

CONNECTED

Path Forward

McCormick Chamber
focuses outdoors

VETERAN
TELEMEDICINE

FARM STAYS



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Faster broadband benefits rural America

As the chief executive officer of NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, I am proud to represent 850 small, independent broadband providers who are offering some of the highest possible broadband speeds to some of the most remote parts of the country. Thanks to NTCA members, many rural Americans have higher internet speeds than I have where I live just outside Washington, D.C.

We currently have a once-in-a-generation opportunity through billions of dollars of funding recently made available by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other federal programs to bridge the digital divide and bring broadband to those who still lack it. As broadband is deployed thanks to this funding, we must ensure that recipients are using it to provide the best possible services.

Recently, Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel initiated a process to redefine what it means to have broadband-speed internet, raising the standard. This move continues us down the path needed to give rural residents the internet service they not only need but also deserve as they connect to vital resources like telemedicine, online education, employment opportunities and much more.

A new, more realistic, standard provides a range of benefits, including clarifying the true needs of rural areas and the funding required to serve them.

We have long advocated that, as a nation, we need to aim higher and do better when it comes to setting broadband objectives. We applaud Chairwoman Rosenworcel's efforts. We look forward to continuing to work with the FCC and other agencies to bridge the digital divide. 📶

A bridge to the future

Your communications provider is your link to vital resources

The digital world increasingly weaves its way into our lives, replacing formerly physical resources, tasks and tools. Consider restaurants, for example. For some, scanning a QR code with your phone to view the options online has replaced physical menus.

Rapid expansion of digital resources was a trend before the pandemic, but it's only accelerated in the years since.

In an article this year for Wired — “The Digital Divide Is Coming for You” — Bhaskar Chakravorti, dean of global business for The Fletcher School at Tufts University in Massachusetts, described having broadband and mobile internet as table stakes. Without those services, you don't exist digitally, he says.

Your rural internet service provider is committed to bridging the digital divide between you and vital resources like these:

BANKING



STREAMING TV



HEALTH CARE RECORDS



GOVERNMENT RESOURCES



EVENT TICKETS



WEATHER ALERTS



GAMING



HOME SALES AND PURCHASES



COLLEGE APPLICATIONS



What's the password?

How to build – and remember – strong passwords

It's difficult to do anything online without piling up a few passwords. Using the same one for multiple sites can leave your private information vulnerable to cyberattacks, and devising strong passwords full of random letters and symbols can make them impossible to remember.

A good password doesn't have to be unintelligible, but it does need to be random enough to avoid any clear patterns. Here are a few helpful tips for building passwords that will keep your online accounts secure without forcing you to hit the "Forgot my password" link every time you want to log in.

At least 12 characters — the longer your password, the more difficult it will be to crack. In general, you should create passwords with a minimum of 12 to 14 characters. But more is always better.

Change it up — using a mix of different characters like numbers, symbols, capital and lowercase letters makes your passwords stronger.

Avoid full words — using your favorite team's name as a password

doesn't cut it anymore. In fact, you should avoid using any full words you might find in the dictionary. That goes for any common phrases, too.

Diceware — one exception to the above rule is the Diceware method. By stringing truly random words together, you can build a secure passphrase that is easier to remember than a jumble of letters and numbers. To help with this process, search for the Diceware Password Generator. It can randomly select between two and eight words to build your passphrase.

Avoid obvious substitutions — “Password” doesn’t become stronger if you change it to “P@ssword.” Avoid substituting obvious symbols for letters. If it has occurred to you, it has probably occurred to a hacker.

Go to the manager — if you're having trouble keeping track of all your logins, a password manager can help. Programs like Dashlane, LastPass and Keeper manage your passwords across numerous sites and devices, making it easier to avoid repeats. All you need to remember is one strong password, and you're set. 🗂️



Tired of passwords?

Apple may have the answer

At its Worldwide Developers Conference earlier this year, Apple demonstrated a new "passkeys" feature that may spell the end for passwords.

Rather than inputting a password for every site you visit, passkeys would use a biometric sign-in like the Touch ID or Face ID that currently exists on iPhones and iPads. Websites and apps on non-Apple devices would provide a QR code that sends authentication to the user's phone or tablet.

Just a month earlier, Apple joined with Google and Microsoft to support the development of new passwordless logins on both mobile and desktop devices. So, even if passkeys don't crack the code, you may not need to juggle passwords for much longer.

Fulfilling the legacy of a giant

Connecting and caring for our communities

Greetings! It's tough to believe that the summer season is behind us and we're preparing for fall. Just last month, we celebrated our 70th anniversary at our annual meeting. This is one of my favorite events of the year. It's fairly simple. We bring our members together, provide an update on our past year and then socialize over food and refreshments. But, that's not what makes the meeting special.



