

CONNECTED

ERSKINE COLLEGE

The 600-student
school is a unique
experience

BROADBAND:
EDUCATION EDITION

GET A SPEED BOOST

WCTEL brings
new pricing and
faster service

SHAPING A GENERATION

Broadband
educates
tomorrow's
workforce





BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Program helps small telcos with cybersecurity

Our lives are impacted in countless ways by broadband internet access. With such connectivity, however, comes threats that must be guarded against, including cyber-attacks targeting network operators. Local, community-based providers such as your telco do a great job protecting against cyberattacks, despite not having the resources of the big, nationwide companies.

But there is more we can do, and NTCA is excited to work with our members and the Department of Homeland Security on the Cyber-Threat Information Sharing Forum for Small Network Operators. While there are other programs for sharing cyberthreat information, these generally do not meet the unique needs of small telcos. Our pilot program provides a trusted environment for small network operators to share information about cyberthreats, vulnerabilities, best practices and mitigation activities. Further, it is bolstered by connections to network defenders across the globe, including federal resources.

During this summer's pilot phase, participants exchanged information via a variety of online platforms, participated in weekly virtual meetings to share cyber intelligence and heard from guest speakers. They also collaborated with their peers and received daily open-source and weekly technical reports created by NTCA's pilot support team.

This is yet another example of how local telcos like yours all across America are working together to ensure you have the best broadband experience possible in today's connected world.

Home prices boosted by faster internet

BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

Access to speedy internet service increases the market value of homes, according to a first-of-its-kind study reported online by the Daily Yonder.com.

The study evaluated 887 "remote rural" counties, which are those not adjacent to a metropolitan area. And it evaluated data such as median housing value, housing characteristics, income growth, employment and more.

Speeds of 25 Mbps or less can make a dramatic difference in overall home values. A 10% increase in the percentage of residents with access to at least 200 Kbps — far slower than the speeds now offered by many rural telcos — would raise the average housing value by \$661.

"These may not seem like massive numbers, but when applied to the average number of households in each county, they add up to significant increases in property values, which would likely have meaningful impacts on county property tax collections," wrote the study's authors, Brian Whitacre, of Oklahoma State University; and Steven Deller, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The authors pointed out additional benefits of increased broadband adoption, including residents who become more civically engaged, reduction of social isolation and even income generation.

BY THE NUMBERS: BROADBAND IN RURAL REMOTE COUNTIES

94%

of the houses had access to download speeds of 200 Kbps.

63%

had access to 25 Mbps, the FCC's definition of broadband.

38%

had access to 100 Mbps.

9%

had access to 1,000 Mbps.

6%

on average, of houses had no fixed internet availability beyond dial-up.



Source: "Broadband's Relationship to Rural Housing Values," a study by Steven Deller and Brian Whitacre



Be aware

A dose of skepticism
and care will foil
phone and online
scammers

Helpful pop-up messages frequently appear on computer screens, including weather notifications, news alerts or reminders to update software. Not all pop-ups, however, are benevolent. In fact, some consumers have learned tough lessons about trust in the digital age.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) describes one form of grift as “tech support scammers.” A pop-up window appears on a computer screen, complete with well-known technology company logos and a phone number for help

solving a problem with a balky operating system, computer virus or similar woe.

The end goal for these scams is to have someone wire money or to provide gift cards to the scammers. And the pitches and patter from the scammers are polished — people are fooled. There are many variations, including offers to help someone recover a refund.

Fraud is certainly not limited to computers. Telephone scammers target the elderly with phone calls in which the scammer pretends to be the grandchild or another

relative. The scammer may even claim to be a lawyer or police officer, increasing the urgency, according to the FTC.

The scammer paints the picture of an urgent situation, asking for money to be sent immediately through a service such as UPS, whose terms and conditions for use state that it does not agree to ship cash. As a result, UPS, which does work with law enforcement on such cases, is not liable for the loss, says Matt O’Conner, senior manager of public relations for the company. ☎

TIPS FOR AVOIDING TECH SUPPORT SCAMMERS

PHONE CALLS: If you get a phone call you didn’t expect from someone who says there’s a problem with your computer, hang up.

POP-UPS: Do not act on pop-ups appearing on your computer that request you to call a number. Real security warnings and messages will never ask you to call.

WEB-BASED ADS: If you’re looking for tech support, go to a company you know and trust. Scammers will try to trick legitimate websites into posting ads for bogus companies.

