

CONNECTED

WONDERFUL WISH LIST

A Decade of dreams
at Connie Maxwell

TASTY TREATS

The homemade goodness
of Mama's Sweet Shoppe

NOVELS IN NOVEMBER

Broadband boosts rural writers





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Committed to a fiber future

For several years, NTCA has encouraged policymakers to think with a hand in the present but an eye toward the future. But in Washington, D.C. — where every technology and every interest has lobbyists and political champions — that mission is easier said than done.

Many of the nation's internet providers believe in a fiber-or-bust approach. As long as it's physically possible, which is not always the case in rural areas, fiber should be the goal. As lawmakers weigh infrastructure investments, why should internet providers settle for less?

Many NTCA members are working diligently to extend fiber optic networks, despite challenges like slow supply chains limiting access to the materials needed to build these robust networks. They are making strides.

In our most recent broadband survey, 70% of NTCA members' customers enjoyed fiber to the premises. It's a technology that makes it possible for internet providers such as yours to easily scale their services to meet demand.

Fiber infrastructure is also a key component of building a better future that includes higher-performance services, real-time applications, smart communities, precision agriculture, 5G superiority and better access to health care and education. To achieve our goals as a nation, we need a strong foundation of fiber connectivity.

Connecting rural communities to the rest of the nation and to the resources they need to excel matters. Broadband matters, because its speed and capacity are the new baselines for working, learning and growing the economy — from wherever we might be. Investment in fiber optic internet ensures rural America will not be relegated to second-class status. It's more than a worthy investment in infrastructure development, it's an investment in our nation's future. 📶

SOS

FBI program helps keep kids safe online

The holidays often bring new gadgets and devices, as well as some free time for kids enjoying a break from school. This time of year is a good opportunity to remind younger technology users of the risks of being online and to share strategies to keep themselves safe.

The FBI offers tools to help build a digital defense to protect kids online. These tools include the agency's free computer literacy program, Safe Online Surfing, or SOS. Designed for children in grades three through eight, it's available to teachers, administrators and parents, who can introduce children to the concepts one-on-one.

The program engages children through a series of online games that mix fun with education on a variety of topics, including online etiquette, managing cyberbullying, the importance of strong passwords and double authentication, and more. Visit sos.fbi.gov to access the guide. 📱

The FBI offers a few additional tips for parents:

- Discuss with your children what kind of information, photos and videos are appropriate to post online — and what's not.
- Emphasize that kids should limit the information they post on social media platforms, such as their full name, date of birth and school information.
- Teach that, while free software and apps seem enticing, using them may open phones and computers up to malware or worse.



Tech the halls

GIVE GREAT GADGETS

Great tech gifts don't have to be expensive. There are plenty of options under \$50 that will make the holidays merry. We've got some suggestions, whether you're shopping for a more budget-friendly gift for that gadget-crazy person on your list or a fun stocking stuffer that won't break the bank.

\$29.99

MSRP at
us.tomy.com



KIIPIX PORTABLE PHOTO PRINTER

This one's a neat gadget that reproduces images from your smartphone without the need for Wi-Fi or even batteries. You just place your phone on top of the KiiPix, and it takes a picture of your screen and prints a photo in minutes. Reviews point out that the device can be finicky with ambient light, and the quality will be closer to those instant Polaroid pictures from the '70s than a professionally printed photo, but the retro look is part of the fun. Available in pink, blue and black.

8BITDO SN30 PRO+

Any gamer would appreciate the SN30 Pro+, a customizable controller compatible with a variety of systems. Featuring rumble vibration, motion controls and 20 hours of play off a four-hour charge, the controller can also be used wired through USB or wirelessly via Bluetooth. Compatible systems include Windows, macOS, Android, Steam, Nintendo Switch and Raspberry Pi. Free software allows you to customize buttons, adjust stick and trigger sensitivity, and create macros with any button combination. The controller is available in black and in color combinations reminiscent of the classic Nintendo Entertainment System and the Super Nintendo.

\$49.99

amazon.com

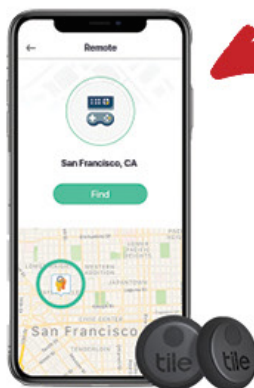


POWERUP 2.0 PAPER AIRPLANE CONVERSION KIT

Even if your design skills are more Wright brothers than Boeing, you can still transform a regular paper airplane into a dream flying machine, while kids can learn about basic principles of physics and working with simple electronics. The POWERUP 2.0 kit includes two sheets of high-quality paper to get you started, a charger, a carbon fiber propeller shaft and an ultratough rear propeller — for those inevitable crash landings. The POWERUP 4.0 model, which is \$69.99, comes with stabilization technology and can be controlled with your smartphone. Either way, get ready to take to the skies!