JEFF WILSON

Chief Executive Officer

It's being able to celebrate YOU and the forces you are in our communities. The past year has been a wonderful mix of community celebrations, festivals and milestones. And through it all, we are pleased to be your partner.

Connecting you is our mission. Cultivating and partnering with you to make vibrant, sustainable, safe and beautiful communities is our vision. We are committed to bridging the digital divide — not only through broadband fiber, but through educational opportunities that empower you to use digital media wisely and efficiently.

These past few months, we've partnered with Abbeville, Greenwood and McCormick on several adult educational opportunities: Streaming 101, Adult Literacy and Facebook for Business, to name a few. And more are on the way.

In this issue, you will read about the new Veterans Telemedicine Centers in Abbeville and Greenwood. You will also learn about our recent scholarship recipient and about McCormick High School student Jeremiah Fambrough's FRS Youth Tour experience in Washington, D.C.

Jeremiah was able to experience something I wish every resident in our area could: the strength of our connection, the power of our voices and the strength of our service. From the home to the halls of Congress, rural America is represented one voice at a time.

I always get a little nostalgic as I reflect on my remarks for the annual meeting. I am in awe of our youth. They are our future. And, I am deeply committed to our history and the values that we so firmly hold.

Every now and again, I visit the hometown of our board president, Wes McAllister. I eat lunch at the Mount Carmel Café. And I take in the investments Wes has made to make Mount Carmel a vibrant community. Wes is the son of our founder and first board president, John McAllister. John believed in a better future. He started in his own backyard when he saw the needs of his neighbors and friends. Following the legacy of his parents and grandparents, John — and now Wes — continued the vision of McAllister and Sons. Building on its early days of selling furniture, appliances and even farm equipment, McAllister and Sons continues to evolve its business based on what the community needs.

But the story isn't in what they sell. The story is in their "why." John McAllister believed in a brighter future — without leaving home. He connected his communities. He nourished them, and he took care of their people. Today, Wes is carrying on that legacy.

And we at WCTEL stand on the shoulders of that legacy. We, too, believe in a better tomorrow. And we're committed to doing our part today.

That's what we're doing, one connection at a time. 📶

JEFF WILSON

Chief Executive Officer, WCTEL



CONNECTED

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2022

VOL. 10, NO. 5

The West Carolina Tel Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by West Carolina Telephone, © 2022. 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.

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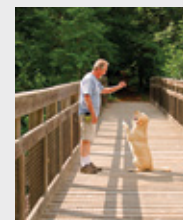
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On the Cover:



Dave Lerow enjoys a trail, one of the amenities the McCormick Chamber has partnered with area civic groups to create. See story Page 8.

The UPS & DOWNS of Internet Speed

When you select an internet service package, your package will come with a maximum download speed and a maximum upload speed.

1 GIG / 1 GIG
1,000 Mbps / 1,000 Mbps

Download speed **Upload speed**

What is download speed?

The first number, your download speed, describes how much capacity you'll have to download things from the internet. The more download speed you have, the more you can do things like:



What is upload speed?

The second number, your upload speed, describes how much capacity you'll have to upload things to the internet. The more upload speed you have, the more you can do things like:



How much speed do I need?

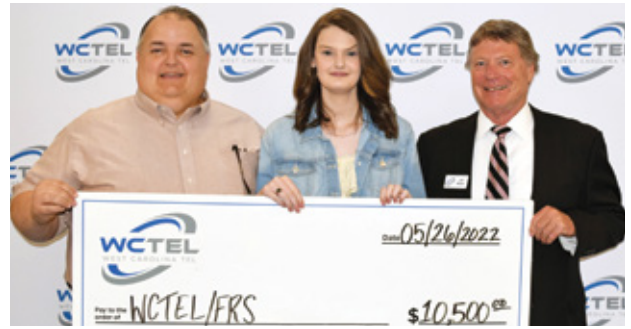
If you're only running a small number of devices on your connection, our lowest speed tier might fit your needs. But if your household enjoys streaming television, browsing on their phones, working from home, and more—all at the same time—you'll need more speed to keep every device running smoothly.

Still not sure what's right for you?
We're happy to help!

wctel.com | (864) 446-2111



Scholarship winners



Audree Vaughn is the WCTEL Scholarship winner for 2022. She was awarded both the \$8,000 WCTEL Scholarship (\$2,000 per year for four years) and a \$2,500 Foundation for Rural Service Scholarship (\$2,500 one-time amount). Audree graduated from Crescent High School and plans to attend Anderson University in the fall to pursue a degree in business management.