For additional tips, or if you feel you’ve been scammed, visit consumer.FTC.gov and search for tech support scam.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING FAKE EMERGENCY SCAMMERS



If you receive a call you suspect is a fake emergency scam, follow a few simple steps toward safety.

Check out the claim by looking up the phone number of the friend or family member the scammer claims is in need. Call that person, even if the scammer requested that you do not.

Do not pay. Anyone who requests you to wire money, send a check, overnight a money

order, or pay with a gift card or cash reload card is always, always, always a scammer. These payment methods are nearly untraceable.

If you sent money to a family-emergency scammer, contact the company you used to send the money and tell them it was a fraudulent transaction. Ask to have the transaction reversed, if possible.

Please report such calls or messages to FTC.gov/complaint.

Our cooperative mission gives us purpose

Business gurus often urge executives to ensure the company they've been entrusted to lead is "mission-oriented" or "mission-focused," and that the organization's mission should drive progress and establish values.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

"A mission statement is not something you write overnight," said famed organizational thinker Stephen Covey. "But fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution, the solid expression of your vision and values. It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything."

If experts like Covey turned their attention to communications cooperatives like WCTEL, I believe they would be pleased to see that the original founding mission of our cooperative remains such a focus of what we do daily.

With October being National Cooperative Month, it's an important time to celebrate that founding mission and our unique legacy as a cooperative.

WCTEL was founded more than half a century ago by local people who wanted to bring a modern communications network to our area. These bold, forward-thinking people were not telecommunications experts or even the sort of business gurus I mentioned earlier. They were, however, people dedicated to our community. People determined to open opportunities for their friends, families and neighbors. People committed to building the foundation our region needed to thrive.

The convictions they held when they formed our cooperative live on today as the foundation of our mission. And taking a page from the business experts, we use that mission to drive our progress and establish our values.

DRIVE PROGRESS

Another favorite idea among the business gurus is that businesses must continually move forward to avoid falling behind. I think there's a lot of truth to this, but I also think it's important to let the cooperative's mission drive that progress.

Delivering the best possible communications service to residents in our region is what drives us to work hard every day.

It's also important for that mission to provide perspective for our progress. If we overextend our resources, we put our future in jeopardy. And if our future is put into question, so are the communications services on which many in our community rely.

Rest assured that as we move forward, we do so with our mission in mind.

ESTABLISH VALUES

A cooperative telco has a different set of values than a publicly traded company like the big corporate providers that dominate our industry. Those providers exist to enrich their stockholders and are driven by Wall Street's quarterly performance measurements. This is why, in most cases, those big, corporate providers only build and upgrade service in profitable metropolitan markets. That profit-driven mission defines their values as a company.

WCTEL is different. Since our cooperative was founded to improve the quality of life in the areas we serve, we are focused on bettering our community. This means taking care of our customers and employees. This means we value the relationships our cooperative has with other organizations. And above all, it means we value the opportunity to continue meeting your communications needs today and in the future. 📞



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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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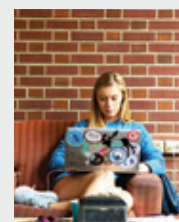
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On the Cover:



Michaela Hurst, a junior majoring in biology, studies in the Java Coffee Shop on the campus of Erskine College.
See story Page 12.



WCTEL awards \$11,000 in college scholarships

WCTEL recently awarded WCTEL and Foundation for Rural Service 2019 college scholarships totaling \$11,000. All scholarship applications are mailed to FRS and independently judged in Washington, D.C., by a panel selected by FRS.

The \$8,000 WCTEL Scholarship — \$2,000 is distributed annually for four years — was awarded to Will Smith from Abbeville High School. Smith plans to attend the College of Charleston to pursue a degree in economics. He also received the \$500 Roger Cox Scholarship from FRS.

The FRS 25th Anniversary Scholarship, valued at \$2,500, was awarded to Jake McAllister from Greenwood Christian School. McAllister plans to attend the Clemson University Bridge Program to pursue a degree in agricultural mechanization and business.

"The board and employees of WCTEL are delighted to help area youth pursue their college dreams," says Jeff Wilson, CEO of WCTEL. "We hope that these students flourish and one day return to our area to raise their families and pursue their career dreams."



2019 FRS Youth Tour participants Meg Botts, from Abbeville High School, and Jaiden Shea, from Crescent High School.

Students tour Washington, D.C.

Each year the Foundation for Rural Service provides rural high school students across America a chance to visit the nation's capital and learn about rural telecommunications. To be considered for this trip, students must submit an essay application to WCTEL. A selection committee chooses the deserving students. This year's attendees were Meg Botts and Jaiden Shea.

