retractable landing gear, and Solomon Van Meter, of Lexington, is responsible for the creation of lifesaving pack parachutes. These men and others are honored for their contributions and service in the Aviation Museum of Kentucky's Hall of Fame, one element of the 23-year-old museum.

History buffs will enjoy seeing restored barnstormers and vintage airliners, such as a Lockheed L-12 that was used as a



spy plane before World War II broke out. But the museum also looks toward the future of aviation with exhibits such as "Women in Aviation," which, while telling of women in the past, encourages young women of today to pursue their aviation dreams as pilots and aerospace engineers. Kids will enjoy getting in the cockpit of a Cessna 150 and turning the control wheel to learn about the relationships between control surfaces on the aircraft, such as rudders and stabilizers.

- **Admission:** Adults: \$8. Veterans and seniors: \$6. Ages 6-16: \$5. Members and children under 6: free.
- **Information:** 859-231-1219 or online at www.aviationky.org.

Carolinas Aviation Museum

4672 First Flight Drive at Charlotte
Douglas International Airport
Charlotte, North Carolina

Flight had its beginnings in the Carolinas, and for the past 25 years, the Carolinas Aviation Museum has told its story. Exhibits include the Wright Brothers on the coast of North Carolina at Kitty Hawk and the Airbus A320 that became Flight 1549, the "Miracle on the Hudson." This is the museum's signature exhibit, and it leaves people in awe.

"Many visitors don't realize that we have the actual Flight 1549. It's not a replica," says museum spokeswoman Jessica Mallicote. "Visitors can see the actual aircraft, hear passenger stories and experience the event in a powerful way."

Visitors will come face to face with an F-14 Super Tomcat, a DC-3 commercial airliner and a CH-46 helicopter transport.

They can also create a new adventure when they get behind the controls of a Cessna 150 to get a feel for what it's like to pilot an actual aircraft.

The museum is located in North Carolina, but it's an easy road trip from South Carolina.

- **Admission:** Adults: \$12. Seniors 60-plus: \$10. Veterans: \$9. Ages 4-18, college students with ID and active military: \$8. Kids 3 and under: free.
- **Information:** 704-997-3770 or online at www.carolinasaviation.org.

Lone Star Flight Museum

11551 Aerospace Ave. at Ellington
Airport • Houston, Texas

History and the future of aviation meet at the new Lone Star Flight Museum, opened less than a year ago at Houston's Ellington Airport. This is one museum that takes you into the skies — literally. With a battery of more than 20 restored planes, you can buy a ticket and take a ride. Or, stay grounded and tour the two 30,000-square-foot hangars housing historic aircraft, such as a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress or a North American B-25 Mitchell.

The Aviation Learning Center, the second of its kind in the U.S., immerses visitors in the energy and excitement of flight through a hands-on learning adventure. Designed for students in grades 5-12, the center uses the universal wonder of flight to engage kids in the exploration of science, technology, engineering and math. Students have come from around the world to get a taste of aviation training. There are three replica cockpits, two hang glider simulators and a theater featuring a film about the principles and history of flight development.

- **Admission:** Adults 18-64: \$20. Ages 12-17: \$18. Seniors 65-plus and kids 4-11: \$16. Members and children 3 and under: free. Additional discounts given for advance online purchases.
- **Information:** 346-708-2517 or online at www.lonestarflight.org.



HI! I'M AMANDA BLACKWELL.

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



Pioneer BDR-XS06

Most new laptops have ditched the optical media reader, but there are still plenty of CDs, DVDs and Blu-rays in the world. The Pioneer BDR-XS06 can read and burn to all these formats using a USB 3.0 connection. It is also compatible with both Mac OSX and Windows operating systems. MSRP \$119.99.

Going mobile

Choosing the right laptop for you

Going to college presents a series of choices. There are the big ones: Which school should I go to? What's my major? And there are lesser ones: Should I eat at the cafeteria? Can I wear pajamas to class?

