

CONNECTED

BROADBAND:
HEALTH CARE EDITION

PERFECT PRESCRIPTION

Savitz Drug
Store going
strong for
60 years

TEAMWORK AT HOSPITAL

WCTEL and Abbeville
Area Medical Center
working together

PALMETTO SWEETS

Peeling back the layers
on Vidalia's cousin





BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

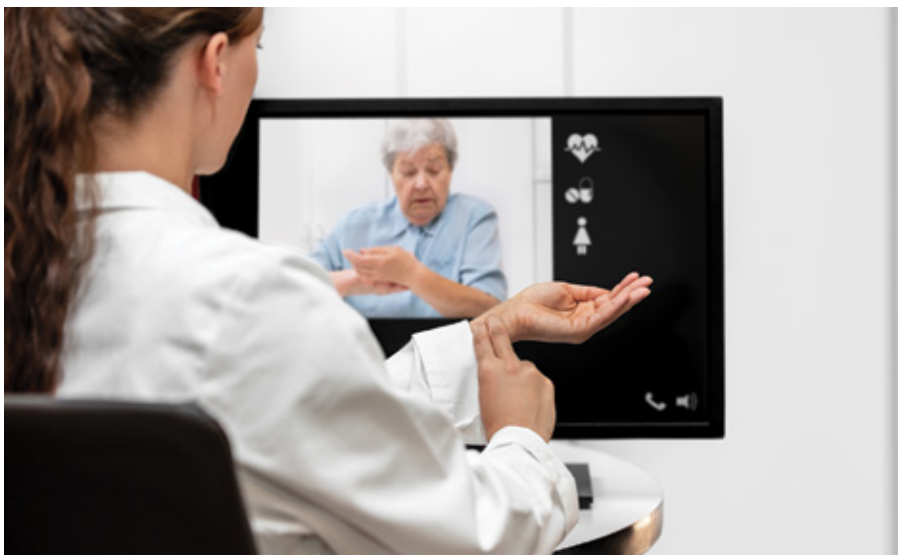
Broadband and rural health care

This magazine brings you stories of businesses operating across the broadband network your telco is building. You read of people who are working from home or getting an online degree thanks to their connection. Stories like these are endless throughout your area, and across the rural landscape served by the members of NTCA.

In this issue there is a focus on a particularly powerful use of broadband — health care. Better health leads to stronger families and happier, more productive communities. With a reliable internet connection and technology such as smartphones, tablets and monitoring devices, people of all ages have the tools to improve their health, access physicians, age in place, and live better lives. Be sure to read this issue's special health care section.

Innovative approaches to solving the challenges of rural living are nothing new for your telco and others like it across the country. Recently, I was delighted to visit with hundreds of executives and board members who lead these companies at our association's national meeting and expo. I was encouraged — as always — to be around these women and men who face the challenges of serving rural America and do an incredible job delivering some of the best broadband service in the nation.

Your community-based provider is part of a national family creating new opportunities for your community and those like it from coast to coast. From health care to education to economic development and beyond, they are building the future of rural America. 📶



Patients to have more access to telehealth services in 2020 under proposed Medicare Advantage changes

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

The elderly and disabled who participate in Medicare Advantage programs could see more opportunities for telehealth services next year.

The proposed changes, announced in October, would remove barriers and allow Medicare Advantage plans to offer additional telehealth benefits starting in plan year 2020, according to a press release from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Seema Verma, administrator of the CMS, says these changes “give Medicare Advantage plans more flexibility to innovate in response to patients’ needs,” adding that she is “especially excited about proposed changes to allow additional telehealth benefits, which will promote access to care in a more convenient and cost-effective manner for patients.”

The key to providing telehealth services, including remote doctor visits and patient monitoring, is the availability of reliable broadband access. The research paper *Anticipating Economic Returns of Rural Telehealth*, published by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, states: “Highly advanced, state of the art telemedicine applications — including some not even yet developed — can only be possible when accessed via a high-speed, reliable broadband network. This is particularly critical in rural America, where the highest potential benefits from telemedicine — and the greatest challenges to deploying broadband — can be found.”

Rural telecommunications providers continue to expand broadband service to some of the most sparsely populated areas of the country. All of the nearly 850 NTCA member companies provide broadband service, many bringing gigabit internet speeds to their communities.

In remarks at a telehealth policy forum shortly after the CMS announcement, Verma said the proposed Medicare Advantage changes are “a major step towards expanding access to telehealth services because the rule would eliminate barriers for private Medicare Advantage plans to cover additional telehealth benefits for enrollees in MA plans.” 📶

MULTITASKING

CONSUMERS FIND NEW WAYS TO ENJOY MEDIA

Phones, tablets, streaming boxes, smart televisions, desktops, laptops and more provide consumers a wealth of opportunities to go online, resulting in increasingly complex and individualized habits for content consumption.

There is no better company to illustrate the trends than Nielsen, a global enterprise specializing in measuring and tracking consumer media trends. In December of last year, the company took a deep dive into how audiences are making use of the growing media world to create its Nielsen Total Audience Report.