Enter our photo contest

Photos for the Halloween photo contest, open to kids 12 and younger, must be submitted by Nov. 1 at 4 p.m. They will be posted to WCTEL's Facebook page, and voting will occur Nov. 1-7. The three photos with the most likes will win a prize. The winner will be announced on Nov. 8.

2019 HALLOWEEN PHOTO CONTEST





SUBMIT
YOUR
PHOTOS

Send your photo to: PhotoContest@wctel.net

Go to: www.wctel.net for contest rules and details.



Featuring news and events around the WCTEL service area

Abbeville

Fall lineup for the historic Abbeville Opera House:

- Free Flow Band — Saturday, Sept. 14, 8 p.m.
- Shaun Jones — Friday, Sept. 20, 8 p.m.
- The Little Roy and Lizzy Show — Friday, Sept. 27, 8 p.m.
- Kier — Saturday, Oct. 12, 8 p.m.
- Night of the Living Dead Theatrical Production — Friday, Oct. 25, 8 p.m.; Saturday, Oct. 26, 8 p.m. and midnight; Friday, Nov. 1, 8 p.m.; and Saturday, Nov. 2, 8 p.m. Night of the Living Dead is being presented with special arrangement by John F. Carroll.

Hogs and Hens BBQ Festival

Abbeville Square, Oct. 18-19

Scare on the Square

Thursday, Oct. 31, 5 p.m.

For more information about all city events, please visit abbevillecitysc.com or the City of Abbeville's Facebook page.

Calhoun Falls

Fall Jubilee at the Blue Hole

Saturday, Oct. 5, noon-3 p.m. Admission is free.

Halloween on Cox Ave.

Thursday, Oct. 31, 6-8 p.m.

Iva

Iva Depot Days

Saturday, Oct. 12, 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m.



Taking 'City Farmhouse'

on the road

BY JOHN CLAYTON

Before an alphabet soup of cable television channels like HGTV and DIY began delivering tips and advice for home decor and remodeling, Kim and David Leggett were finding dusty treasures and building their City Farmhouse brand.

That part of the business — the hunt for the rusty and the rustic — has remained the same for the Leggetts since they started the business 25 years ago in Franklin, Tennessee. But City Farmhouse evolved as trends changed, venturing into “pop-up fairs” and “pop-up shops,” terms now part of the lexicon as antiques and decor items move beyond the four walls of the traditional retail space.

“The pop-up fairs and pop-up shops are becoming a popular way all across the U.S. for people to sell all kinds of things,” Kim Leggett says. “It’s not just relating to antiques. They’re extremely popular in New York and California, where people are selling everything from jewelry to fashion.”

The Leggetts began their City Farmhouse Pop-Up Fairs in 2012 in Franklin. Shoppers and vendors from across the country have attended. In 2017, the couple licensed City Farmhouse fairs in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Medina, Tennessee.

While Kim Leggett has been putting her touch on her own City Farmhouse brand for more than two decades, her fingerprints are now all over a series of Country Living Fairs.

As program director for the 2019 fairs, sponsored by the popular Country Living Magazine, Leggett is coordinating presenters for the main and kitchen stages. “The goal is to bring Country Living Magazine to life,” Leggett says.

“Visitors will learn from top-notch influencers in the industry, while enjoying vendors with antiques, home decor, food, crafts, clothing — everything you might see in an issue of Country Living Magazine.” 🗨️



Kim and David Leggett have curated the City Farmhouse style for over two decades.

A family business by the book

Kim Leggett says the pieces she discovers, buys and sells can come together to create a home that makes memories. “We don’t always know the whole story behind a piece, but when it goes to another home, it becomes part of another story, and we have that going forward,” she says.

To Leggett, connections between past and present are at the essence of what has become the “city farmhouse” style of decor, which she promotes with shows and her Franklin, Tennessee-based business.

She authored “City Farmhouse Style,” a 2017 book about a design movement that features urban homes decorated in farmhouse style. The work includes photography by Alissa Saylor. “Farmhouse style is time-tested. It has staying power. You can bet the farm on it,” writes Country Living Editor-in-Chief Rachel Hardage Barrett in the book’s foreword.

A love for antiquing and decorating is part of Kim Leggett’s family heritage. “My grandmother, who raised me, and my aunt — she was at our house all the time — went to auctions and local flea markets like the ones in every little small town,” she says. “So you could say I was raised in the business. My grandmother wasn’t actually a seller, but she would buy things, and when she got tired of something, she would sell it to a neighbor.”

