



CONNECTED

FIGHTING FIRE

Volunteers
remain backbone
of local
departments



WHAT A YEAR

WCTEL looks
back at 2019

LIKE A STREAM

Services offer more
viewing options



— By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO —
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A good way to start the New Year

NTCA members make a real difference in their communities, and in the lives of the people they serve. I was reminded of this a few weeks ago when the Foundation for Rural Service announced it had awarded \$100,000 in FRS Community Grants to groups throughout the U.S. FRS is the nonprofit arm of NTCA that supports rural telecom companies, consumers and policymakers with educational information, products and programming.

Each year, community organizations apply for FRS grants to help them tackle challenges ranging from accessing technology and improving educational offerings to providing telemedicine and first-responder services to rural areas. Applications are sponsored by their local telco.

It was also exciting to see the USDA award several ReConnect grants and loans to NTCA members toward the end of the year. This program represents yet another option for rural broadband funding, as well as an example of public/private partnerships at work to extend broadband to unserved communities.

After all, investments by federal and state agencies, coupled with the commitment of rural broadband providers, are key to our nation's progress in connecting the millions of citizens still without access to fast, reliable internet service.

These programs, as well as the engagement we saw among policymakers at our Telecom Executive Policy Summit in November, provide a strong start to 2020 and give me great hope for a strong new year for rural broadband. 📶



Are you ready for a telehealth future?

Story by STEPHEN V. SMITH

The presence of reliable broadband service holds great promise for rural America. While it touches many facets of life, broadband's greatest impact may very well be in the area of health care. Consider this statement from the Federal Communications Commission:

"Advances in telemedicine are transforming health care from a service delivered solely through traditional brick and mortar health care facilities to connected care options delivered via a broadband internet access connection directly to the patient's home or mobile location."

While reliable access to a broadband network is still out of reach for millions of rural Americans, hundreds of cooperative and independent telecommunications companies across the country are delivering world-class internet service, often over a fiber connection. If you received this magazine in the mail, your local telco is one of those leading-edge providers.

If access to broadband is becoming less of the challenge to telehealth's wide-scale availability, what is the greatest challenge? The FCC recently tasked the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee with studying and reporting on telehealth barriers and incentives. The report stated that "people-based" issues offer the most significant challenges to telehealth adoption. While this includes many factors, such as policy and licensing, broadband adoption is a leading concern.

In other words, the technology is there. Now, people need to embrace it.

"Increasing support must be given to rural and disadvantaged communities so that digital literacy and adoption does not exacerbate the digital divide," the IAC report states. Quite simply, the presence of broadband doesn't mean patients and doctors are ready to put it to use as part of their health care program.

Are you ready? Do you understand the implications of telehealth? What steps can you take toward enjoying its benefits?

Begin by asking your doctor what programs are available. This could include connected medical devices in your home or something as simple as remote monitoring via an app on your smartphone or tablet. Of course, access to telehealth starts with subscribing to broadband service that will support this life-changing technology. And once in place, broadband has the potential to enhance your life in many other ways as well. 📶

Knowledge is power

Does your digital know-how stand up?



Story by NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

Convenience and power. Internet services bring both. Online bill pay eliminates a tedious task. Social media can keep family ties strong or reconnect you with old friends. Streaming services bring a wealth of music, books and more.

But when it comes to digital tools, knowledge is power, and the Pew Research Center's recent "Americans and Digital Knowledge" report found that a majority of adults in the U.S.

could not correctly answer half of the survey's 10 multiple-choice questions.

Questions touched on security and a general understanding of technology. Here are a few of the queries, edited for clarity, focused on security and privacy — good information to know. The answers do include additional context and tips not included in the report.

Q If a website uses cookies, it means that the site ...

A: Cookies allow websites to track user visits and site activity. They are common, and you are often tracked across the websites you visit.

Q Where might someone encounter a phishing scam?

A: Phishing scams can occur on social media, websites, email or text messages. Each form of communication offers an avenue for exploitation. For additional tips to improve your online security, visit [FCC.gov/consumer-guides](https://www.fcc.gov/consumer-guides).

Q What is the largest source of revenue for most major social media platforms? (Several possible options were listed.)

A: Advertising is the largest source of revenue for most social media plat-

forms. Often advertising is personalized to you by information gathered from not only your activities on a social media site but also your actions on other websites.

Q When a website has a privacy policy, it means that the site ...