\$69.99

poweruptoys.com



\$24.99

thetileapp.com

TILE

The best Bluetooth finder on the market, the Tile line of products can be attached to your keys, backpack, purse or TV remote — anything that can be lost or misplaced. A free app for iOS or Android can then be used to find the missing Tile within 150 to 400 feet — depending on the Tile size — or you can ask Siri, Google Assistant or Alexa for help. When outside of Bluetooth range, the app will show the Tile's most recent location, which is updated whenever another Tile user comes within range of your device. You can also subscribe to Premium service, which includes free battery replacement and smart alerts that warn you when you've left something behind, or Premium Protect, which reimburses you up to \$1,000 if Tile can't find your things.

Giving thanks

Find reasons for appreciation in day-to-day excellence

As the year winds down, this is the season when the pace of everyday life just seems to pick up. Family gatherings, sports, special events, shopping — the list of chores, commitments and celebrations gets long. It's always a whirlwind, and 2021 is no different. While time is at a premium during the holidays, I think it's important to find a few minutes for reflection, to make time to take stock and to give thanks.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

There's plenty to be thankful for. I could list the projects we've accomplished, the services we've provided and all the work we've done this year. I am thankful for all of those, and they're all important parts of keeping our community current and connected. But this year, I'd like to offer thanks for the often unsung day-to-day interactions, people and services at the core of who we are as a company. Because when quality performance is the norm, it's easy to take it for granted.

For example, I'm thankful for our team of customer service representatives, a group whose role is to make your lives and the business you do with us as seamless as possible. They answer questions, solve minor issues and initiate new services —

seemingly basic tasks that make a big difference every day. By being the professionals they are, they make others' lives better.

We have another team of professionals whom you might rarely notice. On any given day, there's likely a crew hard at work somewhere near you maintaining the physical infrastructure that allows us to provide the services you rely upon. Often, these crews work in inclement weather and the most trying of conditions. After an outage, they lead the effort to restore service so you can get back to living your life and conducting business as quickly as possible.

At the office, we have others with the financial expertise needed to keep our house in order, and they do the painstaking work needed to make us what we are now. There are technical experts, sales professionals and so, so many more. Thank you, everyone. You and your efforts are valued and appreciated.

There are also the members of our board of directors, volunteers who contribute their time and expertise to creating the oversight that defines us as part of this community. We do not serve outside investors. Instead, our board is the link to you, and board members are charged with ensuring we keep your needs at the forefront.

Now, let me ask you something. The last time you connected your computer to the internet, did you think about the complexity of the fiber network needed to link your home to the online world? Of course you didn't, and we wouldn't expect you to.

The services we provide are out of the way, even invisible. They just work, and all the people I've described make that possible.

Because everyone at WCTEL performs well, it's easy to take our team's work for granted. Often, it isn't flashy. It's not going to make news. But every day, their work benefits those around them. When you're helping others, can there be a better reason to be thankful?

From everyone at WCTEL, we are thankful for you. Enjoy the holidays. 📺



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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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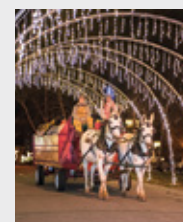
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On the Cover:



Connie Maxwell's Christmas celebration has the seasonal traditions of holiday decorations and sleigh rides for visitors. See story Page 8.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2021 ANNUAL MEETING

The WCTEL board of directors held the 2021 Annual Meeting on Aug. 16 at the Abbeville Civic Center. Board President Wes McAllister called the meeting to order by greeting the members. The invocation was delivered 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 there was a quorum present. WCTEL board Secretary Jane Stone read the notice of the annual meeting and the proof of mailing. McAllister introduced retirees and board members. Then, Agnew unveiled the outcome of the election. Incumbent board members McAllister and Stone were reelected to represent

North McCormick and Donalds, respectively. Eric McCall was elected by majority vote to represent Antreville/Lowndesville.

McAllister began the president's report with a description of the different ways WCTEL keeps customers educated and connected. McAllister touched on how, as of the end of 2021, WCTEL's fiber-to-the-home initiative will be 100% complete. He recognized the employees' commitment to service during this time and assured the members that WCTEL continues to strive to provide superior service. McAllister then gave a financial overview, stating that WCTEL's assets and liabilities stayed consistent during 2021.

WCTEL CEO Jeff Wilson followed with the CEO's report, starting with the recognition of loyal employees, interns, board members and recent retirees.

Wilson then talked about the CARES Act, a federal grant that provides money for bringing broadband to underserved areas. With the help of the government, WCTEL engineering construction teams built fiber to over 3,100 homes and businesses.