Leggett was hooked, going to the auctions and first buying “blind boxes” filled with surprises. “There would just be all kinds of interesting little things in the box,” she says. Soon enough, she began buying with purpose, teaming with her husband to create City Farmhouse and applying knowledge gained through the years to bring a country style into households across the country.



“People in farmhouses were very eclectic, especially people who didn’t have a lot of money,” Leggett says. “They used whatever they could find, and maybe there was a craftsman in their backyard who was a cousin or a neighbor and they could make some wonderful things inexpensively.”

Leggett has introduced these relics — and their stories — to cabins, cottages, mansions, homes of celebrities and even restaurants across the country. From national design awards to features in national magazines, Leggett is recognized for her passion and efforts in sharing a decorating style that connects people with the past while writing a new story for their future.

CITY FARMHOUSE AT THE COUNTRY LIVING FAIRS

Sponsored by Country Living Magazine

The first fair this year was in Rhinebeck, New York. The final two 2019 events are set for Columbus, Ohio, Sept. 13-14 and Atlanta, Georgia, Oct. 25-27.

In addition to hundreds of vendors from more than 25 states, this year’s fairs will feature a City Farmhouse Pop-up SHOP. This special section of the Country Living Fairs will include unique finds from the Leggetts, along with curated sellers and popular vendors from other City Farmhouse events.

Other antique events

ANTIQUING ROUND TOP AND SURROUNDING AREA

This Texas event increases the tiny hamlet’s population of 90 exponentially as thousands from around the state and nation descend for the spring and fall dates. Round Top’s 2019 Fall Antiques Week is set for Sept. 30-Oct. 5. You can find City Farmhouse at Booth BD1 at the Marburger Farms Antique Show in Round Top. It happens in the spring and fall, Oct. 1-5 this year.



Full speed ahead

WCTEL rolling out faster internet speeds for customers

BY JOHN CLAYTON

The needs of internet customers evolve as quickly as the internet itself, and WCTEL is making high-speed changes to meet that demand.

This fall, the cooperative unveiled faster speeds and new pricing plans to customers on its fiber network.

“This is a huge moment, not just for us as a company, but for our customers,” says Shannon Sears, WCTEL Director of Commercial Operations. “The customers’ needs have changed so much over the past couple of years, and this is not the same internet that we had a few years ago. The equipment is better. The speeds are better.”

SPEEDY PLANS

WCTEL’s new base plan on its fiber optic network provides upload and download speeds of 200 Mbps for \$40/month. A faster option ups those speeds to 500 Mbps for \$60/month. A premium package with upload and download speeds of 1 Gbps (that’s 1,000 Mbps) is \$80/month.

Comparatively, speeds under the old plan are more than tripling. And on all plans, uploads are as fast as downloads. “Previously, it was set up to be heavy on the download side for streaming and things like that,” Sears says. “That’s still the greatest need by far, but today, more people are pushing information out to the internet in the form of photos, videos and other data.”

In addition to improved speeds coming into customers’ homes, WCTEL has also updated its Wi-Fi routers and Wi-Fi plans, offering extenders for larger properties along with three new Wi-Fi plans: Wi-Fi Standard (formerly DeviceLink), Wi-Fi Extended, and Wi-Fi Premium.


ESSENTIAL UPGRADES

Wireless internet is a necessity for today’s customers who stay plugged in longer and use more devices. According to Deloitte Digital Media Trends, consumers subscribed to three digital streaming services on average in 2018, and that number is expected to grow.

An article that the Internet and Television Association published online says streaming video made up 76% of consumer internet traffic — and that was in 2017. That same article quoted statistics indicating that each person in 2018 was responsible for eight networked devices, a number expected to expand to 13.1 devices per person by 2022.

“The more devices you have, the more internet you need. The demand is there now,” Sears says. “We’re really positioning ourselves and our customers for the future because of the speeds we have.”

WCTEL is working to make the improved speeds available to every customer. “We have a couple of small areas that do not have fiber optic service, but we expect our network to be 100% fiber within about a year,” says WCTEL CEO Jeff Wilson. “We want to make sure all of our customers have the best internet experience possible.”

Sears says higher speeds and savings, along with a change in policy that no longer requires members of the cooperative to have phone service, has given WCTEL a significant edge. “This is far superior to what our competitors can offer in our area,” he says. “Since 2008, when we put in our fiber optic network, we’ve been building toward this.” 