One choice is usually the selection of a laptop: a Mac or Windows-based PC? Either can be a considerable investment, so you want to make sure that your choice is right for you.

If you're getting ready to go off to school — or just want to do some computing on the go — here are a few things to consider before buying.

PRICE

Apple computers are generally more expensive than comparable Windows-based laptops. In a way, you are paying for the Apple name, but the philosophy behind that name relies on the company's commitment to offering solid technology, ease of use and quality design. Apple's lowest-priced offering is the MacBook Air, which starts at \$999. A similar PC will sell for \$799 or less. On the higher end, a fully loaded MacBook Pro sells for \$2,799, while a comparable Microsoft Surface laptop comes in at \$200 less.

UNDER THE HOOD

Laptop prices vary depending on how much processing and graphical power you want, as well as the amount of memory and hard disk space available. Most laptops have limited, or no, upgrade options, and this is especially true with Macs. You always want to purchase as much as you can so that your machine doesn't become obsolete sooner than expected. Some PC laptops can take memory and hard drive updates, which may lengthen their lifespans.

DESIGN

There is only one Apple, which means the company controls the way all their laptops look. The sleek, lightweight and elegant designs are what other companies seek to emulate. On the PC front, the variety of manufacturers means you have more choice, and competition has produced some stylish options from Dell, HP and Microsoft.



SOFTWARE

If you have a piece of software that you use all the time, make sure there is a version for the operating system that comes with your laptop. Most major software programs, such as Microsoft Office or Adobe's applications, can be used with both Apple and Windows-based computers.

EASE OF USE

While Macs are not perfect, Apple computers tend to be a better choice for people who are not tech-savvy or who don't enjoy fiddling with systems settings and drivers. On the other hand, PCs have gotten much better at guaranteeing plug-and-play compatibility and easier software installations.

GAMING

If you want to play the latest games on your laptop, you will want to buy a PC. While Mac users can play games, this is the area where Apple cannot compete with Windows-based devices. There are more games available for PCs, and more are developed all the time. Gamers may also want to invest in a dedicated gaming laptop from a specialty company like Origin or Razer. Also, Dell has its Alienware line for gaming.

SECURITY

Even the best-protected PC is more at risk of viruses and malware than a relatively unprotected Mac. PCs are so prevalent that it makes sense for hackers to focus on that market rather than target OSX. For most Mac users, the system's built-in security is more than enough to ensure peace of mind — never forget security upgrades for either, though. ☞

Setting anchor

A mariner finds a home

BY JOHN CLAYTON

As is to be expected of an old salt, Dave Bender carefully charted his course before setting off on a journey to find a new home, complete with Southern accents.

"It was a three-year process for me," Bender says of his search for a new residence after more than four decades in South Florida. "Every three months, I'd use my frequent-flyer miles and my Marriott points and make five- to seven-day pilgrimages to places in Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama and North Carolina. I visited 70 different communities and 100 pieces of property."

FINDING THE RIGHT PROPERTY

Abbeville was among the first places Bender visited as he sought a "small, Southern, values-based town" away from the ever-increasing hustle and bustle of South Florida.

"It was just getting too crowded. There was too much asphalt, too much concrete," Bender says of his former home.

The soon-to-be retired Merchant Marine captain was

unable to immediately locate an Abbeville property that appealed to him, however, which left him unusually adrift in his search to become purposefully landlocked.

"I loved the people I met in Abbeville," Bender says. "But I didn't like the property I'd seen, so I kept looking. I was online one evening looking for something else when I stumbled across a website."

That website featured a 125-acre tract of land in rural Abbeville, and Bender made the call. Another offer on the land fell through, and two weeks later, Bender was an Abbevillian. "After three years of searching, I was getting rather depressed," Bender recalls. "My friends told me to hang in there, and it would work out, and it did."

