

CONNECTED

SHINING SO BRIGHT

Festival of Trees
is McCormick's
tradition

AN ABBEVILLE GEM

Jeweler's Bench
finds new facets

SERVICE AND SOLACE

Broadband powers
community outreach





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Being thankful for broadband in 2020

When you're making your list of things to be thankful for this season, make room for this:

"access to broadband from a reliable, community-based provider." This year has taught us many things, one being that broadband is vital to so many areas of our lives — work, school, health and more.

I recently spoke with a journalist who has been covering the gaps in broadband connectivity across our country. She lives in a beautiful community in the mountains of Vermont and is lucky to be able to download emails — forget anything like streaming or VPN access. She has learned from working with NTCA and some of our members that building broadband is not a cheap proposition. There are physical hurdles (Vermont mountains?) that make the task even more formidable.

Several months into a remote world, her office is closed and her options for connectivity are limited. She joins the ranks of local school kids in nearby fast-food parking lots trying to complete their homework while she tries to upload her stories. In the most prosperous country in the world, in 2020, she has realized the hard way that having a broadband connection has become a lifeline and a necessity — and that speed and capacity actually do matter.

If you are holding this magazine, you are served by a community-based provider committed to keeping you connected. And that's a reason to be thankful! 📶



Wired up Hot spots rely on fast internet networks

Connecting rural communities to reliable broadband networks represents a vital challenge for not only individual states but also the nation as a whole. Jobs, education, health care and more increasingly rely on fast internet access.

As state and national policymakers consider strategies to expand broadband networks, weighing the benefits of an often misunderstood technology might prove beneficial.

Hot spots are described by NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association as wireless on-ramps to the internet that cover a small area. Many consumers and policymakers associate hot spot technology with cellular phones, because many phones have the capability of becoming hot spots to serve as gateways to the internet for other devices.

NTCA, however, notes that these mobile connections represent only one form of hot spot. A fixed hot spot is created by use of a Wi-Fi router connected to a physical internet source such as a fiber optic network. These hot spots are common in homes, coffee shops, offices and more. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many rural telcos used this technology to provide free Wi-Fi connections at schools, churches and public spaces.

The important point to remember is that wireless connections do ultimately need wires. Fast broadband networks make these Wi-Fi-based hot spots possible, because those wired links provide the final connections to the internet.

NTCA emphasizes it's important for policymakers to remember that the term "hot spot" is associated with far more than mobile phones. Robust rural broadband networks make Wi-Fi-based hot spots possible, bringing their power and convenience to your homes, businesses and more. 📶

The 2020 gift guide



\$200



Senstroke

Giving that budding Buddy Rich in your household a full-size drum kit is the fastest way to put yourself on the outs with your neighbors and less-than-appreciative family members. So, the Senstroke is a great gift for everyone. The Bluetooth sensors attach to drumsticks, as well as to your feet, allowing you to mimic a bass drum and hi-hat. Connect to a free app to play and practice drums on most surfaces. The app includes a learning mode for beginners and can also record, playback and export your performance in MIDI format. Complete kit: \$280. Essential kit: \$200.



\$59.99

SHOP FOR THE TECH THAT'S SURE TO PLEASE

Getting the right holiday gift for that special person in your life can be difficult. But whether they're into technology, music, sports or "Star Wars," our gift guide has something for everyone on your list. 📺



\$69.99



The CrazyCap

The CrazyCap uses ultraviolet light to kill germs inside your water bottle. This means you never have to worry about a smelly bottle again, even if you leave it overnight in your gym bag. It self-cleans every four hours. And forget about running low on water during a hike. The manufacturer claims you can safely disinfect any debris-free water, so you can refill your bottle from rivers, lakes or streams. The rechargeable cap can also disinfect surfaces or objects, such as your smartphone or keys. CrazyCap can be purchased with its bottle or separately, and it fits most cola-style bottles. The company donates 5% of every sale to water.org, a group that helps people around the world have access to clean water. The CrazyCap with 17-ounce bottle: \$69.99.



Gadget Discovery Club

\$96

For year-round giving to that tech junkie in your family, you may consider getting him or her a subscription to the Gadget Discovery Club. Every month, the service mails a new mystery gadget for you to discover upon opening the box. The promise from the company is that you will receive a high-quality item at a cheaper price than retail, with a one-year guarantee and a 30-day return period. Don't expect to get an iPhone, but past deliveries have included gadgets such as fitness trackers, Bluetooth speakers and wireless earphones. Subscriptions range from \$96 for three months to \$276 for 12 months.