Anderson District 3 STEAMs ahead

Tech investments paying off for students

BY JOHN CLAYTON

Over the past year, second graders from Anderson School District 3 have Skyped with a world-renowned scientist, and fifth graders have won an international jet-toy competition in Detroit.

Neither of these things would have been possible without the district's commitment to STEAM — science, technology, engineering, arts and math education — and WCTEL's partnership with the district, says Aimee Gray, District 3's Director of Technology.

District 3 serves the Starr-Iva area of southwestern Anderson County. Students in grades six through 12 receive school Chromebooks or iPads they can take home. Younger students all have devices they can use at school.

"In the past two years, we've made sure every student in our district has access to a Chromebook or an iPad," Gray says. "In a lot of areas, students taking home a device wouldn't be helpful without internet access, but we're fortunate to have WCTEL cover our area and provide high-speed internet access to a majority of our students, so we're able to teach them at school and have them go home and continue their learning."

DIVERSE STUDIES

The district also offered up a STEAM camp this past summer attended by 55 fifth, seventh and eighth graders. They visited nearby Erskine College and the Greenville Zoo and used online applications to create and complete projects.

The camp was another avenue to get students involved in STEAM education, says Laura Beth Smith, District 3 Coordinator of Instructional Services.

"We just try and help students understand what STEM and STEAM can be and what you can do with those studies," she says.

Instructors are introducing these concepts as early as the K-4 program, and students are learning about new worlds of opportunity with technology.

Gray says a Skype call with noted scientist, conservationist and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Jane Goodall, famous for her research with chimpanzees in Africa, is a case in point. "It's changed the way we're educating our students," Gray says. "They were learning about animal habitats. It's an experience I don't think too many people have ever had. It's something they won't forget — it brought the world into their classrooms."

HEALTHY COMPETITION

A team of fifth graders also competed in a jet toy competition, winning district and regional championships and ultimately an international championship in Detroit. "Our students won, competing

against over 100 teams from all over the world — our students from little Starr and Iva won," Gray says. "Our efforts are paying off, and that wouldn't be possible without having the technology to bring that education to them. The kids are inspiring us, the adults."

District 3 is stepping up its STEAM efforts with the opening this school year of the Anderson Institute of Technology, a partnership with Anderson Districts 4 and 5. The facility will provide career pathways through 19 technical programs.

Leaders in District 3 are also making sure each student has access to high-speed internet. The district is opening extended "hot spots" at elementary schools and at the district office. "Not everybody in our area has internet access, unfortunately," Gray says. "So, we're doing a hot spot program. We're installing four external outdoor access points, which will provide Wi-Fi signals more than 200 yards out."

WCTEL is providing the equipment and installation for the hot spots. The district is designating two parking spots at each hot spot location as "hot spot spaces," and parents can park there to allow their students to get online.

"WCTEL's partnership to provide high-speed internet access and us getting our Chromebooks out there to our students in the district is paying off," Gray says. "If you look at our test scores, I think Anderson 3 is rocking right now." ☑



Students in Anderson District 3 attend a variety of STEAM camps and fairs during the year.



ONLINE opportunities

Broadband internet takes education to another level

Tomorrow's workforce may appear very different from today's due to an expected increase in the number of science, technology, engineering and math jobs. And the market for jobs requiring more education than a high school diploma but less than a college degree is also expected to grow.

But with the opportunities a changing workforce represents, challenges also appear. Fast broadband internet services, however, can help by providing rural communities access to the educational tools to make those career paths a reality.

A report by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association found that improved access to broadband internet allows communities to better provide critical training. Many small, rural communications providers offer fiber-based broadband services that can support distance education, and many also work closely with educators and industry to develop opportunities for students to acquire STEM — science, technology, engineering and math — and middle-skills jobs.

Students like Nathaniel Treadaway develop skills that increase economic opportunities in rural areas through work-training programs, apprenticeships and classroom instruction. Treadaway grew up in Kuttawa, Kentucky, with aspirations to teach music. But after studying music education at the University of Kentucky for a short time, he quit. "I decided the teaching field wasn't for me," he says. So he started working at a bank.

He soon realized the need to combine technology and his job, and he decided to go back to college. He enrolled at West Kentucky Community and Technical College in Paducah to pursue an internet technology degree. He got an internship at a major Paducah corporation that provides customer network support, and now he works there full time while continuing his education online. He expects to graduate this year.

At 29, Treadaway is part of a growing number of students attending college while continuing to work. "This is a rural area, and I'm thankful we have these opportunities," he says. "It's vital for those of us who want to stay here."