A: Privacy policies are contracts between websites and users about how those sites will use their data. Often long and legalistic, the agreements may outline how your private information can be used to target advertising or whether or not your information can be shared with other companies.

Q What does it mean when a website has "https://" at the beginning of its URL, as opposed to "http://" without the "s"?

A: "https://" in a URL means that

information entered into the site is encrypted. Look for "https://" before completing any financial transaction on a site.

Q Many web browsers offer a feature known as "private browsing" or "incognito mode." If someone opens a webpage on their computer at work using incognito mode, who will be able to see their online activities?

A: Private browsing mode only prevents someone using the same computer from seeing one's online activities. In most cases, your internet provider, including your phone wireless provider, can see all digital traffic passing from your device to the internet.

Want to see the entire report?

Do a Google search for "Pew Research Center and Americans and Digital Knowledge."

We've arrived in the future

Welcome to 2020! I sincerely hope you and those close to you had a superb holiday season and that this new year is off to a wonderful start.



JEFF WILSON

Chief Executive Officer

Something about starting not only a new year, but also a new decade makes 2020 feel like a year especially full of promise. For so long, the 2020s have seemed like the distant future. Now, we have arrived!

It's entertaining to look back and see what Hollywood, science fiction authors and big thinkers predicted for the future.

While I'm still waiting on the flying cars and weekend trips to the moon that science fiction promised us, I catch myself from time to time thinking about how some of the things we take for granted every day would seem so futuristic to us just 20 or 30 years ago.

Here in the future, all of us carry around personal communication devices in our pockets that allow us to make video calls with people all over the world.

We can instantly download practically any book, movie or song in the world right to our tablets.

While we don't exactly have Rosie from "The Jetsons," we do have robots that vacuum our floors, manufacture products and even help perform surgeries.

We have software that can share photos around the world, alert us to emergencies and order almost anything we need for home delivery. Our watches can help detect heart problems. Our cars can give us directions to anywhere we want to go. And our homes can turn on lights, lock doors and change the temperature with just the sound of our voice.

Many of these things are becoming a normal part of our daily routine, but the 1980 or 1990 version of myself would have seen them as straight out of science fiction.

For those of us at WCTEL, it's rewarding to know our network is what brings the future to our part of South Carolina. Whether it's our broadband service at your home or our network providing vital infrastructure to businesses, we're right at the heart of all of this futuristic technology. We worked hard to make that network and our company even better in 2019. It was certainly a year of meaningful accomplishments and noteworthy milestones for us.

- Increased internet speeds significantly.
- Continued to grow our company by expanding our service area and offering our services to underserved residents.
- Opened an office in Newberry to better serve residents in that area.
- Introduced three Wi-Fi packages to improve the wireless experience in your home.

Turning the page to 2020, we have some significant goals in mind in order to serve you better.

- Work on a \$6.1 million dollar Fiber-to-the-home investment in Calhoun Falls and McCormick.
- Finish fiber optic construction so that 100 percent of our traditional service area is served by fiber optics.
- Launch new products and services for both residential and business customers.

Knowing that the only thing certain about the future is change, I think WCTEL is primed to accomplish these things and more. We're thankful for the opportunity to serve you in 2020 — and in the future. ☎



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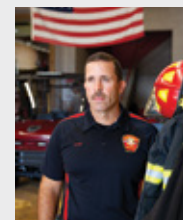
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On the Cover:



Abbeville Fire Chief
Neal Dickenson leads a
largely volunteer force.
See story Page 12.

Streaming services offer fresh options



The number of options for watching TV online is greater than ever. Fortunately, pairing WCTEL's fast internet service with a leading streaming-TV provider makes it simple to catch your favorite shows and sporting events.

Here are a few options. Please note, prices often change, so please verify the costs before ordering. To see more streaming options, visit wctel.com/streaming.

SLING TV

Sling TV, one of the first live TV streaming services, offers packages that cater somewhat to customers' tastes. Sling Orange and Sling Blue have some common channels, but only Orange offers the ESPN sports channels and Disney Channel. Getting both Orange and Blue costs about \$45 per month.

HULU WITH LIVE TV

Hulu started with a package that allowed customers to view television programs following their original broadcast dates. Hulu added original programming and a live TV package starting at \$54.99 monthly.

DIRECTV NOW

As DirecTV's attempt to keep cord-cutters in the fold, the DirecTV Now packages start at \$50. The price can incrementally increase to at least \$70 for additional channels.