Wilson also announced the development of Upcountry Fiber, a partnership between WCTEL and Blue Ridge Electric Co-op, or BREC, that will span over the five counties BREC serves. In closing, Wilson stated that none of West Carolina Tel's accomplishments would be possible without the support of its members and the community.

McAllister closed the meeting with a time for questions. After hearing none, the meeting was adjourned.

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



The WCTEL annual meeting provided vital information to members gathered at the Abbeville Civic Center.



Board President Wes McAllister opens the annual meeting.

Holiday closings

In observance of the upcoming holidays, WCTEL's offices will be closed on the following dates to allow employees time with their families.

Thanksgiving
Thursday, Nov. 25, & Friday, Nov. 26

Christmas
Thursday, Dec. 23, & Friday, Dec. 24

New Year's Eve
Friday, Dec. 31

Starry, starry nights

Story by ANNE BRALY

The evening sky over Clear Creek was speckled with clouds. But as darkness settled across Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau, the clouds parted and the Big Dipper came out, nodding to the moon as its halo crept closer to Orion and his belt.

This scene is played out regularly near Wartburg, Tennessee, at the Obed Wild and Scenic River, a 5,100-acre park with 45 miles of waterways snaking their way through canyons guarding the banks of the Obed River, Clear Creek, Daddy's Creek and Emory River. In 2017, the park was designated as an International Dark Sky Park by the International Dark Sky Association, making it one of only two in Tennessee and one of 69 in the United States.

Getting the designation was a five-year process, says Rick Ryan, an interpretive ranger at the park. "It required a lot of patience and persistence," he says.

The process involved, first and foremost, the obvious — being dark. That may sound simple, but a sky-quality meter was used to determine whether or not the park had too much ambient light from neighboring towns. It didn't. So the park passed that test. "It's not enough to be dark, though," Ryan says. "You have to be committed to preserving the night sky."

That's done through street lighting and lighting paths and parking lots using only dark-sky-friendly lighting fixtures, something that was easy for Obed Wild and Scenic River since there is no outdoor lighting.

A Dark Sky Park must also be committed to providing educational programs to teach visitors about the importance of darkness as a resource for plants and animals like owls and other night hunters.

A good place to stargaze at Obed Wild and Scenic River is the Lilly Bluff Overlook boardwalk found at the end of the Overlook Trail, a well-marked route once you pass through Wartburg. There's plenty of parking, and it's a short walk over to the bluff overlooking the gorge of Clear Creek. There are two boardwalks with platforms where you can set up your chairs and any stargazing equipment you may bring.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Ryan and a team of volunteers held regularly scheduled stargazing opportunities, providing telescopes and everything needed for visitors to see the universe up close and personal — craters on the moon that look as though you can reach out and touch them, rings

of Saturn so vivid you could feel as though you can make the planet spin, the "spot" on Jupiter brilliant with color.

COVID put a stop to that, but not permanently. Ryan says he hopes to get the programs up and running again as soon as possible.

Now, though, the park is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Stargazers can go on their own, bringing binoculars or a telescope and maybe a chair, blanket and some hot chocolate to keep them cozy as they marvel at the night sky.

The sky changes with the seasons, and winter offers a wonderland of stars and constellations, such as Orion the Hunter and Canis Major — the big dog. And Dark Sky Parks are the best places to see them due to their verified lack of ambient light.



In the West, dark skies are easier to find because there are more deserts and less urbanization. “You know, in places like Utah and Nevada,” Ryan says. “But in the Eastern half of the U.S., up and down the East Coast, you can look at a satellite photo and it looks like a big white blob with cities like New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia and D.C. It’s kind of sad, really.

“But when you zoom in a little bit closer, you see there are regional pockets of darkness,” he continues. “It’s important for people in the East to have Dark Sky locations so that those who don’t get to travel out West will have places like this here to experience.” 📱



Rick Ryan is the interpretive ranger at the Obed Wild and Scenic River.

National Park Service

Stargazing Apps

Several good stargazing apps are available to download on your smartphone, as well. With most of these apps, all you have to do is point your phone toward the night sky and the app will demystify what’s in front of you, be it stars, planets, constellations or man-made objects like satellites, including the International Space Station. Many of them can even alert you to upcoming celestial events, so you’ll never miss another meteor shower again.

★ **NASA app:** Not only can you get the latest NASA photos, videos and features — and watch NASA events in real-time — you can look back down at the earth from the International Space Station.

★ **Star Walk 2:** This app uses your GPS to find the exact position of celestial bodies. Just point your phone at the stars and let it do the work. If you’re stargazing with young children, there’s also Star Walk Kids for iPhones and Android. Star Walk 2 is free for Android users but costs \$3 for iPhone users.

★ **SkyView Lite:** Track your favorite constellations as they move across the sky. This is a preferred app (free) for people who only want to see the major stars overhead and not the ones you can’t see.