Adults in the United States spent more than 10 hours daily with some form of media: live or time-shifted TV, nearly five hours; radio, nearly two hours; and digital devices, nearly three and a half hours. They often combine the tools they use. For example, someone might watch television while also surfing the web on an iPad.

Forty-five percent of those responding to a survey of Nielsen's Media Enthusiast Community watched TV while using digital devices "very often" or "always." Nearly a third reported using both platforms "sometimes," while only 12 percent never use both at the same time.

The report concluded that new digital platforms such as smartphones and tablets have changed how consumers interact with and consume media, often using multiple devices at once to create a better overall experience.

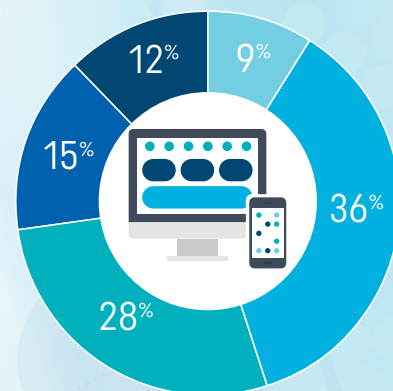
How often, for example, have you been watching a TV program, wondered what other shows an actor has appeared in and used a smartphone or tablet to find the answer? Well, you're not alone. More than 71 percent of respondents to the survey had looked up information about TV content they were viewing, and 51 percent reported the same habit for audio.

While some trends are changing as the technology landscape expands, others do not: Prime time still rules. Adult media usage still peaks from 9-10 p.m., with nearly 38 out of a possible 60 minutes spent consuming media.

The study reached a clear conclusion: Today's media landscape keeps consumers engaged. 📱



SIMULTANEOUS USAGE TV + DIGITAL



How often do you watch TV and use a digital device simultaneously?



SIMULTANEOUS USAGE OF DEVICES

DIGITAL USAGE WHILE WATCHING TV

In what ways have you used your digital device to engage with the TV content you were watching?

71%

Look up info related to the content

41%

Email | Text | Message about the content

35%

Look up | Shop for product or service being advertised

28%

Write | Read post about content on social media

15%

Switch to different content after seeing something online

DIGITAL USAGE WHILE LISTENING TO AUDIO

In what ways have you used your digital device to engage with audio content you were listening to?

51%

31%

25%

20%

14%



Broadband opens new health care frontiers

When I talk to state and local leaders, they say they're pleased by what a broadband network can do in our homes, schools and businesses. But increasingly, the place where experts and leaders are most excited about broadband technology for rural America is at the doctor's office.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

The American Telemedicine Association defines "telehealth" as "the remote delivery of health care services and clinical information using telecommunications technology." It's no overstatement to say that it can revolutionize health care across our country.

And since telehealth requires high-speed broadband, we're excited to be in the middle of that revolution.

As you'll read in the pages of this issue, telehealth is already helping doctors deliver improved care to patients on cases ranging from stroke to mental health. It's helping sick people eliminate trips to the emergency room. It may even encourage doctors to come to rural clinics and hospitals.

Based on studies, telehealth is already improving patient outcomes and satisfaction while also reducing costs and increasing efficiency for health care providers.

Because of broadband technology, local residents can work with their physicians to connect with specialists around the country via virtual visits and consultations. Eliminating the hurdle of traveling to big-city hospitals has proven to make patients more likely to seek care when they need it, which translates into faster and more complete recoveries.

Telehealth can also increase the pace of care when minutes and seconds matter. Whether it's giving a stroke patient an immediate evaluation by a specialist or enabling a regional radiologist to read the X-ray of a broken arm in the middle of the night, health care providers can use technology to eliminate dangerous delays. Tapping into a regional telehealth network of experts over broadband could mean that patients don't have to wait for help from local medical professionals who may not have the expertise or simply can't be everywhere at once.

I find, however, that when explaining what telehealth is, it's also important to discuss what it's not. In my view, telehealth should not be a way to replace local physicians with robots or with doctors a patient never meets in person. Telehealth should be an essential tool and an important resource for your doctor to use in the care of his or her patients.

When we say our mission at WCTEL is to improve the lives of the people in our service area, I can't think of a better way to do that than by working with talented doctors and nurses to help local residents live longer and healthier lives.

As we've built and improved our network, we're happy for the convenience and entertainment it provides. But it is health care — along with economic development and educational opportunities — that drove us to invest the millions of dollars required to build a world class communications network in our rural area. ☎



CONNECTED

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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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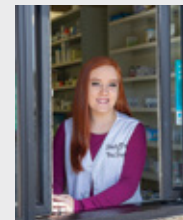
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WORDSOUTH
— A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY —

On the Cover:



Peri Hoskins serves a customer at the drive-through window at Savitz Drug Store. See story Page 12.



Introducing new WCTEL employees!

From left, Georganna Baylor, account services representative; Max Crawford, regional market manager; Tosha Hanna, account services representative; Bobby Gulley, install and repair tech; Courtney Dominick, account services representative; and Will Addis, install and repair tech.