YOUTUBE TV

YouTube parent company Google more recently entered the live streaming crowd with YouTube TV. The service offers a solid channel lineup in addition to local channels in most areas. It is \$49.99 monthly.

OTHER OPTIONS

Other relatively new entrants to the fray include Philo, fuboTV and AT&T WatchTV. Philo and AT&T WatchTV are mainly for the budget-conscious. AT&T WatchTV costs \$15 per month and comes with a limited lineup. Philo includes basic cable options and is \$20 per month.

FuboTV is geared toward sports fans, offering a bevy of regional sports networks, which means a lot of professional baseball, basketball and hockey games are available. This streaming service starts at \$59.99 per month.

Lifeline SERVICE

LIFELINE IS A FEDERAL PROGRAM TO HELP LOW-INCOME AMERICANS PAY FOR PHONE OR BROADBAND SERVICE

You are eligible for Lifeline benefits if you qualify for and receive one of the following benefits:

- SNAP
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- The Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefit.

Additionally, consumers at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines will continue to be eligible for a Lifeline program benefit. (State determinations of income will no longer be accepted.) There are no changes to the eligibility criteria for Tribal programs.

NOTE: Some states have additional qualifying programs, allowances and stipulations. Check with your local telecommunications provider for information about benefits that may be available in your state.

DO YOU QUALIFY?
Apply today!

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, please visit www.lifelinesupport.org or call your local telecommunications provider.

NOTE: Your telephone company is not responsible for determining who qualifies for these programs or who receives assistance. Consumers must meet specific criteria in order to obtain assistance with their local telephone and/or broadband service, and qualifying is dependent upon government-established guidelines.



TAKE THE RIDE

Follow the Hank Williams Trail

Story by ANNE BRALY

The road between Georgiana and Fort Payne along the Hank Williams Trail is a journey lovers of country music should make at least once in their lifetime. It tells a story of one of Alabama's most famous sons, from his beginnings as the child of a railroad engineer who was mostly absent from his son's life to the glamour of stardom and Williams' tragic demise at the young age of 29.

Over the span of Hank Williams' life, he recorded more than 165 songs. Though he could not read a note of music, he was a wordsmith when it came to writing hits that have become part of the American songbook.

The trail is a 250-mile trip through history that includes a visit to Williams' boyhood home and ends at a barber shop where he made one of his last stops before dying in his car in West Virginia on his way to perform at a concert in Ohio. "The Alabama Tourism Department has done an incredible job with the Hank Williams Trail, and it's a great way to experience some of my dad's life story," says his daughter, Jett Williams.

Here are some trail highlights

GEORGIANA

Thousands of newspaper clippings, photos of family and friends, record albums and 45s, royalty receipts, clothes, one of Williams' early guitars, the old wooden bench he stood on to sing at Mount Olive Baptist Church in nearby Greenville, Alabama — there are too many items to list, and it will take a couple of hours to take in the scope of the collection at the Hank Williams Boyhood Home & Museum.

Williams lived here from 1931 to 1934. It was in this house at 127 Rose St. that he played his first guitar, having bought it by selling peanuts and shining shoes at the town depot.

Among the more unusual items in the small house is a stage light used in the Municipal Auditorium for the show "Louisiana Hayride." The Hank Williams Festival is on the grounds the first Saturday each June.

Online: www.hankmuseum.com

MONTGOMERY

Montgomery is ground zero for Hank Williams. He called it home from 1937 to 1948 and moved back in 1952. He lived there at the time of his death.



Chris' Hot Dogs, 138 Dexter Ave.

This shotgun-style eatery is the oldest restaurant in the city and was Williams' favorite place to eat — and drink.

"He'd order two hot dogs all the way — mustard, sauerkraut, onions and Chris' famous chili sauce — and a Budweiser and a shot of Jack," a server said when asked about Hank Williams' favorite dog. Williams' seat isn't marked, but it was one of 12 stools along the counter. There are also booths and tables, so it's not hard to find a seat and eat where the Hillbilly Shakespeare once dined.

Online: www.chrishotdogs.com

D'Road Cafe, 121 Montgomery St.

This cafe, the former location of the Elite Cafe, is worth at least a drive-by to see where Williams made his final public performance just four days before he died. The Elite opened in 1911 and was a Montgomery institution before it closed in 1990. Now reopened as the D'Road Cafe, the restaurant allows visitors to sit in the place where Williams last performed.

Online: droadcafe.com

Hank Williams Museum, 118 Commerce St.