The Child Animatronic Edition

The creators of the hit Disney+ show "The Mandalorian" want you to call him The Child, while the internet knows him as Baby Yoda. Whatever his name is, he is undeniably adorable and ready to come home for the holidays. The Child Animatronic Edition giggles, babbles and makes Force effect sounds. It also features motorized movements, including eyes that open and close and ears that move back and forth. The Child even lifts his arm as he prepares to use the Force, after which he may need a "Force nap." Demand will be high, so you may need an intergalactic bounty hunter to snatch one up or be quick on the draw at your favorite online retailer. \$59.99 MSRP.

Thank you to 'the helpers'

When times are tough, it's probably a good time to go back to one of America's most respected and revered voices: Mr. Rogers. And, let's face it. We've had some tough times in 2020.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

I'm not even exactly sure what to call Fred Rogers. He was more than a TV personality. To multiple generations of Americans from all backgrounds, he became a teacher, guru, attitude coach, theologian and maybe even a long-distance friend.

And while he's famous for asking people to be his neighbor or telling people he likes them "just the way they are," this year I believe one of his messages rings through especially strong.

Throughout his time on PBS and especially in his appearances after the Sept. 11 attacks of 2001, he would remind viewers of what his mother told him to do in a bad situation: to look for the helpers.

Even though he may have meant it for children, I think it's also pretty sound advice for us grown-ups. In times when things seem out of control and we feel helpless, we can often look at the situation and focus on those trying to help. Ideally, I think we try to become a helper if we can. In those situations when we can't help, focusing on the people in need will almost always add order to how we feel.

This year has had no shortage of troubling events, but with that, we can hopefully recognize all the people doing what they can to make situations better. Where there were wildfires in Oregon and California, there were thousands of firefighters doing their part to help. When devastating hurricanes slammed into the Gulf Coast, emergency personnel and aid organizations rushed in to assist those affected by the storms.

Since the pandemic hit, doctors, nurses and scientists have worked to study it, limit the spread and find a vaccine. Near the top of that list of helpers has to be our local educators, and I would be remiss if I didn't recognize them for their efforts to essentially reinvent school this year.

I would humbly suggest that in our own way, many of the community-based internet providers like WCTEL around the country have been among the helpers as we've connected or upgraded the services to people in our neighborhoods who needed broadband to work or attend school online.

Even when we face struggles as a nation, as a state or as a local community, I believe there will always be helpers who work hard to serve where they can.

In this issue, we highlight some of those helpers and look at how they use technology to strengthen their mission. Whether through fundraising, recruiting volunteers, connecting with similar organizations or raising awareness of their causes, dozens of organizations in our region alone use broadband to do great work in serving their communities.

As we move into what may be a very different kind of holiday season, may we all pause to give thanks for those helpers. 📺



CONNECTED

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020

VOL. 8, NO. 6

The West Carolina Tel Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by West Carolina Telephone, © 2020. It is distributed without charge to all members/owners of the cooperative.



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

West Carolina Telephone
233 Highway 28 Bypass
Abbeville, SC 29620
Telephone: 864-446-2111
www.WCTEL.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Westley "Wes" McAllister, President
North McCormick, Area 8

John Michael Thomas, Vice-President
Iva, Area 2

Jane U. Stone, Secretary
Donalds, Area 3

L. Ned McGill
Starr, Area 1

Lee W. Logan
Due West, Area 4

Stanley H. Keaton
Antreville/Lowndesville, Area 5

James Robert Hester
Calhoun Falls, Area 6

Darren Campbell Lewis
Abbeville, Area 7

Talmadge R. Bussey
South McCormick, Area 9

Produced for West Carolina Tel by:

WORDSOUTH
A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY

On the Cover:



The annual Festival of Trees brightens the Dorn Grist Mill and Cotton Gin in McCormick. Photo courtesy of Shorelines Magazine. See story Page 8.

WCTEL hosts 'drive-in' annual meeting

The WCTEL board of directors held its annual member meeting at the WCTEL Abbeville office on Monday, Aug. 17, 2020. This meeting was the first drive-in meeting with all attendees staying in their vehicles while the meeting was conducted using an FM radio transmitter.