A CHANGE IN PACE

Bender, a native of Speedway, Indiana, grew up with the roaring engines at the Indianapolis 500 each May and basketball every winter. He began the move to Abbeville in 2013 by living part time in a 38-foot motor home on his new property. By 2015, he had left Florida

behind, built a home and begun his new life as a landlubber, going from sailor to gentleman farmer. With the help of a forester, the property's 40 acres of pine forest was to be thinned for the first time earlier this year.

In addition to the pine tract, another 15 acres includes hardwoods, and 10 acres are pastureland. The tract also includes "a couple of creeks and a pond."

But that's really about all the water Bender says he cares about seeing anymore. "I spent 40-something years looking out on a bare horizon," he says. "Now, I look out on trees and hills and a lot of wildlife. It's wonderful ... I've talked to a lot of people who have spent a lot of their lives on the water, and when they retire, they never want to see it again."

NO REGRETS

After five years, Bender says he's gotten used to semi-retired living without tide tables and "playing tree farmer."

"The most terrifying thing that happens out on the ocean is when the motor stops, and there's silence," Bender says. "You know you're in trouble then. Now, if I'm out on the

tractor and the motor stops, I can just walk back to the house."

Bender balances farming with regular visits to the Main Street Coffee Shop Company and involvement in the community. He became a member of the Abbeville Chamber of Commerce's board of directors when local leaders asked for his perspectives as a new resident.

He says there have been no regrets since the move. "People told me I wouldn't be accepted in a small town in the South, but I've found just the opposite," Bender says. "Everyone I've met has been welcoming." 🗨️



Instead of tall ships, nowadays it's tall trees that keep Dave Bender busy.



Retired Merchant Marine officer Dave Bender moved to the Abbeville area after three years of property hunting.

Good & EASY EATS!

Subscription services provide first-class meals and convenience

BLUE APRON

Blue Apron delivers everything you need for a gourmet-quality meal you can cook at home. The step-by-step recipes are paired with unique ingredients to help you feed your family for a fraction of restaurant prices without sacrificing taste. Menu items include spicy smoked trout sandwiches, Caribbean chickpea curry and Mexican-spiced pork.

As low as
\$9.99
per serving!



HELLO FRESH

Much like Blue Apron, Hello Fresh is a competitor with a twist. While you'll still find high-end meals, Hello Fresh specializes in simple home cooking. But the meals don't skimp on flavor. The plates include tasty recipes for winner winner chicken orzo dinner, pineapple poblano beef tacos and slow cooker smoky beef chili.

As low as
\$8.74
per serving!



FRESHLY

If you're tired of cooking on the stove but still want to put a satisfying meal on the table every night, Freshly is the perfect option. Packed with protein, Freshly meals can be cooked in the microwave. The natural ingredients are also gluten free. The options don't disappoint; each chef-prepared meal is ready in under three minutes. You'll find Sicilian-style chicken parmesan, homestyle meatloaf, and spaghetti squash and meatballs on the menu.

As low as
\$8.99
per serving!



MUNCHPAK

If you're not in the mood for a full meal but you're curious about what our neighbors across the pond reach for in their pantries, MunchPak is the answer without the cost of the flight. With snacks from around the world, you choose the size of your delivery and customize its contents. Try out Japanese hard candy, wacky new potato chip flavors, drink options and more.

As low as
\$9.95
per serving!



Your personal 'techtionary'

Learn the internet lingo basics

Sometimes the language of technology can seem complex, but it's an increasingly common, and important, part of day-to-day life. Hopefully, this column will make your use of technology a little smoother.

I often describe myself as a translator, and I want to help you create your own "techtionary." I'll define some common words associated with the internet and related services, and, hopefully, this will give you a simple reference you can keep handy.

► **BROADBAND:** This term is meant to define fast internet. The fastest broadband services come from providers that rely on fiber optic networks, although some companies do offer broadband plans through networks reliant on copper cables. I like to think of broadband as a garden hose delivering water. The higher the water pressure — how many megabits per second your plan provides — the faster the speed!