This museum is the tell-all of Williams' life — both public and private. The collection includes thousands of pieces of not only his, but also of his wife's, Audrey's, past — furniture from their house in Nashville and suits, including several handmade Nudie suits. There are guitars, bills and other receipts, and artwork. The collection is massive, but its crowning jewel is the baby blue 1953 Cadillac in which Williams died. It's on loan from his son, Hank Williams Jr.

Take your time touring the museum, but when you're done, browse the gift shop — ticket and shop sales and private donations fund the museum.

Online: hankwilliamsmuseum.net

Hank Williams Gravesite, 829 Columbus St.

On your way out of town is Oakwood Cemetery. It's here, high atop a hill, that Hank and Audrey Williams are buried. Inscriptions at the base of Hank's headstone remind visitors of his most well-known songs, such as "Kaw-Liga," "I Can't Help It" and "Jambalaya."

LAKE MARTIN, ALEXANDER CITY

Hank Williams' Cabin on Lake Martin is a small, white frame affair where Williams and Fred Rose, his friend and a giant in the music publishing business, wrote blockbusters "Kaw-Liga" and "Your Cheatin' Heart."

The cabin is now on the property of Children's Harbor, a camp for sick and disabled children. The two-bedroom building is available for rent.

Online: childrensharbor.com

Kowaliga Restaurant, 295 Kowaliga Marina Road

This restaurant, now serving a menu of cheeseburgers and catfish, sits at the water's edge of Lake Martin. Inside, a carved statue of the Indian Kowaliga, whose story was the inspiration for Williams' song "Kaw-Liga" guards the entrance.

Online: www.kowaligarestaurant.com

BIRMINGHAM

The Redmont Hotel, 2101 Fifth Ave. N., is the place where Hank Williams spent his last night in 1952 and is also the oldest hotel in Alabama still in operation. Remodeling a few years ago reconfigured many of the guest rooms, but Williams' room was on what is now the third floor, somewhere around what is now room 304.

Step off the elevator on the third floor and you'll see a wooden plaque with four of Williams' records. This is the only floor displaying any Hank Williams decor and is a silent tribute to one of the hotel's most famous guests.

Online: www.redmontbirmingham.com

FORT PAYNE

On the eve of his death, Hank Williams stopped by Carter's Barber Shop for a haircut and a shave from barber Howard Simpson. He also had a sip or two or three — maybe more — of moonshine while there. When Simpson died, he left the chair that Williams sat in to local barber Alton Beason, who opened his shop at 1719 Gault Ave. It's now on display in a corner of the shop, carefully roped off for all to see but not sit in. ☞



Carter's Barber Shop in Fort Payne, Alabama.



Chris' Hot Dogs in Montgomery, Alabama.

2019 FEATURED BIG CHANGES AND EXPANSION

WCTEL opened its new office in Newberry with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Nov. 7.

WCTEL introduced faster internet speeds, grew in Greenwood

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

In 2019, WCTEL committed to giving customers faster internet speeds at better prices. The cooperative unveiled optimized speeds throughout its fiber optic coverage areas to better meet the needs of business and residential users.

"This is a huge moment, not just for us as a company, but also for our customers," says Shannon Sears, WCTEL director of commercial operations.

WCTEL's base plan on its fiber optic network provides upload and download speeds of 200 Mbps for \$40 monthly. A faster option increases those speeds to 500 Mbps for \$60 monthly. A premium package with upload and download speeds of 1 Gbps is \$80 monthly.

Comparatively, speeds under the old plans more than tripled. And on all plans, uploads are as fast as downloads. "Previously, it was set up to be heavy on the download side for streaming," 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."

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 by the end of 2020," WCTEL CEO Jeff Wilson says. "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 allows internet-only customers to become members of the cooperative, 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."

ETRON SOLUTIONS

In August, WCTEL acquired Greenwood-based tech company Etron Solutions, which provides computer networking, cybersecurity, computer repair and other IT services for businesses.



John Lawrence, left, former owner of Etron Solutions, is now WCTEL's enterprise architect, and Chuck Nash is the company's director of business solutions and network operations.

INDUSTRY EDUCATION WEEK

Abbeville County's third annual Industry Education Week honored Betty Jo Hall. Ninth graders from each school in Abbeville County came to learn about WCTEL and to enjoy a company tour. "This is always an enjoyable week for us at WCTEL," says Sears. "We are encouraged by the bright and eager minds that are developing in our future community members, future employees and future leaders."