★ **Star Chart:** Like the others, point this free app at the sky to see what’s above you. But then, when you’re done, point it down on the ground to get a view of the sky on the other side of the world. Pretty cool, huh?

★ **SkySafari:** SkySafari has all of the tools you expect in a stargazing app — and you can even control them with your voice. Tell it to find Venus and it will. SkySafari is free for Android users and \$3 for those with iPhones.

Reach for the stars

Stargazing programs will be held at Obed Wild and Scenic River as soon as groups are allowed to gather again. For updates on when this will happen, check the park’s Facebook or web page at facebook.com/ObedNPS or nps.gov/obed.

Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries embarks on

'A Decade of Dreams'

Christmas celebration set to return Dec. 2-4

Story by ANNE BRALY

Photography by MATT LEDGER

As summer heated up across the Lakelands, leaders at the Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries had long been thinking about the future — both distant and more immediate.

Leaders at the 130-year-old children's home were busy planning the return of its Christmas celebration. The annual event welcomes as many as 20,000 visitors to the Greenwood campus, but last year's yuletide event was canceled due to COVID-19.

While 2020 provided a few hiccups at Christmastime, the year also marked the kickoff of Connie Maxwell's 10-year strategic plan, "A Decade of Dreams." Campus leaders have embarked on an effort to add to its facilities and programs for children while increasing its endowment and annual fund.

BIG DREAMS

Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries President Danny Nicholson took the reins four years ago with a unique understanding of both the nuts and bolts of the strategic plan and the home's residents.

"In our 130-year history, over 18,000 children have come through this place, and we have looked at our history deeply and come up with a pathway that we feel is consistent with who we've always been," says Nicholson, who was adopted as a child. "But we're enhancing that by moving into the future. We decided that we could take a blanket of a deeper understanding of



Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries President Danny Nicholson enjoys the original stained glass of the Connie Maxwell Baptist Church.

healing and trauma. We want to enhance that and situate our future by ministering and working with our kids on a high level in relation to trauma and brokenness, so we're setting out on this plan."

Prior to arriving at Connie Maxwell as president in 2017, Nicholson spent 33 years in institutional advancement, playing key fundraising roles at the Medical University of South Carolina and at Coastal Carolina. With that background, it's no coincidence that "A Decade of Dreams" would be one of the first challenges facing Nicholson as he leads Connie Maxwell into the future.

Nicholson says all of it — his past as an adopted child and his professional life as a fundraiser — is tied together now.



Heritage Park provides a spectacular setting for Christmas decorations.

“I know God called me here,” he says. “I was an adopted child and an only child, so really, the continuity of my life and what we’re doing here is closely tied because I feel like I’m one of the children here. I want to use everything I learned in higher education and in fundraising and bring it here so the campaign will be the very best it can be.”

The goals are to increase the home’s endowment from \$90 million to \$125 million and the annual fund from \$1.2 million to \$3 million. Beyond dollars, another goal is to research and build a campus Healing Center, which could help children with trauma and mental health issues.

“We have to make the children feel safe and teach them about faith and the love of God,” Nicholson says. “And all those things are important, but one more important thing would be if we could understand better how they’re wounded, how they’re broken, how they’ve been traumatized and what are the best practices and ways that we can actually work to help them heal completely.

“A lot of our society’s ills — the breakdown of the family and addictions and all the things that cause a child to be left alone or to be hurt — we think we can learn more about those things so we can better minister to the child and love them into wholeness.”



The petting zoo is always a popular treat for children and families.



Visitors love riding through the campus on horse-drawn wagons to see the beautiful Christmas lights.

THIS YEAR'S PLAN

Since it began in 2000, Connie Maxwell Christmas has been the home’s largest annual event, welcoming thousands of visitors from across the region onto campus.

Last year was to be its 20th anniversary, but celebration of that milestone will take place this Dec. 2-4 instead. Debbie McDowell, assistant to the president at Connie Maxwell and the Christmas event organizer, says planning for the home’s Christmas celebration involves the children at the residential home, along with staff and volunteers from the community. Planning is a year-round activity.

“We really missed it last year,” McDowell says. “It brings thousands of people from all over to campus for the wagon rides and the concerts in the chapel. We have Christmas cards the children make. There will be some special decorations for sure for the 20th anniversary.”

In addition to the students creating Christmas cards for display and decorating the residential cottages, hundreds of volunteers help with the “heavy lifting” before, during and after, McDowell says. “In addition to our staff, we have volunteers involved every night of the event,” she says. “We also have about 100 volunteers help out with setup and takedown.”

The three-day event includes tens of thousands of Christmas lights, a live nativity scene, wagon rides through campus and appearances by animals from the campus farm. After the three-day celebration, the Christmas lights will remain up on campus throughout the rest of December.