Community Corner

FEATURING NEWS AND EVENTS AROUND THE WCTEL SERVICE AREA

- Calhoun Falls -

- » **April 13:** Easter Eggstravaganza, Blue Hole recreation area. Sponsored by the Calhoun Falls Chamber of Commerce.
- » **May 17 and 18:** Springtime in the Falls, townwide yard sale.

- Abbeville -

- » **March 16:** The first live concert of 2019, featuring Campfire Revival at 2 p.m.

- McCormick -

- » **June 1:** Western S.C. Blueway Festival, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Baker Creek State Park, 386 Baker Creek Road, McCormick. Free admission! www.bluewayfestival.com.

- Due West -

- » The Due West Robotics Club hosted the first Tech Challenge Meet on Jan. 12 at Erskine College. Teams from around the Upstate competed for final rankings going into the League Championship on Feb. 2, at Easley High School. The state championship was in February at Gaffney High School.
- » **March 9:** STEM Festival in Charleston
- » **March 16:** iMAGINE STEAM Festival in Greenwood
- » **March 30:** Demonstration at Erskine College Alumni Day
- » **April 6:** iMAGINE Upstate in Greenville
- » **May 17-19:** The LEGOLAND International Invitational in California. The Narwhal of Ideas, a LEGO League team from Due West, won the state championship and advanced to nationals for the 9 to 14-year-old division.
- » The Robotics Club is in the planning stages of starting a robot combat league, Battle Bots.

NOTICE SPAM CALLS

Malicious caller ID spoofing is when a caller deliberately falsifies the information transmitted to your caller ID display to disguise their identity. Spoofing is often used in an attempt to trick someone into giving away valuable personal information so it can be used in fraudulent activity or sold illegally.

TIPS TO AVOID SPOOFING SCAMS:

- Don't answer calls from unknown numbers. If you answer a spam call, hang up immediately.
- If you answer the phone and the caller — or a recording — asks you to hit a button to stop getting the calls, you should just hang up. Scammers often use this trick to identify potential targets.
- Do not respond to any questions, especially those that can be answered with "Yes" or "No."
- Never provide personal information in response to unexpected calls or if you are at all suspicious.
- If you get an inquiry from someone who says they represent a company or a government agency, hang up and call their main number to verify the authenticity of the request. You will usually get a written statement in the mail before you get a phone call from a legitimate source, particularly if the caller is asking for a payment.
- **WCTEL will never call and ask for personal information over the phone. If you receive a suspicious call that appears to be from WCTEL, immediately hang up and call our main line at 864-446-2111.**

This info and more can be found at:
www.fcc.gov



Home

is where the hope is

BY ANNE BRALY

Laurel,
Mississippi,
finds the
spotlight



Ben Napier and his wife, Erin, are the stars of HGTV's "Home Town" filmed in Laurel, Miss.

Brick-lined streets, century-old homes along avenues fringed with old-growth trees, cute shops, restaurants and heavenly bakeries all make Laurel, Mississippi, a charming Southern town. In its heyday, it was the lumber capital of the country. Somewhere in the 1980s, however, it became little more than a whistle-stop for people traveling between Birmingham and New Orleans.

But much changed when Erin Napier and her husband, Ben, returned to her hometown. They are the stars of the HGTV show "Home Town," now in its third season. And what they've done to bring Laurel back is nothing short of amazing.

The show's premise is this: Take an old Laurel home in need of restoration and bring it back to life with a bit of paint, some woodwork, drywall and lots of ingenuity. They turn a house in need of updates into a neighborhood showplace.

The success of "Home Town" brings people not only from around the country but also from around the world to Laurel. Visitors find renovated houses and some of the show's hot spots, including Laurel Mercantile Co. and The Scotsman General Store, both owned by the Napiers. Another stop is Pearl's, a lunch-only establishment highlighted in the show's first season. It's not uncommon to see a line at the restaurant, which features black-eyed peas and fried chicken.

FINDING A PATH

Before becoming HGTV and local celebrities, Ben Napier was a youth minister and Erin Napier made wedding invitations so pretty that they caught the eye of Martha Stewart. Long story short: He is an eternal optimist, but she is just the opposite, which led her to some self-reflection and therapy in the form of writing down one positive thought daily. Those thoughts are now collected in a book, "Make Something Good Today," but her writings, which she posted on social media, also caught the eye of HGTV. The rest is history.

"There was a defeatist attitude that permeated the town, a kind of communal and contagious giving up," Ben Napier says.

Small towns with allure



BARDSTOWN, KENTUCKY:

With a population of just more than 13,000, the community offers small-town living loaded with Southern charm.

In the center of the Bluegrass State, Bardstown is Kentucky's second-oldest town, founded in 1780. It holds dear its claim as the Bourbon Capital of the World, and it has been named by USA Today and Rand McNally as the Most Beautiful Small Town in America.

Bardstown has nearly 300 structures on the National Register of Historic Places, including a stagecoach stop built in 1779 that now stands as the Old Talbott Tavern, a bed-and-breakfast and restaurant.