Board President Wes McAllister called the meeting to order by greeting the members present. The invocation was performed by Rev. Johnnie Waller, from Calhoun Falls, followed by the pledge of allegiance led by WCTEL board member Robert Hester. WCTEL's attorney, Paul Agnew, verified the presence of a quorum. Agnew also reported the outcome of the election. Incumbent board members Ned McGill and Tag Bussey were re-elected to represent Starr and South McCormick respectively. Robert Hester was re-elected by majority vote to represent Calhoun Falls.

McAllister began the president's report with a review of all operational changes made this year because of the pandemic. He recognized the employees' commitment to service during this time and assured the members of WCTEL's continued efforts to provide superior service. McAllister gave a financial overview stating that WCTEL's assets and liabilities stayed consistent during 2020.

WCTEL CEO Jeff Wilson followed with the CEO's report starting with the recognition of loyal employees, interns, board members and recent retirees. He also noted that it took the cooperative 22 years to reach 10,000 broadband customers, and in just the past three years, WCTEL has grown to 20,000 broadband customers. He credits the fiber network.

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



WCTEL HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

WCTEL offices will be closed in observance of the holidays on the following dates:

Thanksgiving, Nov. 26-27 | Christmas, Dec. 24-25 | New Year's Day, Jan. 1

WCTEL wishes all a joyous and safe holiday season.



Visitors to Rock City's Enchanted Garden of Lights in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, are greeted with traditional holiday cheer.



'T is the time for Christmas lights, and cities around the South tend to take the holidays to a whole 'nother level, brightening the season and lighting up the town.

It's time for brightly lit trees, warm cider simmering on the stove and scenting the house, and steam rising from mugs of hot chocolate. And it's time to revel in the joy of the Christmas season with family, friends and lots of colorful displays of light.

Rock City's Enchanted Garden of Lights, now in its 26th year and named a Top 20 Event for 2019 by the Southeast Tourism Society, is just that — enchanting. There are more than 30 holiday scenes and a million-plus LED lights — more than ever before. As the lights brighten the night, Rock City Gardens' daytime splendor is transformed into a fantasyland of brilliant wonder.

For many, a trip to Rock City atop Lookout Mountain is a holiday tradition. For others, it will be a new experience. For all, it offers popular attractions preserved from years past, along with new adventures through the lights.

There are four areas that light up each Christmas season: Yule Town; Magic Forest; North Pole Village, where Santa and Mrs. Claus live and work with their magical elves; and the popular Arctic Kingdom, which has a brand-new look this year, offering one of the world's first of its kind — walk-through Christmas trees.

FESTIVALS *of* LIGHT

Have a merry time

Also new this year are the fashions on Inara the Ice Queen and Jack Frost. They will be decked out in colorful, new garments to prepare them for a journey through a stunning display of ice crystals in the Arctic Kingdom with a design reminiscent of the aurora borealis lights. Within this area of the Enchanted Garden of Lights is the Glacier Grotto, which offers a firepit to warm visitors passing through. Treats to warm the body and soul are also found at the North Pole Lodge, where kids of all ages can enjoy gingerbread cookie decorating and sipping hot cocoa while enjoying live music.

But that's not all. Other presents Rock City offers for the season include the chance to enjoy dinner with Santa, storytimes with Mrs. Claus, pictures with Santa and greetings from Jack Frost, Inara the Ice Queen and other characters roaming through the Enchanted Garden of Lights. 📸



Whimsical light displays are part of a holiday stroll through Georgia's Rock City.



Mountain views are part of the Rock City experience.

Rock City Enchanted Garden of Lights

Nov. 20-Jan. 2, 4-9 p.m. (closed Christmas Eve)

Rock City Gardens, 1400 Patten Road, Lookout Mountain, Georgia

For information on special events and deals on weekday pricing during the holiday season, visit www.seerockcity.com/lights.

Lights around the South

Holiday lights shine all around the South this season. Here's a look at some in your area.