► **OVER-THE-TOP (OTT) VIDEO:** This term refers to media delivered through an internet connection — often with the help of a smart TV, Roku, Apple TV or other streaming device — as opposed to your standard cable TV or satellite TV.

► **WI-FI:** This is the way you can connect a computer, television or other device to the

internet without using a wire. From your home to the coffee shop, Wi-Fi is increasingly essential as more and more people rely on mobile devices or connected devices, such as a Roku, Amazon Echo or gaming box. Keep in mind, Wi-Fi can be either open for all to access or protected with a password. If you have a home Wi-Fi network, consider using a secure password.

► **WIRELESS ROUTER:** This device converts a broadband connection into a Wi-Fi signal. Routers need to be maintained and updated regularly to have the best connection. Many broadband providers sell routers or offer plans where they manage the router. Using a router recommended by your broadband provider is a good idea because they typically help

maintain the device and keep it updated. I think of a router as a sprinkler head attached to the end of the garden hose. It distributes the broadband signal to a wider area, much like a sprinkler distributes water.

► **STREAMING:** This term refers to accessing content, such as television shows or music, over the internet. If you like to watch a video using applications such as Netflix or YouTube, you are streaming video. If you listen to music online through Pandora or Spotify, you are streaming audio. The content is stored online as opposed to you downloading it to your device.

► **VOICE OVER INTERNET PROTOCOL (VOIP):** While the phone seems to work as it always has, VoIP technology is very different from that used

when copper wires transmit phone calls. With VoIP, calls go through your internet connection. VoIP is becoming more and more common, and in most cases you don't even know you are using an internet-based phone.

These are just a few of the words you may hear in regards to your internet service. Don't hesitate to ask questions when speaking to your internet service provider, which is a great resource. The internet network can seem like magic at times, but it's not as mysterious as it may appear. ☎



CARISSA SWENSON
IS A TRAINING
AND EDUCATION
CONSULTANT
FOR CONSORTIA
CONSULTING.



RISING ABOVE

WCTEL's Smart Rural Community designation helps West Carolina prosper

BY JEN CALHOUN

When it comes to recruiting the businesses that bring jobs to a community, a region's resources are key. And while infrastructure traditionally refers to water, sewer and electricity, high-speed internet is just as important, says Stephen Taylor, economic development director for Abbeville County.

"Really, the beginning of the game is infrastructure," says Taylor, who spends much of his time recruiting businesses and industry. "One thing we're proud to promote is that we're a gig community."

In fact, WCTEL's ultra-fast internet service and the cooperative's efforts to expand and recruit businesses were part of the reason the cooperative earned the Smart Rural Community designation from NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association.

A RARE DISTINCTION

NTCA honored only 13 rural communications firms in the country with the award. The selected companies used advanced technologies to help their local communities by enabling innovation in the areas of economic

development and commerce, education, health care, government services, security and energy use.

"WCTEL is a prime example of the power of a broadband connection and a steadfast commitment to growth and prosperity," NTCA Chief Executive Officer Shirley Bloomfield says. "Not only are the people of WCTEL charting their own path to a more prosperous future, but they are also creating a road map for many more communities across the country to follow suit. I commend the people of WCTEL for these extraordinary efforts."

SMALL TOWN, BIG TECH

WCTEL received the award based on several criteria, according to NTCA. The first



WCTEL's install and repair team delivers fiber services to the community. Team members, from left, are JR Hagan, Cason Nickles, Mitchell Beasley, Barry Ferguson, Brian Mitchell, Reggie Finley and Chad Culbreth.

involved the cooperative's commitment to faster broadband speeds with its installation of a fiber optic network throughout its coverage area. The first fiber installations began in 2008, and they continue today.

Now, WCTEL offers speeds up to a gigabit per second for many parts of its coverage area. Cooperative leaders formed the strategy when they recognized WCTEL's members' need for faster upload speeds for streaming videos, online gaming, and business communications and security.