► **Details:** www.visitbardstown.com

BELL BUCKLE, TENNESSEE:

The name comes from a creek of the same name. The town, which dates back to 1852, exudes Southern hospitality. Its people are friendly, and it offers a laid-back vibe that appeals to the visitors who come for a day or overnight stays in one of several bed-and-breakfasts.

The downtown features a row of businesses with rocking-chair front porches covered by metal shed roofs. It's a place where fried green tomato sandwiches are the go-to meal at Bluebird Antiques and Ice Cream Parlor.

Only about 600 people live in Bell Buckle, but that number easily swells into the thousands every June during the Moon Pie Festival or during weekends in October when The Webb School plays host to its huge Arts and Crafts Fair.

► **Details:** townofbellbuckle.com

AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA:

This town boasts a thriving arts scene, is home to a number of equestrian events, has a dynamic restaurant presence and offers numerous choices for overnight stays.

Catch the three-day Antiques in the Heart of Aiken show and sale in February, horse shows throughout the year, a couple of steeplechase events during the year and bluegrass at the Aiken County Fairgrounds in May. But it doesn't have to be a special event that brings you to town. The Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame is open year-round, as are the Aiken County Historical Museum and the Center for African American History, Arts and Culture.

► **Details:** www.visitaikensc.com



"The perception from the inside was that Laurel was a dying town and a relic of a once-booming past. I didn't see it that way at all. It was beautiful, but it wasn't putting its best face forward. Our mission was twofold: We wanted Laurel to be the way Erin remembered it, but at the same time, we wanted to bring a little big-city style and culture into it, because we wanted to change the perception of living in a small town. We wanted others to realize that coming home wasn't 'settling.' It could represent a deep connection to your roots and a commitment to preserving the goodness of a small, tightknit community."

Since the launch of "Home Town," tourism to Laurel has grown tenfold, says George Bassi, tourism chairman for the Jones County Chamber of Commerce. "It used to be we'd see maybe 10 people downtown. Now there are more than 100 on the streets every day," he says. "It's so much fun for us to see the town come alive."

While the homes featured on the show, including that of the Napiers, are not open for public tours, there are plenty of reasons for folks to linger in town. They can visit the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art and its exquisite collections of British Georgian silver and American works from the likes of John Henry Twachtman and Winslow Homer. They can walk through parks designed by Frederick Olmsted, the same man who designed New York's Central Park. Then they might lunch at Pearl's or dine at one of several restaurants, such as Mimmo's, known for authentic, made-from-scratch Italian, or The Loft for a good steak.

After three seasons of filming, the Napiers have found their rhythm in making "Home Town." "The show made sense as part of the overall mission," Ben Napier says. "With each house we saved, we felt we were putting Laurel back in its rightful place on the map." 🗺️



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



WaterHawk Smart Rain Shower Head

It's not all about saving electricity. You can also help conserve water with the WaterHawk Smart Rain Shower Head, which comes with a water-powered LED display — no batteries needed — that shows you water temperature and real-time usage in gallons per minute. It's much easier to cut down on those long showers when you can see the cost of the water you're using. MSRP \$49.99.

Want to lower your electric bill?

Turn to high-tech solutions

Smart devices can help you conserve energy and save money by automatically turning off the lights after you've left a room, managing heating and cooling throughout the house, and more.

ENERGY AUDIT: Before buying devices, consider learning what is consuming the most power in your home. Heating and cooling usually account for almost half the energy usage, but there are ways to find out how the rest is being used. Energy monitors, such as those made by Sense, \$299, or Neurio, \$219, connect to your electrical panel and provide real-time data — through a smartphone app or on the web — about a home's energy usage. They are great tools for finding out if it's time to upgrade an old appliance to a more energy-efficient model.

THERMOSTATS: There are two big players in the smart thermostat market: Nest and ecobee. Both offer features that can not only cut energy costs but also make your home more comfortable. Smart thermostats, which can be controlled remotely, also learn your routine, warming up the house before you get out of bed or keeping it cool as you come home from work.

Which one to choose? Nest is owned by Google, and the thermostat is part of a line of smart devices designed to interact with one another and that are easily controlled through Google Assistant. The ecobee model, which

comes with Amazon's Alexa voice service built in, can double as a digital assistant and control hub for other devices.



LIGHTS AND DEVICES:

About 25 percent of the average utility bill comes from lights in the home, so being able to better manage usage is essential to cutting costs. Companies such as TP-Link and Wemo offer several solutions. You can replace a traditional light switch with a smart version or put a smart plug into any outlet. A smartphone app or digital assistant can control the lights. Several models of smart lightbulbs can be programmed or remotely controlled to switch on and off, dim, change color and even report their own energy use.



A range of other energy-saving options are also available. Motion sensors can turn lights off when no one is in the room. And smart power strips offer surge protection while also reporting how much energy a plugged-in device uses. The strips can even turn off the devices using too much power. ☑





Better medicine

Medical Center and WCTEL partner in challenging realm

BY JOHN CLAYTON

The communication and information needs around medicine are evolving as quickly as medicine itself. Keeping up locally with those needs is the job of Abbeville Area Medical Center Information Technology Director Tim Stewart and the WCTEL Business Solutions department.