• Magic Christmas in Lights

Bellingrath Gardens, Theodore, Alabama

Take a tour through the gardens and become illuminated with the more than 3 million lights sparkling throughout the gardens every Christmas. It's a holiday event that has become a tradition along the Gulf Coast. www.bellingrath.org

• Natchitoches Festival of Lights

Natchitoches, Louisiana

The city's historic district lights up with holiday spirit as hundreds of thousands visit annually for fireworks, parades, plays, historic tours and the charm of the oldest community in Louisiana. More than 300,000 lights drape the cobblestone streets decorated with garlands of greens. www.natchitocheschristmas.com

• Southern Lights Holiday Festival

Kentucky Horse Park, Lexington, Kentucky

Santa on horseback outlined with lights and other scenes are part of the 3-mile driving tour of the Kentucky Horse Park that attracts more than 120,000 visitors each year. www.kyhorsepark.com

• Anderson Christmas Lights

Anderson, South Carolina

Old Man Winter, Santa Claus, the Anderson Express and a salute to the military are among the 160 displays and 3.5 million lights that brighten the night at Anderson Christmas Lights. Warm up by the fire, roast some marshmallows, sing some Christmas songs and get into the holiday spirit. andersonchristmaslights.org

• Dollywood's Smoky Mountain Christmas

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

The mountains come alive with color and cheer as Dolly's crew turns on the lights — 4 million of them — throughout the park. They are a backdrop for the amazing Parade of Many Colors and other events, including live shows with a holiday theme, such as the popular "Christmas in the Smokies." www.dollywood.com

• Galaxy of Lights

Huntsville, Alabama

The Huntsville Botanical Garden is all decked out in holiday finery as the annual Galaxy of Lights turns the gardens into a fantasyland of lights and color. It's a driving tour that takes you past nearly 200 animated displays, from those with holiday themes to dinosaurs and nursery rhyme characters for the kids. Special Galaxy of Lights Walking Nights are also available. Walk through snow falling inside a twinkling icicle forest, visit with Santa and enjoy hot chocolate along the way. www.hsvbg.org

On the light side

Festival of Trees delights visitors at Dorn Mill Complex

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photography courtesy of SHORELINES MAGAZINE

Each year, the old Dorn Grist Mill and Cotton Gin in downtown McCormick hums back to life just in time for Christmas.

The Festival of Trees, an annual presentation of the McCormick County Historical Commission, rings in the Christmas season while giving attendees a decorated glance into the past.

"It's truly a holiday wonderland," says organizer Toni Moore. "I don't know another way to describe it."

The Dorn Mill Complex consists of the circa 1898 grist mill and the 1930 cotton gin, and the Festival of Trees has utilized both buildings for the past six years. The mill and the cotton gin closed in the 1950s, but they get a breath of life each Christmas season.

Volunteers, including community groups and individuals, decorate using trees donated by members of the community.

The annual event has grown since its inception seven years ago and welcomes around 3,000 visitors to downtown McCormick. Admission to the event is free for everyone.

"There's nothing like watching people walk through that grist mill from 1898 and watching their entire faces light up," Moore says. "It's amazing. I don't care how young or how old people are. They're thrilled, and they're blown away when they walk through those doors. It's just amazing to watch."

CHRISTMAS YEAR-ROUND

Planning for the Festival of Trees starts soon after the previous Christmas season is over.

Moore says the volunteers from the historical commission start with ideas and preparations in January. Decorating begins in earnest around Labor Day or before, when the insides of old Southern buildings lacking air conditioning are anything but winter wonderlands.

"We make sure that we've got our dates planned, and then it begins," Moore says. "I get our fliers and marketing materials out while Linda Baker and Mary Tobin start brainstorming. By February or March, they have a game plan for the entire grist mill, and they will decorate up until the morning we open to the public."

A team of volunteers begins decorating the Dorn Grist Mill and Cotton Gin in September.



Opening day is traditionally the first Friday of December, and the Festival of Trees runs on Friday and Saturday of the first two weekends of the month, topping off almost a full year of planning and decorating. After the final visitors make their way through the Festival of Trees, the volunteers can then concentrate on their own family Christmases, with nary a "humbug" uttered.



“It’s really nice that we have a couple of weeks in between the event and our traditional Christmas with our family,” Moore says. “I’d say by Jan. 1, we’re definitely tired of the holidays. However, we’re ready to go after that. Even this year, with the virus and everything, we’ve asked some questions on how we should do things differently and plan a little bit, but we’re still excited to do it.”

Moore admits that this year will be different. Social distancing will be in place as visitors travel through the mill and the cotton gin. “It’s a really nice complex to do what we do,” she says. “We have lots of open space, so we are able to social distance and have people completely spaced out. Hopefully, we can keep everybody moving at a decent speed, but not so fast that they can’t appreciate everything that they’re seeing.”

Groups from assisted-living facilities and retirement communities that usually trek into McCormick by the busload for the festival may not make it there this year due to the pandemic, but Moore says the event will go on, regardless. “The only way we won’t do it is if the governor or someone says that we can’t,” she says.