GREENWOOD CONSTRUCTION

WCTEL continues to expand its reach into Greenwood County. During 2019, WCTEL completed 570 miles of fiber optic cable and added new residential and business customers. For updates on this project, visit GigUpGreenwood.com.

KICKOFF CLASSIC

WCTEL's fifth annual Kick-Off Classic was a success, with free food, fun and football. Don't miss the sixth annual Kick-Off Classic in August!

WELCOME TO NEWBERRY

WCTEL hosted a grand opening ceremony for its new office in Newberry on Nov. 7. Visit us at 1530 Main Street, Suite 105, Newberry SC, 29108.

INTERNS

Earning an internship with WCTEL can mean a bright future with the company. Over the past two years, WCTEL had 12 interns and apprentices working in various departments. "It is a win-win situation," says Marie Titus, WCTEL's HR Manager. "The interns earn credit towards their classwork while gaining real-life experience working for us. We have worked closely with Piedmont Technical College in our area and have interns from the computer science department, engineering and business administration." The 2019 intern staff included Noah Branham, Marquice Johnson, Kendall Ryans, Courtney Coffey and Noel Johnson. ☎



WCTEL added 570 miles of fiber optic cable in Greenwood in 2019.



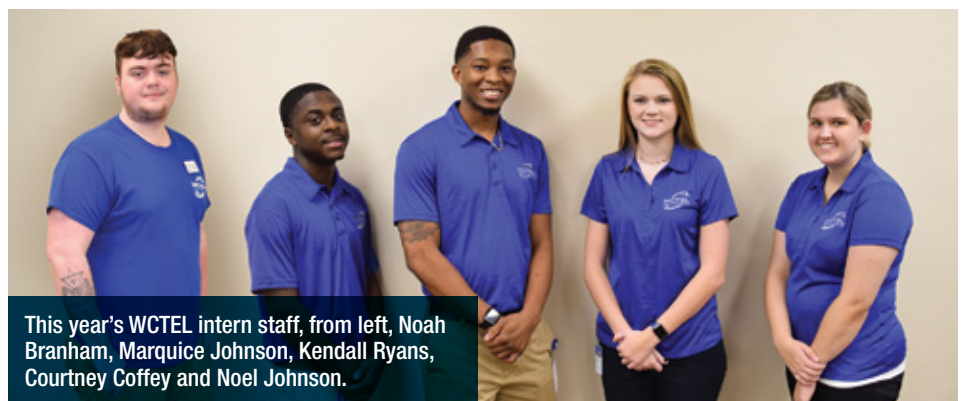
The 5th Annual Kickoff Classic provided family fun for all.



Ninth graders from Abbeville County schools attended Industry Education Week programs at WCTEL.



Dixie High freshman Lauryn Foster, left, learns about an old-school telephone with WCTEL Service Manager Kerri Hall.



This year's WCTEL intern staff, from left, Noah Branham, Marquice Johnson, Kendall Ryans, Courtney Coffey and Noel Johnson.



Telemedicine changes the health care landscape

Broadband makes a difference daily

Imagine a world with greater health care accessibility, as convenient as contacting a physician from your home. Or consider a medical system where rural communities can easily connect in real time with specialists based dozens, if not hundreds, of miles away.

Broadband technology provides the key link between you and medical providers needed to make those innovations and others possible. That more convenient, healthier world is becoming a reality for rural communities across the nation.

The systems are not yet what they one day may become, but every day more and more people are receiving the benefits of telemedicine. And the results are often profound.

Kentucky veterans have easier access to important care. Changing laws in states such as Texas allow greater access to telemedicine. Telestroke programs in Minnesota and North Dakota save vital minutes when patients most need care. And those are just a few examples of broadband technology changing health care for the better.

KENTUCKY VETERANS

In rural Kentucky, getting to and from an appointment at any medical specialist can often require hours of travel. But when you're a veteran trying to get to a Veterans Administration Medical Center in a metropolitan area, travel times can increase even more. And a veteran might need multiple doctors and have multiple appointments scheduled on different days.

An innovative pilot program in a mountainous section of eastern Kentucky is helping to change that. The Virtual Living Room program, which started in 2017 in McKee, offers vets a comfortable and private room in their local library complete with high-speed internet access to visit with VA health care providers located more than an hour's drive away.

The program, available for setup at other qualifying sites, not only illustrates the potential of telemedicine but also shows the efforts being made to create a system capable of benefiting as many people as possible.