Fast internet speeds are important when it comes to recruiting businesses. WCTEL's internet speeds are faster than those of some larger cities, giving them a competitive edge. "It's great and fairly unusual that a community of 25,000 people can offer that service," he says.

GROWING JOBS

WCTEL also goes beyond technology and communications services to help the area's economy, Taylor says.

"One of the great things about WCTEL is they help me recruit companies," he says. "If a company wants to locate to the area or expand, they'll hire site consultants. We also have meetings at WCTEL just to highlight that they have fast internet speeds and technology that a large, metropolitan community would have."

WCTEL leaders also helped ProTowels, a towel and blanket manufacturer, obtain a \$1.7 million, zero-interest Rural Economic Development loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The loan helped the Pittsburgh-based company expand its Abbeville facilities and add 50 jobs to the region.

"To grow to this size, we have relied on WCTEL and the infrastructure to support our company and facilities," says Jeremy Scott, vice president of operations at ProTowels. "The Abbeville facility is the largest by far, and most of our operations and staff are located here in South Carolina. The fact that this facility has the infrastructure that we do has allowed our facility to grow at a faster pace than others."

HELPING THE COMMUNITY

WCTEL also helped Erskine College in Due West by offering the same high-quality broadband available to colleges in much larger cities and installing campuswide wireless internet services. Because of this, the school offers classes on programming, advanced math, engineering, research, design and the many other areas of coursework that are increasingly dependent on fast internet speeds.

Local schools are also benefiting from WCTEL's network, which gives students

faster broadband speeds to access online research tools, complete their homework and use all the apps and software they need to stay competitive in the global realm.

WCTEL's fiber connectivity helps health care in the region, too. As medical records and tools grow increasingly digital, Abbeville Area Medical Center and other health care providers are able to expand their services through managed networks and telemedicine capabilities, both of which can increase the standard of care for all residents.

Also, WCTEL collaborates with the Freshwater Coast Community Foundation, which focuses on programs that increase the community's quality of life. With programs that improve education, the arts and economic development, the foundation has launched efforts from farmers markets in each community to initiatives meant to attract new businesses. When it comes down to it, WCTEL's technology keeps the town growing, keeps families together and makes life better for everyone in the community, Taylor says.

"We have to make sure these businesses know how relevant we are," Taylor says. "It's a good feeling to be able to tell them that we are as capable as any major city when it comes to broadband capacity. We can hang with the big boys." 📶

Canning 101

Do you want to get started with canning vegetables, fruits and more? Well, it's best to pay attention to a few fundamental rules.

Ruth Sarro, a former extension agent for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, says you will need some basic equipment, including a wide-mouth funnel, tongs, a ladle or dipper, a jar lifter and a water bath canner with a rack inside.

The best foods for canning have good structure and won't fall apart during the process. High-acid foods and pickles don't need to be pressure canned, but low-acid foods — like vegetables, meats, soups and broths — do.

Inspect your fruits and vegetables before canning. “The quality of the food going in determines the quality of the canned product,” says Sarro.

Glass jars and rings may be sterilized and reused, but you must purchase new flat lids each time. The “USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning” is available through the National Center for Home Food Preservation's website.

FOND MEMORIES

Sarro recalls childhood summers spent gathering wild blackberries and plums and fresh figs, pears, persimmons and pecans on the family dairy farm in South Alabama.

“With seven children to

feed on a farmer's wages, my mother taught each of us to harvest, freeze and can fruits and vegetables,” she says. She became a member of her local 4-H club; food preservation was one of her many projects.

After college, she worked as an agent for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Although she primarily handled 4-H programs, she also answered consumers' questions about canning and food safety.

Now retired, she teaches nutrition classes part time at Jacksonville State University, and she continues to enjoy canning at home. She makes berries into jams, freezes them to use throughout the year or eats them fresh.

That's the beauty of food preservation, she says. Canning and freezing let you enjoy the taste of summer in the dead of winter.