West Kentucky Community and Technical College continues to address the problem of young people across rural America leaving for the bigger cities. "In the past, some of the younger generation felt like they had to leave the area to make a good living and raise their families, but they're itching to come back," says David Heflin, vice president of academic affairs at the college. "We want to find employment that can provide that opportunity for them. We can't allow the 'brain drain' to continue taking our kids from this area. We have to provide opportunities so they have a reason to stay."


DISTANCE LEARNING

Broadband internet leads the way in the industrial revolution, and it's a driving force in education and jobs. Not only does broadband impact technology in jobs, but also manufacturing plants often rely on high-tech tools such as robots and cobots, which are computer-guided devices that assist a person. Partnerships among industry and educators are a growing trend to ensure that schools are offering courses that meet the requirements for these and other jobs.

Using technology to partner with other high schools and postsecondary institutions, high school administrators can create programs that help students prepare for guided postsecondary education, according to the report. Partnerships with other area institutions can help students prepare for regional job markets.

For rural community colleges, distance education plays a big role. Often, there's not enough enrollment to support a local classroom, and online classes can fill a gap. It's a growing trend. At Collin College in Texas — with locations in Frisco,





McKinney and Plano — online classes now account for about 40% of the enrollment.

When Glenn Grimes, a Collin College professor of computer science, first started teaching 17 years ago, all the classes were face to face. “Back then, people didn’t have the bandwidth necessary to drive the audio and video needed to do online classes,” he says. Students now have the ability to pick and choose topics they wish to study from campuses all over the world. “It’s a huge benefit for students,” Grimes says. “It gives them so many more options.”

Rural broadband providers are playing vital roles, leveraging their networks and working closely with local educational institutions, the NTCA report states. Rainbow Communications of Hiawatha, Kansas, provides fiber connectivity to Highland Community College, the oldest college in the state.

The network allows the school to offer numerous courses at various sites. Career and technical education courses at HCC include building trades and medical coding. The college also supports the agricultural industry through such courses as precision agriculture and diesel mechanics, areas of study which are necessary as farms increasingly rely on precision agriculture that blends traditional mechanical equipment with analytical tech and GPS-guided systems.

In Brainerd, Minnesota, Consolidated Telecommunications Co. works with Bridges Career Academies & Workplace Connection, which brings together high schools, local colleges and businesses to provide career guidance and training. The effort focuses on building local career opportunities.

Nex-Tech in Lenora, Kansas, works with local charitable foundations and public utilities to support high school and college internships. Students earn at least \$10 per hour and are offered technical and nontechnical career experiences in areas like agriculture, economic development, automobile restoration, medical services, computer technology, art, banking, legal and others. ☞



Broadband and its impact on education

- Youth who live in areas with broadband are found to have earned higher scores on college entrance exams such as the SAT or ACT.
- More than 70% of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association members can provide 25 Mbps and higher broadband to their customers.
- A 2005 study found no significant difference between the writing skills of on-campus and off-campus students utilizing distance learning.
- Distance education can help address the lack of specialization possible in small, rural schools that can’t provide as broad a range of courses as larger schools because of affordability or demand.
- Distance education can also assist in early college attendance for high schoolers, particularly in rural areas that lack resources to support the increased expenses of college.
- Broadband-enabled distance education allows all eligible students who have access to broadband to participate.
- Distance education can also provide flexibility for working students and accommodate ongoing family obligations.

Source: Rural Broadband and the Next Generation of American Jobs, a report of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association.





FLYING STRONG

Erskine College bracing for growth, staying true to mission

BY JOHN CLAYTON

Sarah Taylor had arrived at Erskine College — student population 600 — from Jonesville, Virginia, having never actually seen the place where she intended to spend the next four years.

But before she made the five-hour drive south to Due West, South Carolina, she made contact with Erskine alumni — a group of missionaries who had come to her hometown — and liked what she heard. They told her about a small, tight-knit campus community, professors who care and classes where students don't get lost in the shuffle.

"They said Erskine is really good because your professors know your name. They know what you want to do," Taylor says. "They know your life goals. They know your family, and you know their family. When that was said, I said, 'All right.' It's been that way for the last two years here — it's probably been even more than I expected."



IT specialist Harrison Timms and Director of IT Stephanie Hudson in the server room located in Belk Hall at Erskine College.