The McKee Virtual Living Room is a collaboration among four organizations: the VA, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, the rural telecom provider Peoples Rural Telephone Cooperative and the Jackson County Public Library. The VA has provided telehealth services for several years, but it can't happen if vets don't have access to high-speed internet connections either in their homes or nearby.

"The rest of the country, like us, really admires our veterans," says Keith Gabbard, chief executive officer of PRTC. "Before the project, we saw veterans spending the day in a waiting room at the hospital, and when they live an hour and a half away, it's pretty much an all-day event for a veteran to get health care."

Fast fiber optic internet networks make telemedicine a realistic option for more and more communities, and the cooperative was a leader in establishing the Virtual Living Room at the Jackson County Public Library.

"We've done a lot to promote it, and the library staff and the veterans are really proud of it," Gabbard says. "It's a source of pride for our community, and it continues to grow. The Virtual Living Room is a beautiful area where veterans, even



◀ From left, Veterans Donald Barrett, Jim Bryant, Mike Montgomery, Bobby Lakes and Danny Robinson attend the ribbon cutting for Virtual Living Room in McKee, Kentucky.

if they don't have a doctor's appointment, can go and read a book. It feels like it's their home."

CHANGING LAWS

While faster internet may provide the foundation for telemedicine services, the legal and regulatory framework of each state can play a role in determining the effectiveness of the programs.

In May 2017, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed a bill into law that leveled the playing field for telemedicine physicians and doctors who work in traditional office settings. In part, the law eliminated a requirement for a patient to first visit a physician in person before receiving care through telemedicine.

"The bill removed a lot of barriers, and we've seen an increase in queries about telehealth," says Becky Bounds, program manager for the TexLa Telehealth Resource Center in Lubbock, Texas. The federally funded center works to provide resources and technical assistance to telehealth programs in Texas and Louisiana.

Bounds says the internet-based tools offer key services. For example, Lubbock is home to the Timothy J. Harnar Regional Burn Center, which often receives patients injured while working in the industries of West Texas. After treatment and returning home, follow-up visits to Lubbock could require drives of five to six hours. However, a telemedicine-equipped clinic on the campus of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in El Paso allows patients to virtually visit with specialists in Lubbock.

"About 12% of the state's population lives in West Texas, and telehealth matters,"

Bounds says. "We are producing cotton, beef, oil and more, and we need health care for the workforce producing those products for the rest of the state and the nation."


THE GOLDEN HOUR

When it comes to treating a stroke, doctors have a saying: Time is brain. It's a reminder that every minute that passes between the event and treatment can lead to irreversible damage. Fortunately, telemedicine technology already gives doctors a fighting chance to begin treating patients before the critical "golden hour" passes.

One of the leaders for this technology in the Midwest is Essentia Health, which established telemedicine capabilities in each of its 17 hospitals, 70 clinics and eight nursing homes throughout Minnesota and North Dakota. With its telestroke program, emergency medical technicians can identify stroke patients on the way to the hospital and even begin treatment.

Essentia Director of Telehealth Services Laurie Hall recalls an ambulance picking up a rural patient nearly 90 minutes from the nearest hospital. In the past, serious brain damage would have been a near certainty for such a patient. But thanks to telestroke technology, EMTs diagnosed a stroke and began treatment about 45 minutes after the stroke occurred.

"The goal is to shorten that window from the time the patient has the event to the time they actually get those

clot-busting medications or the clot is removed," Hall says. "Getting that done so quickly is profound when you think about the injury that could happen from just those few extra minutes. It helps these patients get out of the hospital much quicker and to get on with their normal lives." 





Working with fire

Volunteers and pros combine to serve communities

Story By JOHN CLAYTON


The volunteer firefighters and first responders in Abbeville and McCormick counties are vital to the safety of their respective communities. Despite evolving roles, volunteers continue to staff area fire departments, answer emergency calls involving brush fires, structure fires, car accidents and more.

"I had one the other day when a woman called with a snake in her house," McCormick Fire Chief Mike Barron says. "What am I supposed to do with that? I'm not trained in that department myself, but there's nobody else to call. So, that's part of it."

Barron is the only paid firefighter in McCormick, working what amounts to a part-time job to supplement his other income. The 18 firefighters on the roster in the Town of McCormick Fire Department and all the firefighters among the seven stations across McCormick County are volunteers.