“My family prefers home-canned jams and jellies because the taste is more like fresh fruit,” Sarro says. “Home-canned peaches taste much better than commercially canned peaches. Sometimes I make peach jam, too. My daughter calls that ‘liquid gold.’”

HOMEGROWN

Retirement has allowed Sarro time to garden, and she's harvested okra, tomatoes, hot peppers and cucumbers. She grows corn, squash and eggplant, too. What she doesn't grow she buys at the local farmers market in Anniston, Alabama, or she shops at pick-



Ruth Sarro prepares strawberry jam in her home in Wellington, Alabama.

your-own farms in her area.

Canning also frees up freezer space. However, there's no room in the house for all the full jars, so the Sarros store them on shelves in their workshop.

“They'll stay above freezing temperatures out there in the winter but not too hot in the summer; then we'll bring them inside and keep them in the pantry as we need them,” she says, adding that she tries to use the food within a year of canning.

The following recipes are some of Sarro's favorites. They are ones she found in the publication “Food Safety in Alabama” but she says she's tweaked them through the years.



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



Anything from watermelon rind pickles to tomatoes and pepper jelly can be canned and preserved.

WATERMELON RIND PICKLES

- 2 pounds (about 4 cups) prepared watermelon rind
- 1 tablespoon pickling lime
- 4 cups white vinegar, divided
- 1 cup water
- 5 cups sugar
- 1 tablespoon whole allspice
- 1 tablespoon whole cloves
- 6 small pieces stick cinnamon

Prepare the watermelon rind by trimming all green and pink portions off. Cut into desired shape or size. Mix pickling lime in a quart (4 cups) of water. Soak prepared watermelon rind in the lime-and-water mixture for 2 to 3 hours. Drain and rinse well, then rinse again to make sure all lime is off the pieces of watermelon rind. Cover rinsed watermelon rind with fresh, cold water and boil for 1 hour or until tender. Drain watermelon rind. Cover with a weak vinegar mixture of 1 cup of vinegar to 2 cups of water. Allow to stand overnight. Discard the liquid the next morning. Make syrup of the 3 cups of vinegar, 1 cup water, sugar and spices by combining and heating to a simmering point. Remove syrup from heat, cover

and allow to steep for 1 hour so flavors of spices can be absorbed. Strain out spices. Add drained watermelon to the syrup and cook gently for 2 hours until syrup is thicker. Using a slotted spoon, pack watermelon rind into prepared standard canning jars. Pour syrup over the watermelon rind in the jars to cover it. Leave 1/2-inch head space in the jar. Wipe jar rims. Adjust jar lids and bands. Process in a boiling water bath canner for 15 minutes for pints and half-pints.

CHILI SAUCE

- 1 peck (about 2 gallons) large ripe tomatoes
- 6 large onions
- 3 large bell peppers
- 1 1/2 pints (3 cups) cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 1/2 tablespoons salt
- 1 tablespoon ginger
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg

Peel, core and slice tomatoes. Chop onions and peppers. Put into a large saucepan. Add remaining ingredients and cook on top of range, stirring

frequently, until sauce reaches consistency of ketchup (about 4 hours). Pack in hot, clean standard pint jars. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust jar lids and bands. Process in a boiling water bath canner for 10 minutes.

BREAD-AND-BUTTER PICKLES

- 10 cups sliced cucumbers
- 2 cups sliced onions
- 1/4 cup salt
- 2 cups cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons celery seed
- 2 teaspoons powdered turmeric
- 1 (3-inch) cinnamon stick
- 3 cups sugar

Combine cucumbers and onions, sprinkle with salt and set aside for 1 hour. Drain off all liquid. Put in a saucepan with vinegar, celery seed, turmeric, cinnamon and sugar. Bring to a boil and simmer 20 minutes. Put into clean standard pint canning jars. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust jar lids and bands. Process in a boiling water bath canner for 10 minutes. [📖](#)



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