Taylor was among a handful of students who spent their summer break on campus working in the Daniel-Moultrie Science Center on several projects centered around the theme of earth stewardship. She attempted to create and catalog a medicinal garden for campus research. Cassidy Cross, who is from Honea Path about 30 minutes from campus, and Luiza Souza, who is from Venezuela and a member of the Flying Fleet women's tennis team, experimented with ways to use sunlight to purify fracking water and make it reusable.

The group of science students — Taylor, Souza, Cross, Ashton Coker, Kimberly Jimenez and Melanie Schexnider — spending their summer working with the Erskine Center of Environmental Stewardship was a mix of chemistry and biology majors and a cross section of the campus. "My first pull toward Erskine was how dedicated and how close the faculty are to the students," says Coker, who is from nearby Greenwood. "Even though this is a college and they expect you to do your best, they're dedicated to stepping up and helping you."

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

Established in 1839, Erskine is the third-oldest traditional, four-year college in South Carolina — only the College of Charleston and Furman University are older. It has remained small over the years, though it is welcoming the largest freshman class in its history this September. With around 400 students, the 2019-20 freshman class is more than double the size of Erskine's other current classes.

It is a calculated move to bring more students to Due West and part of a multiphase plan for growth that begins with the addition of several athletic programs, including NCAA Division II football. In 2020, the Flying Fleet will return to the gridiron for the first time since 1951.



Keegan Sullivan, a senior majoring in business administration, studies in the Watkins Student Center.



“Right now, we’re starting a few new athletic programs with the hope of starting other educational programs in a couple of years,” says Wendi Santee, Erskine’s Vice President of Student Success. “This year we’re starting football, which is a pretty big part of the increase. We’re starting track and field, beach volleyball, rodeo, acrobatics and tumbling, and esports. All of those sports are coming online for the first time this fall, which has brought in traditional students.”

While Erskine is sitting at the precipice of some major changes in terms of student population over the next few years, Santee says some important tenets of the school remain the same. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church founded Erskine as a means to train more ministers, and the college is still affiliated with the ARP Church. The Erskine Theological Seminary sits right next door to the undergraduate campus.

“The primary thing about Erskine College that we want students to know in the recruiting process is that we are a faith-based institution,” Santee says. “We are an evangelical Christian institution that tries to be Christ-centered in all the things we do here within the curriculum. That doesn’t mean you have to be a Christian or proclaim Christ to come here, but we do want to make sure that students know what kind of institution we are and what they’re coming to.”

A SPECIAL PLACE

An essay published in the now-defunct Sandlapper Magazine, a lifestyle publication for South Carolinians, praised Erskine for its Rockwellian campus atmosphere and quaint charm.

“Those who know say you have to visit to understand,” the essay read. “Erskine’s beauty is that it is 20 miles from anywhere, and its location — Due West of what? — is its intrigue. It is a treasure of contrasts. Antebellum buildings are wired with high-speed fiber optic connections and links to anywhere on Earth. And it is populated by some of the brightest students in the country preparing themselves to enter the workforce or the most prestigious graduate, law and medical institutions.”

At the core of Erskine is its dedication to the liberal arts, something that has been tested due to an increased emphasis on STEM and STEAM education at every level. “I think there are more challenges today for liberal arts institutions than there were many years ago,” Santee says. “We firmly believe that this type of education provides more value. You have to be able to show people that the product here is better and is worth the extra expense, so we try very hard to do that and show that a liberal arts education is still very relevant.”

Chemistry professor Joel Boyd, whose students spent their summers working to save the planet, says he sees that value and relevance every day. “Doing the sciences in a liberal arts environment is more powerful than it sounds at first,” Boyd says. “It’s key for our students to get out and travel, to get out and network and communicate through science, and you can see a very clear theme and trend when you go around and talk with students and see them give their oral presentations.

“The students from a liberal arts background are communicators, and in the end, that’s where the road meets for all of us,” Boyd says. “If you can’t communicate it, then it’s really, in a sense, a wasted effort. That opportunity has a requirement to communicate to people, and that’s one of the things that sets us apart.” 🗨️

FLYING FLEET FACTS

Erskine College • Due West, South Carolina

- **Established:** 1839
- **Affiliation:** Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
- **Endowment:** \$40.52 million
- **Enrollment:** 610
- **Colors:** Maroon and Gold
- **Nickname:** Flying Fleet

Erskine Theological Seminary

- **Established:** 1837
- **Enrollment:** 120

Fall squash

Enjoy a versatile, beautiful taste of the season

Trees tower over the two-lane road, its dividing line faded with wear and age. As you approach Granddaddy's Farm, however, the road widens and a rainbow of colors appears in hues of the autumn season — orange pumpkins, gourds of green, golden butternuts and the reddish tinge of One Too Manys.