The same goes for Abbeville County, which has 13 all-volunteer departments with a total roster of around 260 volunteers, says Abbeville County Fire Marshal Tim Williams. Williams is a county employee who works alongside a maintenance chief and an administrative assistant to serve the entire county.

The City of Abbeville Fire Department has 25 volunteers and six professionals working under Chief Neal Dickenson, who is also a career firefighter. The town of Calhoun Falls operates an all-volunteer department.



Colton Jones, engineer at Abbeville Fire Department, checks out the medical equipment on the truck to make sure everything is in working order.



Abbeville firefighters Colton Jones and Chris Clemmons suit up for a call.



McCormick Fire Department.

Dickenson praises his volunteers. “Some of the things our firefighters have to do and the training standards they have to meet are the same as our professionals,” he says. “That kind of hurts the volunteer side. It’s just harder to train as a firefighter for an individual who works full time and who has a family.”

He says the volunteer force of firefighters has fallen off about 40% every 10 years. “We have some dedicated and great firefighters on the volunteer side,” Dickenson says. “We’re just not replacing them like we used to.”

IMPROVEMENTS

The Abbeville Fire Department covers about 4.5 square miles within the city limits. While that may not sound daunting, the department’s call volume has risen steadily over the past few years. The volume was trending toward 800 calls in 2019 including 79 in September alone, and 79% of those were medical calls, Dickenson says.

“One of the things that we do see increasing is motor vehicle accidents,” he says. “We had literally gone from running one or two wrecks a month to almost 60 last year, and we hadn’t changed any of our response criteria.”

The city began running medical calls in 2013. Since then, firefighters have begun cross-training as EMTs and paramedics. “We just felt like we could offer the community a little bit more for little to no cost,” Dickenson says. “All we needed to do was some training.”

Response times in the city limits average two to four minutes, which can be the difference between life and death during some medical emergencies.

Barron, whose McCormick volunteers provide support to the county departments, says about 30% of his department’s calls are medical emergencies, while about 30% deal with fires, and the rest are miscellaneous events.

The Abbeville and McCormick county departments have significantly more ground to cover, making response times vital. Williams says newer technology at 911 dispatch gets firefighters on the scene faster.

“The farmers and the people who worked from home would

hear the siren and respond to the station and take the call from there at one time,” Williams says. “That evolved into the technology of pagers, and we still use that technology, but we also have gone to some technology that allows our 911 operators to send the call out as they’re taking it.

“The call goes out over a text message or an app that we use to identify the location of the emergency,” he says. “It actually gives you driving directions, too, so that technology has been greatly increased over the years to the benefit of the fire service.”

FINDING A WAY

Barron says McCormick County’s volunteer fire departments receive \$9,000 for operating costs from the county each year. “You can’t run a department on \$9,000 a year,” he says.

The deficits are made up with fundraisers — community festivals, chili and stew sales, BBQ dinners and the like — and grants from different state and federal agencies.

Dickenson says his department relies heavily on grants for equipment and training funds, but with or without equipment, the volunteers remain the lifeblood of the departments.

The Abbeville community has made strides in that area with training classes at the Abbeville County Career Center. Those classes can prepare teens to join their local departments as volunteers or give them the training they need to be professional firefighters in the future.

“We’ve been fortunate to gain some folks from the Career Center program,” Williams says. “It’s important to get those kids a head start and kind of pull them toward a career in firefighting.

“We feel like it’s a fantastic program the school has decided to take on,” he says. “It allows students to come out and join their local department at the age of 16. They can’t do everything that we do, but they can do a lot to help out. Then they can be ready to get a job anywhere, and we’re hoping to gain from that because they get a chance to volunteer and serve their local communities and give back.”



McCormick Fire Chief Mike Barron

Ooey gooey chewy — Pizza

Warm up a cold day with a perfect slice



Chris Stone and Andrea Clark make the Lookout Mountain Pizza Company a dining destination.

Pizza is one of those foods where when a craving hits, nothing else will do. It's been an American favorite for decades. And now, people in the Rising Fawn area of Lookout Mountain, Georgia, are satisfying those cravings at Lookout Mountain Pizza Company.

A pilot for American Airlines for 32-plus years, Chris Stone jettisoned himself into a new career as a pizza maker. And it's not just any pizza. It's the artisan pizza that brings people from as far away as Atlanta and Birmingham, and as close by as Chattanooga and Mentone, Alabama. "It's really become a little destination place," Stone says.

When asked how he jumped from piloting to pizza, Stone says he's always loved to cook. "Before 9/11, I was based in Washington, D.C., but after 9/11, I ended up in New York for about five years, and one night, I ended up taking a pizza class."