“It’s always a wonderful event for the community,” says Julie Miner, Connie Maxwell vice president for communications. “We’re super excited to be able to have it again this year.” 📺

~ Quick facts ~

Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries was founded in 1892. The faith-based ministry and children's home is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. In addition to Greenwood, campuses are located in Orangeburg, Mauldin, Chesterfield and Florence.

'A Decade of Dreams'

To learn more, visit ConnieMaxwell.com and follow the “A Decade of Dreams” link.

A Christmas Celebration

Thursday, Dec. 2, through Saturday, Dec. 4, 6-8:30 p.m. each night
Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries
810 Maxwell Ave.
Greenwood, South Carolina

20th Anniversary Connie Maxwell Christmas Kick-off concert

American Idol finalist Colton Dixon
Tuesday, November 30



NaNoWriMo

November challenge helps writers write

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Growing up in rural East Tennessee, Dani Honeycutt dreamed of writing for a living. She devoured books and wrote poetry as a teen. She'd even study the encyclopedia to pack as much knowledge into her brain as she could. Writing was the natural next step. It was a place to put all her thoughts — a place to create.

Then she learned about NaNoWriMo, a nonprofit organization that grew out of an international creative writing event of the same name. Short for National Novel Writing Month, NaNoWriMo gives participants a goal of writing a 50,000-word manuscript during the month of November.

"I liked the challenge," says Honeycutt, who grew up in the small town of Rogersville and now lives in Greeneville, Tennessee. "Even though 50,000 words is more like a novella, I liked the challenge of saying, 'OK, you have 30 days to do this.' I felt like there was an accomplishment there."



Writers gather at a local NaNoWriMo write-in at a Florence, South Carolina, coffee shop.

Dani Honeycutt and Ashley Long

For a few years, she participated in the event but couldn't quite reach the 50,000-word goal. Until she did. So far this year, Honeycutt has published three nonfiction books through Amazon Self-Publishing.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

NaNoWriMo events primarily take place online — especially during

pandemic times — but official subgroups are generally paired off regionally within states in the U.S. Honeycutt volunteers as a municipal liaison for one of NaNoWriMo's East Tennessee groups. In that role, she markets the program regionally, organizes in-person and online events, and generally serves to support other writers in her group.

Ashley Long, another municipal liaison who lives in a small community near Morristown, Tennessee, says she first tried the NaNoWriMo challenge in 2010. “I wasn’t very successful,” she says. “I didn’t go to meet-ups, and I didn’t take advantage of all the resources the nonprofit offered.”

But in 2011, things changed for Long. “I was able to write 50,000 words in 30 days,” she says. “It wasn’t a full novel, but it was a good beginning.”

Since then, Long has written two rough drafts for two different stories, she says. “NaNoWriMo helps with motivation,” she says. “Writing is a very solo thing. But with this, there’s a collective energy when you do a virtual or in-person event.”

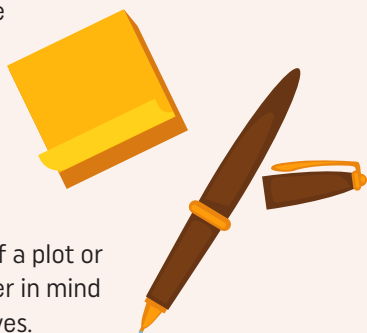
THE BENEFITS OF TRYING

While writing 50,000 words in 30 days sounds like it could be difficult, Long believes the event itself can be freeing for burgeoning writers. “NaNo is about getting the words on the page,” she says. “You write as much as you can in those 30 days. It’s about getting something that’s valuable in front of you that you can actually work with instead of having it run around your brain.”

NaNoWriMo is also a great way to make lasting friendships, Long says. She and Honeycutt became friends after meeting through the organization. “You get to meet like-minded people with the same goals and interests as you,” Long says. “Some of my best friends now are people I’ve met through NaNo over the years.” 🗨️

Writing tips for National Novel Writing Month

- **Just write** — Don’t worry about editing, reading and rereading your words. Just get them down.
- **Don’t listen to THAT voice** — You know the one — that overly critical voice of doubt that tells you nothing’s good enough. While constructive criticism is important, there’s no place for THAT voice.
- **Read** — Reading what other writers write can help you structure and build your own words. It can also free up your imagination and allow you to see how they develop characters and move a plot.
- **Prep** — Whether you’re what NaNoWriMo calls a “plotter” or whether you’re a “pantser” who flies by the seat of their pants, it’s generally best to have a scrap of a plot or even a vague character in mind before November arrives.



Finding the muse

NaNoWriMo and the Great American Novel

Writing is hard. It’s time-consuming and solitary, and it can fill a person with more doubt in their intelligence and abilities than they’ve ever known. But it can also help stretch the limits of the imagination and bring a sense of accomplishment like nothing else.