"The farm is beautiful in the fall," says Andrew Dixon, who lives on the property once owned by his grandfather, Charles Dixon. "The fields are dying back and giving way to the colors of all the different winter squash varieties."

Hayrides are one of the most popular activities the Estill Springs, Tennessee, farm offers, taking families afield to pick the perfect pumpkin. Since the Dixon family became involved in agritourism, this is one of several things visitors can now do to learn more about farm life and growing in the Volunteer State.

But offering pumpkins and winter squashes for decorating is just one thing Granddaddy's Farm does. The Dixons also encourage folks to cook with them by offering free recipes at the farm store. "You can use them as table decorations, and then you can turn around and use the same ones for cooking, so you're not throwing it away," Dixon says, adding that it's only been in the past six or seven years that he's seen more people in the South



Granddaddy's Farm is made possible with the help of family, including, from left, Philip Dixon, Ann Thomas, Lacey Thomas, Nancy Dixon, Karen Dixon, Steve Dixon and Andrew Dixon.

interested in cooking with winter squashes.

"Before that, it was more of a Northern thing," he says. "It's taken us a little longer when the only squash we grew up with was yellow squash — and we fried that."

The farm offers 15 varieties of squash and gourds. Winter squash planting takes place in late June. Harvest begins in early September, and the farm opens to the public later that month on Fridays from 1:30-9 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

Dixon's personal favorite squash is butternut, a versatile variety that can be used in place of pumpkins for pies. "Butternut squash is so much easier to use," he says. "Pumpkins have so many seeds and



stuff. There's so much to hollow out. A butternut squash is all meat. It's much more efficient to cook with."

Butternut squash is also a good choice in casseroles, smoothies, soups and salads. "Any winter squash can be used for cooking, but some are better than others," Dixon says.

Here are some recipes from Granddaddy's Farm.



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

GRANDADDY'S FARM SPEEDY SPAGHETTI SQUASH

- 1 spaghetti squash
- Butter
- Parmesan cheese

Wash squash and place it on a cutting board. Cut squash in half lengthwise and scoop out seeds. Place squash halves cut-side down on a plate with a little water in the bottom and microwave on high 5-8 minutes or until tender. Fluff the insides of the squash with a fork, and it will begin to resemble spaghetti. Place "noodles" on a plate and top with butter and parmesan cheese to taste.

Note: Meat sauce also goes well over the squash noodles, and the noodles go well in a mock pasta salad with the addition of zesty Italian dressing and your favorite pasta salad ingredients (onions, green pepper, hard salami, capers, etc.).



APPLE-STUFFED ACORN SQUASH

- 2 apples, peeled and cut into slices
- 2-3 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 acorn squash
- Honey

Add apple slices to frying pan with melted butter. Saute apples until fork tender. Set aside.

Place squash on cutting board, slice it in half lengthwise and scoop out seeds. Place halves cut-side down on a plate with a little water in the bottom. Microwave on high for 3-6 minutes until the inside is tender.

Place squash halves on plates, fill with sauteed apples and drizzle with honey.

PUMPKIN (SQUASH) PUREE

- 1 large butternut squash

Wash squash and place it whole in an ovenproof pan. Roast squash at 350 F for 1 to 1 1/2 hours or until you can insert a fork easily into the squash. Remove squash from oven and let cool. Slice the squash lengthwise and scoop seeds out gently, taking care to leave the meat intact. Scoop out all of the meat, place it in a blender or food processor, and puree until smooth. Use the puree as the base for pumpkin pie, smoothies or any other recipe that calls for pumpkin.

Tip: You can freeze the puree for several months. At Grandaddy's Farm, the Dixons freeze puree in quart bags in the amount called for in their recipes, and they thaw it as needed.

'PUMPKIN' PUREE SMOOTHIE

- 1 frozen banana
- 1/2 cup vanilla Greek yogurt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1/2 cup skim milk
- 2 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 2/3 cup butternut squash puree
- 1 cup ice

Add all of the ingredients to a blender in the order listed. Blend on high for at least 3 minutes or until smooth. This may take longer if your blender isn't very strong. Scrape down the sides of the blender as needed. Add more milk to thin out if the mixture is too thick. Add a couple more ice cubes for a thicker texture if desired. Add more spices to taste, if desired. Makes 1 smoothie. ☞



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