He was hooked then, although he waited to turn it into a career. "It took me about 10 years to figure out exactly what I wanted to do with it," he says. Stone continues to fly European routes weekly Monday through Wednesday. On Thursdays, he's home to open his pizzeria with the help of a well-trained staff. They know how to make the pizza dough from scratch and heat up the wood-fired pizza oven to

its optimum heat: 750 F at its base and 1,000 degrees at its dome. The oven bakes pizza to perfection in under two minutes.

The class he took in New York, under renowned bread baker Jim Lahey, owner of Sullivan Street Bakery, taught the art of making Roman-style pizza crusts. On his many trips to Europe — Italy is on his route — he learned about Neapolitan pizza and began working with the dough at home. "I ended up building a pizza oven in my kitchen at home," he says.

In 2016, he found a location for his pizzeria, an old building that had housed an art shop, church and mechanic's shed at different times through the years. After spiffing the place up with some paint, a new roof and other renovations, he opened Lookout Mountain Pizza Company in July 2017, and it quickly became the place for pizzas that feature quality ingredients like wheat flour from Naples, Italy, along with canned tomatoes from a town near Italy's Mount Vesuvius and Wisconsin cheese. "It's not the cheapest pizza to make, but you need to use good ingredients to make a good pizza," Stone says.

The dough is a simple mixture of flour, water, salt and a little yeast. The pizza sauce is made from scratch. Onions roast in the wood-burning oven and function as a topping for pizzas named after Italian women. Sophia is the house favorite, with

Here are some helpful hints for home pizza cooks:

- Use a good flour, such as King Arthur. "Some people use bread flours with plain flour and stuff like that, but I've found it really makes no difference. But you'll need to add a little oil to the dough to get it to brown up," Stone says.
- Do not overwork the dough. You want the dough to "pop," and overworking it will make it tough. You want the dough to be airy. Pizza dough is a very dynamic thing. It changes with the humidity and temperature. The texture won't be the same from one day to the next.
- Get your hands on a copy of Lahey's book, "My Pizza: The Easy No-Knead Way to Make Spectacular Pizza at Home," and watch some of his cooking videos on YouTube.

wood-roasted onion tomato sauce, fontina cheese, Italian sausage and Peppadew peppers. The Maria, with pepperoni, onions and portobello mushrooms, is another top seller. All pizzas are 13 inches and have a marvelous crispy, blackened edge to the dough that softens as you reach the center.



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



Artisan Pizza

Though this is not Lookout Mountain Pizza Company's recipe, it's a good one for beginners.

- 3 cups plus 3 tablespoons lukewarm water (100 F or below)
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon granulated yeast
- 1 1/2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 7 1/2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

Combine warm water, olive oil, yeast and salt in a 5-quart bowl, preferably a lidded, but not airtight, plastic container. Measure the flour using a "scoop and sweep" method. Reach into the flour bin with your measuring cup, scoop up a full measure all at once, and sweep it level with a knife. Mix until all of the

flour is incorporated (kneading is not necessary) using a wooden spoon or a food processor with a dough attachment. Cover with a non-airtight lid. Allow to rise at room temperature for 2 hours. Do not punch down. You want to retain as much gas in the dough as possible. A reduction in gas will make your pizzas and flatbreads dense. Refrigerate and use over the next 14 days. Refrigerate at least 3 hours before using.

To make: A half-hour before you're ready to bake, place a pizza stone in the bottom third of the oven and heat it at your oven's highest temperature. Prepare and organize your toppings. Dust a pizza peel or a large cutting board/flat cookie sheet with enough flour or cornmeal to easily transfer the pizza over to the hot stone. Pull up and cut off a

1/2-pound (orange-size) piece of dough. Using a little flour (enough so it won't stick to your fingers), stretch and shape the dough into a ball. Sprinkle your work area with a little flour. Using your hands or a rolling pin, roll out and stretch the dough until it is approximately 1/8-inch thick and 12 inches wide.

Place the finished dough onto the prepared pizza peel. Then, add the toppings of your choice. Carefully slide the pizza onto the hot stone. If it isn't sliding, sprinkle more flour or cornmeal between the pizza and the pizza peel until the pizza moves. Check for doneness after 8-10 minutes — it may take a few minutes longer. Turn the pizza around if one side is browning faster than the other. Allow to cool slightly on a wire rack before serving. 📺



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