HISTORY LESSONS

As much as the Festival of Trees annually serves as a kickoff locally for the holiday season, it also provides free history lessons, highlighting the area’s important agricultural and economic past.

Agriculture, including the Dorn Mill Complex, has long been the economic engine for rural McCormick County, and the historical commission is keen to share that history with local residents and visitors.

“It’s a complete history lesson,” Moore says. “That’s one of the things that Mary Tobin has really brought to this. She is always researching and diving into the history of McCormick and learning more, which is wonderful because it is important to showcase the history of this complex. Mary has really brought the history to the forefront. Last year, for example, she did a lot of period work on the decorations and a lot of the trees so people could be reminded of the roots of the county.”

For information on the McCormick County Historical Commission or the Festival of Trees, contact the group on Facebook — @McCormickCountyHistoricalCommission — or by email at mccormickschistory@gmail.com.



Festival of Trees

Dorn Mill Complex | Grist Mill & Cotton Gin
206 N. Main St. McCormick, South Carolina
Dates: Dec. 4-5 and Dec. 11-12 | Hours: Noon-7 p.m.
Contact information: McCormick County Historical
Commission, 805-201-5150 | Admission is free.



CHOWGIRLS

Making a change

High-speed connections power service organizations across the country



Chowgirls Killer Catering in Minneapolis leveraged online tools to better serve their community.

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In March 2020, Chowgirls Killer Catering in Minneapolis was busy preparing for its Sweet 16 party, complete with signature food and a swing band. Like many events in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, the celebration was ultimately called off. The next day, while watching Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz recommend against large gatherings across the state, it occurred to co-owner and CEO Heidi Andermack that one canceled party was the least of her problems.

“We had a big leadership meeting about what to do, because all our events were canceling,” she says. “Our chef, who had been working with Second Harvest Heartland, thought of calling them to see what they were going to do. We would have a big empty kitchen, so maybe we could work with them.”

As service organizations, charities and churches throughout the nation learned,

creating connections to serve their communities meant relying more on online tools, broadband access and digital communication. They learned to talk, collaborate and succeed with the help of technology.

Chowgirls had first partnered with Second Harvest Heartland, a member of the Feeding America network of food banks, on a food rescue program around the 2018 Super Bowl. The two groups met once again and created the Minnesota Central Kitchen to feed families in need.

Chowgirls is now one of eight kitchens cooking for Minnesota Central Kitchen, preparing 30,000 meals weekly for hungry populations in the Twin Cities area. Large-scale donors such as restaurants, grocery stores and food distributors contribute ingredients, which are managed using Feeding America’s MealConnect app.

Chowgirls prepared 30,000 meals weekly.



“It’s a lot of meals to keep track of, so our high-speed internet has been pretty key to keeping it all coordinated,” Andermack says. “We also organize all of our meals and what is available using Google Spreadsheets. We’re not just tracking our kitchen but tying together a whole network of kitchens.”



In Smithville, Tennessee, the Rev. Chad Ramsey of Smithville First Baptist Church used online tools to stay connected to members.

WORSHIP ON DEMAND

While the importance of online tools is nothing new to service organizations across the country, they have become all but essential over the last year. Rev. Chad Ramsey at Smithville First Baptist Church in Smithville, Tennessee, has relied on the ability to stream services online to reach parishioners who might find themselves homebound.

“Streaming is huge everywhere,” he says. “We see that in the media world with Netflix, Disney+ and all the streaming services. But the same is true for the church.”

Smithville FBC not only streams live services for parishioners who can’t make it to the church but also has its own studio for recording and uploading training videos for everyone from new members to those preparing for mission trips. With so many demands on the church’s internet service, Ramsey isn’t sure what they would do without a fiber connection.

“We saw where things were going in this world and knew that having that ability to connect with each other would be important, whether it’s sharing files, videos, streaming or uploading to social media,” he says. “People are so much more connected than they have been, and if you don’t have that consistent and quality connection, you’re going to be left behind.”

That approach has helped Smithville FBC build a church that appeals across generations, attracting millennials and seniors alike. And while their

preferences for how they worship may not break down as neatly as expected, the fiber connection provides the flexibility to meet everyone’s needs.