Chris Baty, the founder of NaNoWriMo, realized this after struggling to write his own book. So, back in 1999, he and a group of friends with similar goals decided to focus on getting words on the page. They gave themselves one month to write a novel. “That was the genesis of the movement,” says Tim Kim, programs director at NaNoWriMo. “Then, word just spread.”

Internet spreads the word

As the internet grew, so did NaNoWriMo. In 2006, the annual writing event also became a nonprofit, Kim says. “We were seeing so much energy behind National Novel Writing Month, and so many people wanted to give back. So, we started thinking about how we could do so much more.”

Now, in addition to National Novel Writing Month for adults, the nonprofit offers a Young Writers Program that serves about 100,000 students and educators across the world in about 2,000 classrooms. In addition, the organization offers Come Write, which helps libraries, bookstores and community centers to double as creative writing centers.

Since its beginning, many books that got their start during National Novel Writing Month have gone on to become bestsellers, including “Water for Elephants” by Sara Gruen, “Fangirl” by Rainbow Rowell and “The Forest of Hands and Teeth” by Greenville, South Carolina, native Carrie Ryan.

One of the things the NaNoWriMo organizers are proudest of is how it’s helped writers from all walks of life to find their voices, Kim says. “In places like New York City or Los Angeles, there are so many resources for people being creative and writing novels,” he says. “But we’ve seen with our programs that writers are coming from all over the U.S. — urban places and rural places, and across the world, as well.”

Getting started

National Novel Writing Month challenges people to write 50,000 words in 30 days. Some finish, some don’t. But everyone involved makes more progress than they may have otherwise. It happens every November and is open to everyone. Find more tools, pep talks, help with structure and a writing community near you at nanowrimo.org.



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

**1Password**

Long, complex passwords protect your online accounts and personal information. However, keeping up with that information can prove tricky. Consider a password manager, such as 1Password, which simplifies the process. There are accounts for both families and individuals: 1password.com.

Don't fall for it

Surge in scams leads to billions in financial losses

Scammers have upped their game in recent years, and they're only getting better. In 2020 alone, 47% of Americans experienced financial identity theft with losses of more than \$712 billion, according to the latest report from the Aite Group. Those losses include phone scams, text scams, application scams and more.

Modern technology and communications services create seemingly endless opportunities, but do take care. They also open the door to those up to no good.

The scam trade is a growing animal of an industry that's always finding new ways to feed itself. Scammers are hungry for your personal information. They'll take over your bank and credit card accounts or use your information to create new accounts. They hit you when you're sick, vulnerable and scared.

Don't fall for it. The Federal Trade Commission offers many ways to spot scams and avoid them.

First, make sure you can recognize a scam. Scammers will say anything and do anything to get an advantage, including posing as representatives of the Social Security Administration, the IRS, Medicare or an official-sounding utility or charity company.

Scammers like to say there's a problem — usually something you did wrong — so they can gain access to your information. Other times, they'll say you've won a prize, like a laptop, an iPad or money.


Scam artists prey on people's good natures, fears and vulnerabilities. Using these tactics, they try to pressure you to act immediately.

"They might threaten to arrest you, sue you, take away your driver's or business license, or deport you," the FTC website says. "They might say your computer is about to be corrupted."

Often, scammers ask for money through a money transfer company or gift cards. Or they'll send a fake check with instructions for you to deposit and send them money.

Recognizing a scam, however, is only the first step. Try to avoid the risk entirely.

- Make them unwelcome — Block unwanted calls and text messages.
- Slow down — Resist the temptation to act fast.
- Keep it private — Never give your personal or financial information in response to a request you didn't expect.
- Don't click on it — Don't click on links or attachments, even if you think an email or a text comes from a company you believe is real. Instead, go to the company's website or call them.
- Stop and think — Hang up on that pushy caller, and do your own sleuthing if you think there's a problem with your accounts.

The FTC website offers several examples of scams along with a way to report them. To learn more about identifying and avoiding scams, as well as printable information, visit ftc.gov and click on "Tips and Advice" and "Consumers." 



Like coming home

Mama's Sweet Shoppe offers its family food traditions to the public

Story by ANNE BRALY

Photography by MATT LEDGER

This holiday season, as visions of sugarplums dance through your head, the folks at Mama's Sweet Shoppe are baking up a flurry of sugary sweets to make your dreams come true. Christmas cookies, holiday cakes, doughnuts and more Yuletide confections are filling the cases at this hometown bakery with two locations, one in Abbeville and another 8 miles due north in Due West.

Sheena Imhoff began selling doughnuts at the farmers market in Abbeville — a small operation, but one that introduced her baking talents to a wide audience. She moved from her small table at the market to a food truck, but the operation soon outgrew her shop on wheels.