Stewart says the hospital has grown to depend on the WCTEL Business Solutions department as those needs change.

"There are a lot of security issues specific to health care that require a really high degree of attention to detail and compliance to regulations, and WCTEL really helps us," Stewart says. "That's a critical part of it for us."

ENTERPRISE LEVEL

The medical center, which celebrates its 100th birthday on May 18, is one of WCTEL's largest enterprise customers, along with the Abbeville County School District. But the hospital and its connected offices and clinics present WCTEL with some unique challenges beyond sheer size.

Stewart says the role of his department continues to evolve with the needs of modern medicine. "The IT part of it gets more and more complex because of the demand

for information," he says. "Before, IT was kind of ancillary to the medical process, and now it's integrated into everything."

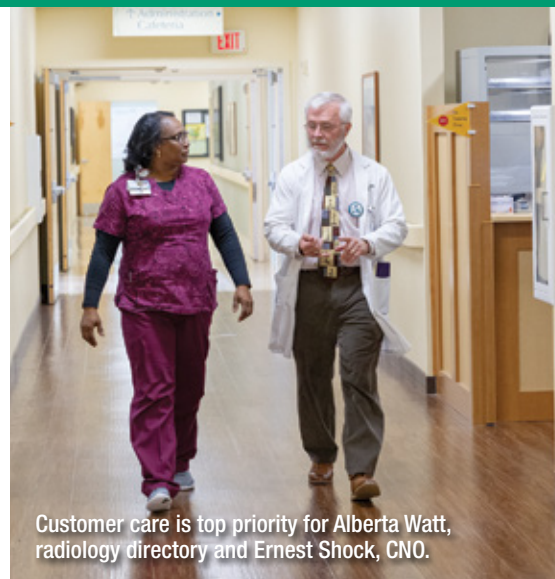
Changes include areas like telemedicine, which depends on high-speed fiber internet connections, as well as the accessibility and security of electronic medical records. "It's kind of a paradox because we have to make things secure and in compliance with regulations, but we also have to make things available to people — to doctors and to patients who want 24/7 access to that information," Stewart says. "WCTEL is really a critical partner in doing that to help us keep up with the technology and understand how it works."

THE EXTRA STEP

WCTEL Director of Business Solutions and Network Operations Chuck Nash says the job with enterprise customers like the Abbeville Medical Center goes well beyond installations and fixes.

"It does present some different challenges but no hurdles we can't cross," Nash says. "Our biggest challenge with enterprise customers is trying to work with them on a more strategic planning level. We will help them all the way down to a granular level, but we try to help with strategic planning and budgeting, and we can be an extension to their existing IT departments."

WCTEL provides most, if not all, of the medical center's communications infrastructure, such as wireless, high-speed fiber internet in the hospitals and clinics, as well as phone systems in most locations.



Customer care is top priority for Alberta Watt, radiology directory and Ernest Shock, CNO.



Tim Stewart, IT director at Abbeville Area Medical Center, and WCTEL Business Solutions Consultant/Sales Engineer Chad Posey discuss network logistics.

But it only starts there, Stewart says.

"WCTEL gives us some of the specialized tech support that we need," he says. "If we get stuck on a particular issue in the IT department, we can call on WCTEL to help. Most recently, we've worked with them to do an IT security assessment of our systems here."

"With a lot of tech companies, we'd be a pretty small player on a national level, and we wouldn't often get the priority service we need, but WCTEL is a local partner, and they're quick to respond. They understand how critical this is here." 📱



Closing the gap

Broadband brings high-tech health to rural communities

BY DREW WOOLLEY

In rural communities, the local pharmacy is often more than just a place to pick up over-the-counter cold medicine and fill prescriptions. It's the first stop for all things health care.

"We've had trouble keeping doctors in our town," says Cole Sandlin, owner of Fred's Pharmacy in Hamilton, Alabama. "We are the first health care center for most people, and that goes for all independent pharmacies in small towns."

Fred's Pharmacy, independently owned since 1951, has been in the Sandlin family for three generations. Since he took over the business from his parents in 2014, Sandlin has seen people travel nearly an hour to cities like Jasper, Alabama, or Tupelo, Mississippi, just to visit a general practitioner.

So he jumped at the opportunity to install a telemedicine kiosk at his pharmacy as part of a pilot program with American Well. The company provides services connecting patients and doctors.

Installed in December 2017, the kiosk gave Hamilton residents the chance to consult with a remote physician without the lengthy drive.

The kiosk was equipped with devices to monitor blood pressure, oxygen levels, skin and ear health, and more. In short,



Cole Sandlin, left, works with the telemedicine kiosk installed in 2017 at his pharmacy in Hamilton, Alabama, as part of a pilot program with American Well.

Photo courtesy of Mandy Green.

it gave patients access to routine medical care right down the street.