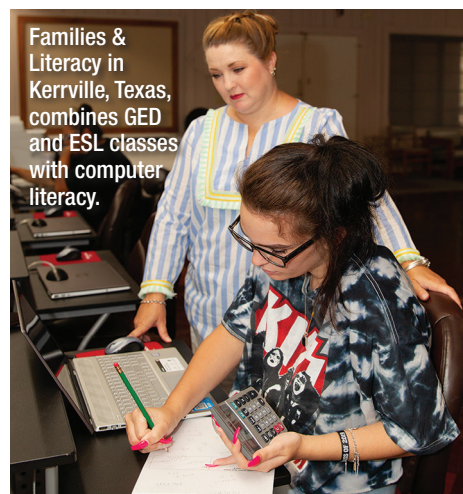
“You might see someone really young who wants things to be done the way they were decades ago, and then there are other people who are much older who want to know why we aren’t making the changes we need to be around for another 100 years,” says Ramsey. “That’s the challenge: Getting the focus not on style but the purpose. We’re here to serve God, not ourselves. That’s what makes us tick.”

DIGITAL LITERACY

At Families & Literacy in Kerrville, Texas, it’s opening doors to people’s futures that makes them tick. The organization serves adult learners throughout the community and inmates of the Kerr County Jail, helping them to earn their citizenship or GED or learn English as a second language.

While most of the classes Families & Literacy organizes take place in local churches or other off-campus locations, the in-office broadband connection has been particularly helpful in getting prospective students on the path to learning as quickly as possible. Not every student has access to a reliable internet connection at home, so the organization provides Chromebooks on-site so they can take placement tests and register for the appropriate classes.

Families & Literacy even offers an



ESL class that incorporates computer skills, helping prepare students to be ready to communicate in the workplace and to better understand the tools they will be using day to day.

“Computer technology is prevalent in pretty much every job you go to now,” says Families & Literacy Executive Director Misty Kothe. “It’s important that not only can our students speak the language and do the work but they can also efficiently use that technology. It just makes them more employable in the future.”

Moving forward, broadband connections offer new opportunities for all three organizations. Families & Literacy aims to offer limited-size classes on location, outdoors if necessary, while Smithville FBC is eager to explore the possibilities of Bible study streaming services. Meanwhile, the Minnesota Central Kitchen project has proven so successful that Andermack now plans to incorporate its mission into Chowgirls’ regular operations even when the pandemic has passed.

“We have always had a mission of reducing food waste, but now we’re looking at it as hunger relief,” she says. “It’s become essential to our business, helping us give jobs to chefs who would otherwise be unemployed and keep the lights on at our facility. Sometimes you just need to support each other, and it comes back in ways you don’t expect.” 📺



HI! I'M AMANDA CLARK

In this column, you'll learn about technology and read 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



LED lights by Twinkly

Thanks to a smartphone app, the innovative LED lights from Twinkly allow you to control the colors and patterns of your holiday displays. Available at stores such as The Home Depot, Lowe's and online retailers like Amazon, prices begin at about \$60.



Tune up your tech

Three tips — and a bonus — to make your devices hum

Gadgets, gifts and gizmos can brighten the holidays. And a few prudent steps can help you keep pesky tech gremlins out of the fun.

Consider a trio of tips for getting the most out of your games, TVs, computers and more.

1. GET THE SPEED YOU NEED

Remember, the more devices you connect to the internet, the more bandwidth you need. If it helps, think of this as the speed of your internet connection. Faster connections allow for more devices.

How much speed do you need? For starters, many gamers prefer connections of at least 25 Mbps. Plus, streaming of high-definition video typically needs about 5 Mbps. Faster service becomes even more important if you have one person streaming a movie on one device while someone else is gaming on another. Each device must share the total available bandwidth.

2. UNRAVEL YOUR CONNECTIONS

Perhaps you wish to connect your smartphone or tablet to a stereo or speaker. Or maybe you want to link your smart TV to the internet. It helps to understand the two technologies.

WiFi: This makes wireless internet possible. Radio waves replace the need for cables, allowing your computers, tablets, phones, security cameras, smart speakers and more to connect to the internet. Think of WiFi as the gateway to the online world or to devices connected to your home network.

Bluetooth: Like WiFi, Bluetooth also uses radio signals to make a short-range connection between devices. Think of this as a one-to-one link between two devices. For example, Bluetooth is often used to connect a smartphone to a Bluetooth-enabled speaker for streaming music. Or, Bluetooth can connect earbuds or headsets wirelessly to a phone for calls and other audio.