In November 2019, she accepted an offer from her best friend, Matt Gambrell, to buy his coffee shop in Due West. She brought in all the necessary equipment

Mornings are made better with a hot cup of coffee and donuts from Mama's Sweet Shoppe.



Mama's Sweet Shoppe owner Sheena Imhoff and General Manager Matt Gambrell fill the pastry case with seasonal treats.

she'd need to bake her inventory and opened Mama's Sweet Shoppe, a name she derived from her nickname, "Mama." Gambrell continued with the operation, working as general manager for Imhoff.

"I have four handsome sons, and we always had many children come in and out of my home who weren't my own," she says. They all started calling her Mama, and the name stuck.

This past summer, Imhoff opened her second location in Abbeville. It all began, though, in the kitchen of her grandmother, Nana. "She was a huge inspiration to me," Imhoff recalls. "For holidays, we always had scratch-made everything. It was so amazing.

"I started cooking and baking when I was 8 years old and had my own business as a pie and cinnamon roll baker by the time I was 12. Nana was great at coming up with her own recipes, many of which I still love to make."

SWEET AND SAVORY

But doughnuts are Imhoff's specialty. And these aren't just any doughnuts. They're a cross between cake and yeast varieties. "They're very gourmet and one of a kind," Imhoff says.

Bakery case favorites at Mama's Sweet Shoppe range from Imhoff's Strawberry Delight Donuts made with fresh berries and from-scratch cream to Nana's Fried Pies stuffed with fillings such as apple, cherry, peach or raspberry cream. Imhoff takes special orders, too, for those



Mama's Sweet Shoppe

occasions when treats from a box just won't do. "I take orders for special-occasion cakes on a first-come, first-served basis as I have time to do them," she says.

Customers can come and sit for a spell to enjoy a latte and doughnut, or they can opt for a more substantial meal. Mama's is always whipping up something special, like shrimp Alfredo, Sante Fe chicken salad or a wrap with roast beef and cheddar. These savory offerings make the bakery more than just a place for sweet confection temptation, and it's the internet from WCTEL that has helped spread the word with more than 10,000 likes on Facebook.

"Facebook has been key in growing our business," Imhoff says. "Our friends and family love to help support us by sharing and commenting on our page, and we love them for all the support, because we are nothing without our fabulous customers. We're grateful for them every day." ☺

A tasty tuber

Sweet potatoes offer a holiday treat

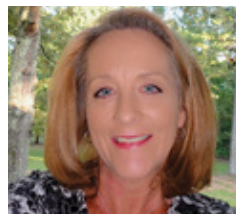
Sweet potatoes evoke strong feelings, bringing back tasty memories for some and not-so-good memories for others. It all depends into which camp you happen to fall — pro-marshmallow or anti-marshmallow.

Those white, fluffy confections are the go-to topping for many cooks. But have you tried a savory version? Sweet potatoes aren't necessarily sweet until you begin adding all that sugar and butter to the mix. Instead, consider some recipes that take your holiday sweet potatoes in a different direction.

Try adding cream cheese and chipotle peppers to your sweet potatoes, along with onions and celery. Or jazz them up with garlic, herbs and a sprinkling of parmesan. And don't forget to bake a couple alongside your turkey — mashed and mixed with the turkey drippings, they make an incredible, gluten-free gravy.

No matter the recipe, sweet potatoes are one of nature's superfoods, loaded with an alphabet of vitamins — A, C, B1, B2, B4 and B6 — not to mention fiber, potassium and other minerals important to our diets.

Here are some recipes for putting savory into your sweet potatoes this season. 📖



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

Roasted Parmesan Sweet Potatoes

- 2 1/2 pounds (about 3 medium) sweet potatoes, peeled and diced into 1-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3-4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme leaves
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 1/3 cup finely grated parmesan cheese
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place diced sweet potatoes on a baking sheet. In a small mixing bowl, stir together olive oil, garlic and thyme. Then pour the mixture over the potatoes. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and toss to evenly coat. Spread into an even layer.

Roast in the oven until tender, tossing once halfway through, about 30 minutes total. You may want to broil the potatoes during the last 1-2 minutes for more golden-brown, crispier potatoes. As soon as you remove the potatoes from the oven, drizzle and toss them with the melted butter, sprinkle them with parmesan and parsley, and serve. Makes 4 servings.



Miller Photography



SAVORY MASHED SWEET POTATOES

- 1 stick butter
- 2-3 stalks celery, diced
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese
- 1-2 chipotle peppers, chopped, or to taste
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 6-7 sweet potatoes, peeled, cooked and mashed

Melt butter in a skillet and add the celery and onion. Saute until tender. Add cream cheese and stir until melted. Add chipotle peppers a little at a time. You don't want the mixture too spicy. Add salt and pepper to taste, then combine the mixture with the mashed sweet potatoes. Serve warm. Makes 6-8 servings.