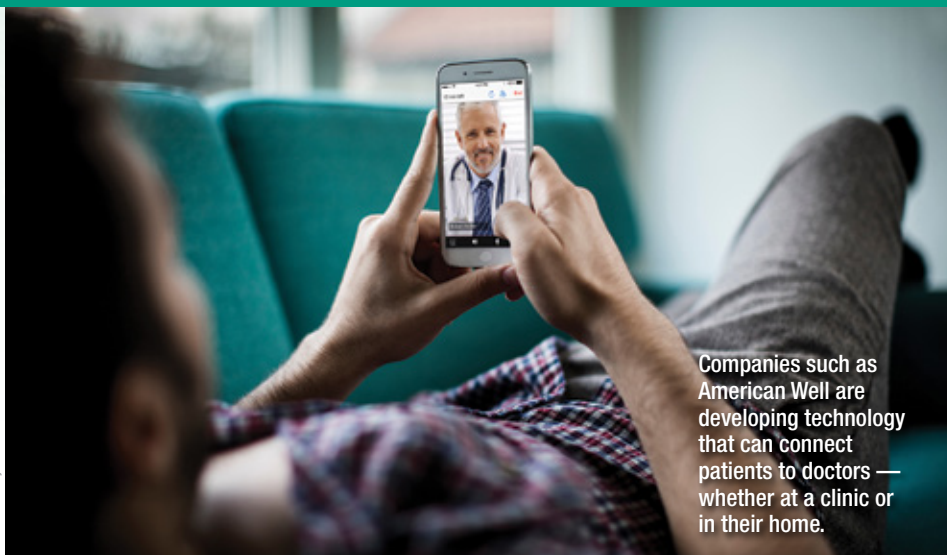
"For us, it just provides another avenue in our store to help patients," says Sandlin. "And in my little town of Hamilton, I want everybody to have the same amenities people have in bigger cities."

A SMARTER APPROACH

That gap between health care access in rural and urban areas is a challenge not just in Hamilton but throughout the country — a problem largely brought on by the rapid advancement of medical technology over the last century.

"Seventy-five years ago, when doctors carried most of what we could do in a black bag, you could have about the same care in tiny towns as you did in the big city," says Dr. Nancy Dickey, executive director of Texas A&M's Rural and Community Health Institute. "The reality today is it takes a much bigger patient base to pay for high-tech care."

But thanks to modern broadband connections, patients no longer have to make a trip in person to benefit from the latest medical technology. Electronic medical records allow a specialist hundreds of miles away to stay apprised of a rural



Companies such as American Well are developing technology that can connect patients to doctors — whether at a clinic or in their home.

patient's condition while the patient has remote checkups at a local clinic or pharmacy.

“What we always try to tell people is that telemedicine is not meant to replace a physician,” says Lloyd Sirmons, director of the Southeastern Telehealth Resource Center. “The whole goal behind telemedicine is to create access.”

While some rural clinics may be deterred by the idea that telemedicine requires expensive technology beyond their means, Sirmons is quick to point out that flashy setups aren't always the answer. A remote mental health counseling program, for example, is relatively easy and inexpensive to establish.

“It doesn't take much in the way of equipment,” he says. “I can take a laptop, one I use every day as a physician, and download software that gives me the ability to connect to a specialist. Then, I have a telemedicine unit.”

SUPPORT NETWORK

For larger health networks, broadband connectivity gives every hospital and clinic on their system access to the same quality of care. One such system is Essentia Health, which consists of 17 hospitals, about 70 clinics and eight nursing homes across Wisconsin, North Dakota and Northern Minnesota.

Since bringing on Maureen Ideker as a senior telehealth adviser six years ago, Essentia has installed videoconferencing

technology at each of its locations. “They wanted to stretch scarce specialist resources to bring their expertise to rural communities, and that's what we did,” she says.

In all, Essentia clinics and hospitals have access to about 30 specialist programs, including stroke, psychiatry and neonatal care. Larger hospitals can even partner with local pharmacies to design prescription dosages to ease patients who struggle with opioids off their addiction.

Ideker estimates that Essentia specialists see around 5,000 patients via telemedicine annually, with patients' satisfaction improving as they have grown accustomed to the new technology. It also provides needed support for rural physicians.

“If you're the only health provider in a rural community, that can be a pretty isolated feeling,” Ideker says. “I think they feel a lot of support from this, which makes for happier doctors who are likely to stay around longer.”

NEW SOLUTIONS

As broadband continues to open up health care opportunities in rural communities, new challenges also arise. Along with educating patients about the medical options available to them, Sirmons sees consistent insurance coverage for telemedicine and across the board as one of the biggest hurdles to its adoption.

That hurdle was enough to put an end to telemedicine at Fred's Pharmacy, at least for now. Despite hoping to continue offer-

ing consultations through the American Well kiosk, Sandlin was forced to end the service after the pilot program concluded due to a lack of insurance coverage for users.

“We were probably a little ahead of our time, but it was an opportunity we didn't want to miss,” he says. “We learned a lot, and we plan to have telemedicine back as soon as it's covered.”

In fact, according to experts like Dickey, as broadband internet becomes more widespread, telemedicine won't just be an option in rural communities. Patients will increasingly demand it. The rise of technology in medicine may be the source of the health care gap, but she believes it can close it as well.