3. PROTECT YOUR DEVICES

A power spike, whether from a storm or other problem on the electrical grid, can damage your devices. Consider buying a surge protector. Make sure the one you choose has a joules rating of at least 2,000.

BONUS TIP: TEND YOUR PASSWORDS

Take the pain out of keeping up with passwords with a good password manager. And you're in luck, because most web browsers such as Chrome, Safari, Edge or Firefox have basic password management built in.

For an extra level of security and convenience, consider tools such as 1Password and LastPass. These allow you to use multiple browsers, offer suggestions for generating solid passwords and can warn about bad practices such as duplicate passwords or sites that have become security risks. 📧

Town gem

Jeweler's Bench celebrates 15 years in Abbeville

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photos by MATT LEDGER

As the Christmas shopping season gets underway this November, the Jeweler's Bench will be celebrating its 15th anniversary in downtown Abbeville.

Owner Joey Crocker, a jeweler who started his career as an apprentice in nearby Anderson, says the opportunity to own his own store in Abbeville was too good to pass up in 2005. "There was one store, and it was going out of business," he says. "It was the last jewelry store that Abbeville had, and I thought that that was the time to do it. I felt like Abbeville could support an independent store, and it has. The people here have supported us. They've been just amazing."

Business and Sales Manager Leslie McAllister, who brings 22 years of experience to the Jeweler's Bench, says the business has evolved since the store opened its doors, as have its customers. "People have gotten savvy about their shopping, and they're price comparing online," McAllister says. "There were so many things to offer people, and the mom-and-pop stores like ours that couldn't roll with those changes and still tried to keep a large inventory were the ones that didn't make it."

With a slightly smaller inventory, the Jeweler's Bench focuses on customer service, which includes repairs, custom jewelry and special orders. "I can't stock hundreds or thousands of pieces of jewelry you can find online that my next customer might want," McAllister says. "But thanks to the internet, I am able to have whatever they want the next day."

The internet has expanded the store's ability to quickly order and stock items, and it's helped grow the market for repairs and custom jewelry. The word of mouth advertising on which Crocker primarily depends travels much farther in the internet age.

Crocker says his business is dependent on its WCTEL services, which include phone, broadband internet and security systems. "Years ago, in business, our No. 1 partner was the bank, and that was it," he says. "That's changed now with technology. Now, your cable or internet company is your No. 1 partner. WCTEL has my alarm system, my cameras, my phone system and my internet. We do a lot of business through the internet, so our most important partner, I think, is WCTEL."

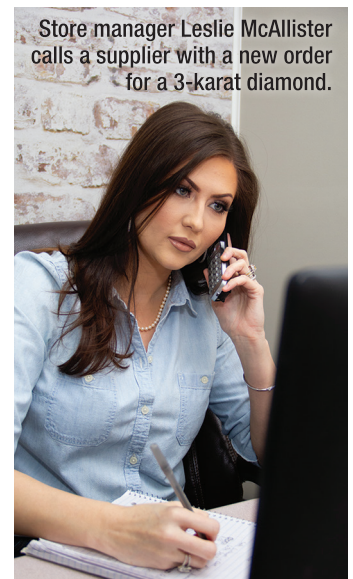
Despite all the changes technology has brought about in the jewelry business, along with shifting economic factors, Crocker says the reasons customers come to the Jeweler's Bench remain largely unchanged, whether it's during the Christmas season or another time of year.



Store manager Leslie McAllister and owner Joey Crocker have grown The Jeweler's Bench into a destination for those seeking custom-designed jewelry and expert advice.



Joey Crocker begins resizing a man's wedding ring.



Store manager Leslie McAllister calls a supplier with a new order for a 3-karat diamond.

"Jewelry is very personal," he says. "It's a very personal thing — every piece has a story. Rarely does someone just walk in and just pick out something just because they saw it and liked it. Usually, there's a story behind every piece of jewelry." [🔗](#)

The Jeweler's Bench

107 Washington St., Abbeville, South Carolina
864-366-7699 | Open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday,
10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday

A tart treat

Cranberries are a longstanding staple at holiday time



They're great with turkey and stuffing or baked in your morning muffin. Dried, they're known as raisins and perfect sprinkled on a salad. A fixture on Thanksgiving tables or even wrapped around trees as a Christmas garland, the jolly red cranberry takes center stage at holiday time.