TWICE-BAKED GOAT CHEESE & BACON SWEET POTATOES

- 4 large (about 3 pounds) sweet potatoes, scrubbed and halved lengthwise
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 8 ounces bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons evaporated milk or heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon each salt and pepper
- 5 1/2 ounces fresh goat cheese, divided
- 3 tablespoons maple syrup, divided
- 1 tablespoon chopped chives

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Prick the cut side of the potatoes with a fork in a few places. Rub the potatoes all over with oil and put them on a baking sheet, cut side down. Roast the potatoes until they're tender when pierced with a fork, about 45 minutes. Let them cool until you can handle them easily — about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a large frying pan over medium-high heat, stirring often, to very crisp. Drain the bacon on a paper towel, and then roughly chop half of it.

Scoop the sweet potato flesh out of the skins and into a bowl, and reserve the skins. Mash the flesh with a fork until smooth. Add the chopped bacon, milk or cream, salt, pepper, half the goat cheese and 1 tablespoon maple syrup to the mashed potatoes. Stir just until blended. Spoon the mixture into the reserved sweet potato skins, dividing evenly and using all of it. Chill.

When ready to serve, bake the potatoes at 350 F until they are warm in the center, 15 to 20 minutes. Sprinkle the warmed potatoes with the unchopped bacon, crumbles of the remaining goat cheese, drizzles of the remaining maple syrup and the chives. Makes 8 servings.



Sweet potato rolls

- 1 cup mashed sweet potatoes, unseasoned
- 3/4 cup milk, divided
- 2 1/4 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 1/2 teaspoon plus 1/4 cup granulated sugar, divided
- 4 1/4 to 4 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 2 large eggs
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, partly melted
- 2-3 tablespoons melted butter (for brushing)

If using a whole sweet potato: Peel the potato, chop it into 1-inch cubes and put the cubes in a small saucepan with water to cover. Cook over medium-high heat for 20-30 minutes or until fork-tender. Drain. Mash the potatoes with a few tablespoons of milk. Measure out and set aside 1 cup of the mashed sweet potatoes.

Heat the rest of the milk to 115-120 F. Dissolve the yeast and 1/2 teaspoon sugar in the warm milk. Allow to proof for 5 minutes.

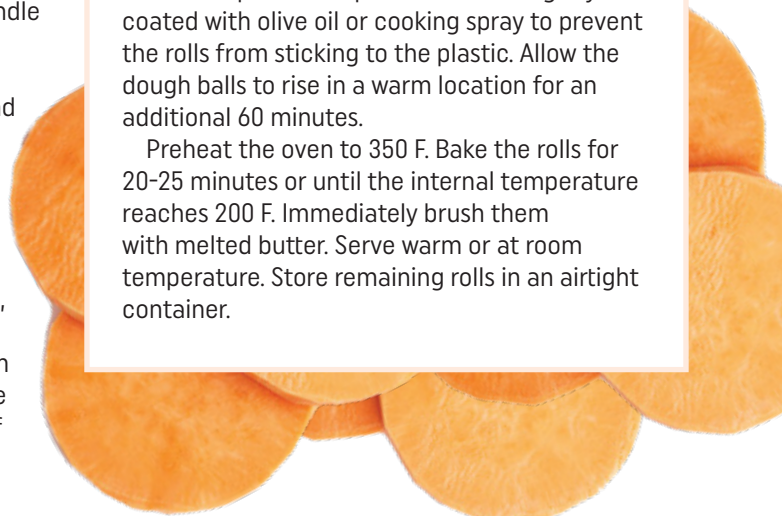
Meanwhile, combine 1/4 cup of sugar, 4 cups of flour and the salt in the bowl of a stand mixer. With the dough hook attachment in place, turn the mixer on low. Add the eggs, one at a time, followed by 6 tablespoons of butter, the mashed sweet potatoes and the yeast mixture. Increase the mixer speed, mixing until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl. If necessary, add up to an extra 1/2 cup of flour.

Transfer the dough to a lightly greased large bowl. Cover, and allow the dough to rise in a warm location until doubled in size, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

Grease a 9-by-13-inch pan. Set aside.

Divide the dough into 12 equal portions and shape each portion into a ball, pinching the seams together. Place each ball, seam-side down, into the prepared pan. Cover the rolls with a sheet of plastic wrap that has been lightly coated with olive oil or cooking spray to prevent the rolls from sticking to the plastic. Allow the dough balls to rise in a warm location for an additional 60 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Bake the rolls for 20-25 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 200 F. Immediately brush them with melted butter. Serve warm or at room temperature. Store remaining rolls in an airtight container.





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