“Not everything can be done by telemedicine,” Dickey says. “But if we can provide medical care for someone in space using this technology, we can probably close the distance between your local clinic and the next big city.”

Did you know?

Kentucky and Tennessee passed telehealth parity laws in 2000 and 2016, respectively, that require private insurance companies to reimburse telehealth services at comparable rates to in-person care. In 2016, Alabama also enacted a partial parity law to cover remote mental health services.

In South Carolina, live video consultations are covered by Medicaid in some circumstances, while Kentucky Medicaid recipients can be reimbursed for video consultations and teleradiology.

➔ To learn more about telehealth reimbursement in your state, visit cchpca.org.



LOCAL INSTITUTION

Savitz Drug Store prescribes service with a smile

BY JOHN CLAYTON

Greeting customers as old friends has contributed to Savitz Drug Store celebrating 60 years of business in Abbeville.

Steve Trumbull arrived at Savitz Drug Store a decade ago with a vision of what he wanted in a small-town store. The formula was simple: provide customers with good service, competitive prices and a smile.

“We want to treat people like they should be treated — treat them like individuals,” Trumbull says. “If you come in my store, you’re going to get a smile and a ‘How are ya doing?’”

The Savitz Drug Store has been an institution in Abbeville since its patriarch, Joe Savitz, opened the doors on Dec. 1, 1959. As the store turns 60, Trumbull celebrates 10 years as the store’s managing owner.

“I had a vision of what I was hoping this store would be, and right now we’re actually exceeding what I thought we would be,” he says. “It’s exciting, and we just want to keep building for the future.”

The Savitz Drug Store’s ownership group, which includes Trumbull, is part of a consortium of about 30 independent drug stores operating similarly to the Independent Grocers Association behind the IGA groceries common in rural areas.

“You have to do that now,” Trumbull says. “An independent pharmacy can’t survive without some kind of buying power out there with the big-box stores and things like that.”

Adero Thomas started with Savitz Drugs during her clinical internship and has worked as a full-time pharmacy technician since earning her degree two years ago.





Pharmacist Steve Trumbull manages the day-to-day operations at Savitz Drug.

BIG MOVES

Soon after Trumbull took over operations at Savitz Drug in February 2009, the store was moved from its original location in Abbeville's picturesque downtown to the Greenwood Highway near the Abbeville Medical Center and other medical offices.

Trumbull says the move traded the nostalgia and comfort of 50 years at the downtown location for additional conveniences for the store's customers, including dedicated parking. "Here, I can look out my window and see the doctor's clinic right across the street," he says. "Once we get the people in here and they see how we operate and how we treat them, they usually come back."

Nostalgia or not, Trumbull says he is proud that his eight-person staff of "regulars" have kept alive the same sort of hometown service Abbevillians were accustomed to in the 1950s and '60s.

"We don't want someone to come in with a prescription and just fill it and take their money," he says. "We try to learn about the person, learn about their families and their hobbies. Some of my customers, I know what their favorite football team is, college and pro. I know what their kids are doing. It's really nice. This is a nice community to work in, that's for sure."

Trumbull had worked in Abbeville once before as a young pharmacist at the beginning of his career. He returned to work alongside a friend and mentor, Charles Loyd, who worked in Abbeville as a pharmacist for 50 years before retiring in 2014.

Now, Trumbull is no longer "the new druggist" in town, and that's the way he wants it. "It took a little time, but I started winning them over slowly but surely," he says. "They call and ask for me now. It's about building trust."

OLD BUSINESS, NEW CENTURY

While customer service is at the forefront of Trumbull's vision for Savitz Drug Store, it is only one piece of the plan in a changing business. Access to a high-speed fiber optic internet service provided by WCTEL has helped position Savitz Drug for the next decade and beyond.

WCTEL's Business Solutions team supplies all of Savitz Drug's telephone, internet and security services. "If we have a problem I can actually talk to somebody," Trumbull says. "I've got their cellphone numbers. If something's not working, I can call. They make you a priority. I've had their competitors come to me, and I say, 'I don't need your services because WCTEL always takes care of us.' We don't have a lot of issues, but when we do, I call them, and they take care of it."

It's the type of partnership WCTEL Director of Business Solutions and Network Operations Chuck Nash tries to foster with every local small business his team serves. "We treat our single-line small businesses with the same priority we do our major enterprise customers," Nash says. "We know that no matter your size, your business is your livelihood. We take that seriously."

Trumbull sees similarities in his business and WCTEL. "A lot of WCTEL's people come here and get their medicines," he says. "We all try to keep it in the community, but I wouldn't be using them if I didn't like them."

Though much of Savitz Drug's business comes through the old-school method — word of mouth — Trumbull says he will look to expand the store's presence on the internet and social media as he blends a bright future with the successful heritage he embraced when he first arrived.

"When I had a chance to jump on this opportunity, I did, and I haven't looked back," he says. "We're taking care of people, and we want to make everyone happy." 📞

SAVITZ DRUG STORE

815 W. Greenwood St.

Abbeville, SC 29620

864-366-2165

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-6:30 p.m.