People have been eating cranberries for centuries. Native Americans first used them as food and medicine, well before Pilgrims set foot here. The absence of sugar in the colonies in the early 1600s meant cranberries, which benefit from sweetening, were probably not at the first

Thanksgiving table. Nonetheless, it didn't take long for them to become a part of that holiday's menu, and today, consumers eat more than 80 million pounds of cranberries from Thanksgiving to Christmas.

Every year, holiday celebrators enjoy more than 5 million gallons of the canned sauce that jiggles like Santa's belly, and cranberries are a simple way to add color to your table and a sweet, tart flavor to your turkey. But as Americans are latching on to the farm-to-table trend, fresh cranberries are outselling the canned variety.

Here are several tips from Vitamix for cooking with fresh cranberries:

- **Baking with cranberries** — Cut cranberries in half before adding them to baked goods to prevent them from swelling and popping.
- **Cooking cranberries on the stovetop** — Simmer whole berries gently in a small amount of water, uncovered, since

too much steam might cause them to swell and explode.

- **Freezing cranberries** — To freeze and enjoy them throughout the year, spread the berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet and place it in the freezer. Once they are completely frozen, transfer the berries to freezer-safe bags or airtight containers. There's no need to thaw your cranberries before cooking. Just give them a quick water bath before using.



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

CRANBERRY APPLE HOLIDAY BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

Make this casserole a day ahead.

Casserole:

- 2 tablespoons softened unsalted butter, divided
- 3 large, firm, sweet tart apples, diced
- 2/3 cup fresh cranberries
- 8 large eggs
- 1 cup vanilla Greek yogurt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/4 cup maple syrup, plus more for serving
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 6 cups stale bread cubes, crusts removed

Streusel topping:

- 1/3 cup flour
- 1/4 cup rolled oats
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Pinch kosher salt
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

Make the casserole: Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the apples and cook, stirring until they are starting to brown and become tender — 4 to 6 minutes. Remove from the heat. Stir in the cranberries.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch casserole dish with the remaining 1 tablespoon of butter. Whisk the eggs in a large bowl. Add the yogurt, milk, maple syrup and cinnamon, then whisk to combine. Add the bread cubes and the apple mixture, and stir until combined. Transfer to the prepared baking dish. Cover it with foil and refrigerate up to 24 hours.

Make the topping: Stir the flour, oats, sugar, cinnamon and salt in a medium bowl. Drizzle 3 tablespoons melted butter over the oat mixture, tossing with a fork until the crumbs are evenly moist. Add



Cranberry Crumble Bars

Crust and topping:

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup ground slivered almonds
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup chilled butter
- 1 egg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Filling:

- 4 cups fresh cranberries
- 1 cup sugar
- Juice of half an orange (4 teaspoons)
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 375 F. Grease a 13-by-9-inch pan.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, 1 cup sugar, almonds, baking powder and


salt. Cut in the butter, using a pastry blender or pulling 2 table knives through the ingredients in opposite directions, until the mixture looks like coarse crumbs. Stir in the egg. Press 2 1/2 cups of crumb mixture in the bottom of the pan. Stir cinnamon into the remaining crumb mixture. Set aside.

In a medium bowl, stir together the filling ingredients. Spoon the filling evenly over the crust. Spoon the reserved crumb mixture evenly over the filling.

Bake 45 to 55 minutes or until the top is light golden brown. Cool completely. Refrigerate until chilled. Cut into 6 rows by 4 rows. Store tightly covered in the refrigerator.

the nuts and stir to completely combine. Refrigerate.

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Remove the casserole and topping from the refrigerator. Bake the casserole, covered, until heated through and steaming, 35 to 40 minutes. Break up any large topping pieces if necessary.

Remove the casserole from the oven, remove the foil cover, and sprinkle the top with the streusel topping. Continue baking until the topping is golden and the casserole is puffed, 25 to 30 minutes. Allow the casserole to cool 10 minutes before cutting it into squares to serve. Serve with additional warm maple syrup, if desired. 



233 Highway 28 Bypass
Abbeville, SC 29620

Presort STD
US Postage PAID
Permit #21
Freeport OH

MORE *giggles.*
MORE *family time.*
MORE *fun.*

**Experience MORE when
you switch or upgrade
your internet!**

100% MORE family fun!

**Stream a better experience and
all your holiday favorites!**

Enjoy **MORE moments. Get a \$50 Amazon
or Netflix gift card with WCTEL internet!**

(864) 446-2111 | wctel.com

Some restrictions apply. Residential only. One-year agreement. Free installation. Offer expires 12-31-2020.