Saturday, 8 a.m.-2 p.m.



Palmetto Sweets

Spring onions bring a taste of the South

About this time every year, the gems of spring — Southern-grown onions — appear on grocery shelves, and they are certainly a long-awaited treat for onion lovers. Unlike those other onions that bring you to tears, these are so mild they're considered tear-free. Many people love them so much they bite right into them like an apple.

When people think of sweet onions, most envision Georgia's Vidalias. But South Carolina Palmetto Sweets, which entered the market about a decade ago, are gaining ground.

Dupre Percival is a caterer and restaurateur who is passionate about South Carolina products, including Palmetto Sweets. "We're known for our foods," he says of his home state. "Our grits. Our peaches. Our peanuts. And dishes like our Frogmore Stew. I add a lot of onions to that. When you think South Carolina, you think food."

Most Palmetto Sweets are grown in the state's Piedmont region, where the weather is just a bit cooler and the soil, much like that across the border in Georgia's Vidalia-growing counties, is rich and loamy. But, Percival notes, soil changes from place to place. "You can have two fields of onions on one farm and they won't taste the same," he says. However, no matter the sweetness, they're all good for cooking.

A PASSION FOR FOOD

A good part of the 70-year-old restaurateur's early years was spent in real estate. He entered the restaurant business in the 1970s for a few years after assuming financial obligations for two sub and pizza restaurants. Within a month, take-out orders were coming in and a side catering business was established.

Fast-forward through a couple of decades: The two pizza restaurants are

closed, but Percival continues to cater through his Dupre Catering and Events. Five years ago, he opened The Market Restaurant at the State Farmers Market in West Columbia, South Carolina. "I'm a caterer who owns a restaurant now," he says from his home in Irmo, a bedroom community to Columbia.

Two much-loved items on his catering menu are his tomato pie and the onion dip. Both call for sweet onions, but Percival always adds more than the recipe calls for.

"Sweet onions have a gentler impact in recipes," he says. "If you put sweet onions in an omelet or in a dip, it gives it a good onion taste without overpowering it. Every recipe requires balance. I'll put onions in some recipes that don't call for them. But when you don't put onions in recipes that do call for them, they're not right. The dish is not good without them."



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



CAROLINA SWEET ONION DIP

This is a signature dish for Dupre Catering.

- 1 cup finely chopped sweet onions
- 1 cup mayonnaise (preferably Duke's)
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Paprika
- Pita chips

Heat oven to 325 degrees. Combine onions, mayonnaise and cheese and place in baking dish. Lightly dust top with paprika and bake for 20-30 minutes or until bubbly and brown on top. Serve with pita chips.

Tip: Add collard greens that have been cooked, mashed and very well-drained to this dip for a taste explosion.

SWEET ONION TOMATO PIE

Dupre Percival says using Duke's mayonnaise and Sunbeam bread makes a big difference in the outcome.

- 1 1/4 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1-2 tablespoons finely minced sweet onion
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- 15 slices day-old bread, divided
- 10 medium ripe tomatoes, washed, cored and sliced (the freshest and ripest you can find)

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Prepare cheese spread by combining cheese with mayonnaise, onion, salt and pepper.

Grease a 9- by 12-inch casserole dish with butter, olive oil or cooking spray. Layer the bottom evenly with 7 slices of bread cut into medium-sized cubes.

Create a layer of tomatoes by overlapping them in a single layer on top of the bread cubes. This usually can be done with 5 of the tomatoes making 4 rows. Season liberally with salt and pepper.

Trim the crusts from the remaining slices of bread and place the slices over the top so that they completely cover the tomatoes. Spread the slices with the cheese spread. Cover well, but don't be tempted to use too much cheese spread or the pie will be soggy. Arrange the remaining tomatoes in slices in the same manner as before. Then, season with salt and pepper. Dollop the rest of the cheese spread in rows across the top or in whatever design you want.

Bake, uncovered, for 25 minutes or until the cheese mixture becomes golden brown. Makes about 15 servings as a side dish.

Note: The pie can be dressed up by adding fresh herbs such as basil, oregano and marjoram to the cheese mixture.



ROASTED BALSAMIC ONIONS

Always a sweet way to enjoy the sweet onions of the South.

- 2 large sweet onions, peeled
- Coarse salt and coarsely ground pepper, to taste
- 4 tablespoons butter
- Good-quality balsamic vinegar

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a baking dish just large enough to hold the onions. Slice off the top and the bottom parts of the onions so they sit flat in the baking dish; cut the onions in half.

Arrange the onion halves, cut side up, in the prepared baking dish. Season with salt and pepper, and place 1 tablespoon of butter on each half.

Cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and bake 50 to 60 minutes or until onions give slightly when the edges are squeezed together between your fingers. Remove from oven. Uncover and sprinkle each onion half with balsamic vinegar while using a fork to spread the onion layers apart so that the vinegar can dribble down between them. Serve hot or at room temperature. Makes an excellent side dish to a juicy grilled steak. 🍷



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