The WCTEL Family Scholarship offers a one-time, \$1,000 scholarship to every dependent of WCTEL employees. An anonymous donor began the initiative, and WCTEL family members have sustained it. The WCTEL Family Scholarship was awarded to Cale Mack, Greenwood; Alana Mitchell, Donalds; Madeline Peacon, Abbeville; Jake Crawford, Abbeville; Meghan Lusk (not pictured), Honea Path; and Kendra Thomason (not pictured), Greenwood.

ENTER IF YOU DARE

Enter WCTEL's Halloween contest that has become quite popular and you may win a prize. All local residents can enter images of their children and their adorable outfits. Learn more about entering the WCTEL Halloween Photo Contest here: wctel.com/Halloween.



GETTING AWAY

to the farm

A few days in a pastoral setting can do wonders for the heart and mind

Story by ANNE BRALY

The South's diversity of rolling pastures, mountain vistas, natural springs and lakes makes it an appealing getaway. But why book a hotel stay when you can wake up to the call of a rooster and go to bed with the hoot of an owl?

Farm stays are one of the best ways to absorb nature, eat home-grown food and learn about rural life. Farmers are welcoming guests by turning their barns and unused dwellings into overnight accommodations for a vacation you're likely to remember for years to come. And who knows? Maybe you'll realize farm living is the life for you.

It's a win-win for guests and farmers. These stays give guests a few days off the beaten path, and they allow landowners to bring in income while educating the public about working the land. "It's a way for farmers to show the inner workings of their farms, what it takes to grow food for their tables, who we are and the stories we

hold. Also, it's nice to welcome city dwellers to our farm to bridge a growing urban-rural divide and offer them our countrysides for relaxation, calm, play and connection," says Scottie Jones, a farmer and founder of the U.S. Farm Stay Association.

And for small farmers, it's a way to make much-needed money for new equipment and for upkeep and repairs of old farm equipment. The extra funds also help with costs like insurance, retirement savings and college funds.

"In the last decade, the concept of hosting guests on one's farm has risen to the surface, especially as booking sites such as Airbnb and VRBO have made the daunting task of taking reservations much more easy to handle," Scottie says.

So, if you're considering something different for your vacation this year, here are some Southern farms opening their gates to overnight guests.



Photo courtesy of By Faith Farm



Devoted to feeding the hungry, By Faith Farm creates opportunities for visitors to pitch in and help.

Photo courtesy of Lori Birkhead



Photo courtesy of Lori Birkhead



Photo courtesy of Kokovoko Breeding Farm

REVIVAL HILL FARM

Cullman, Alabama

Milk cows, pick herbs from the garden, gather eggs from the henhouse or just sit back and enjoy life at Revival Hill Farm. The farm stay has one bedroom and a roomy living area with couch, television chairs and kitchenette. It's attached to the farm store/milking parlor with a private outdoor entrance and access to farm animals, garden, fire pit, pond, pasture and woodlands with numerous trails for hiking. If you need more space, Revival Hill also has a house you can rent. This three-bedroom, two-bath accommodation is located across the street and has a full kitchen, laundry room, open-concept living area and beautiful covered back porch.

The farm is a stone's throw from Smith Lake Park, so tow your boat. There's plenty of boat parking at the farm.

Nightly rate: \$172

Reservations: Airbnb

STONEWOOD FARM

Ridgefield, South Carolina

Enjoy life at a slower pace at this farm with its menagerie of goats, chickens, horses, dogs and friendly felines. The farm offers overnights, glamping-style, in a 14-by-20-foot tent on a raised platform with an outdoor dining area set up for roasting s'mores at night or for drinking your coffee in the morning. The tent sleeps six and comes complete with lanterns, heaters, snacks, a coffee maker and a television with a large selection of movies.

The farm is located in the South Carolina Lowcountry, not too far from Charleston and Hilton Head, so you can

spend a day touring the city and then come back to the country to unwind.

Nightly rate: \$95

Reservations: Airbnb

BY FAITH FARM

Joelton, Tennessee

This farm works a little differently than some others. With a mission to grow healthy food for those in need, 100% of your nightly rate will go toward feeding the hungry in surrounding communities. It's a farm stay with a purpose.

Stay in a 1,500-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath modern loft apartment with kitchen and living room above a red barn. Wander the fields, hike the trails or sit beside a pond and reflect on your peaceful surroundings just 15 miles outside the busyness of Nashville.

Pick vegetables from the donation gardens or help harvest food for By Faith Farm's food bank collections.

Nightly rate: \$275

Reservations: Airbnb or byfaithfarm.com

KOKOVOKO BREEDING FARM

Corinth, Kentucky

Pop a tent out in the open fields or make reservations for the carriage house. Either way, you'll spend time in the beautiful outdoors of Central Kentucky's horse country.

Swedish Gotland ponies and Lincoln Longwool sheep graze over 150 acres of Kentucky rolling hills and forest. It's unspoiled. It's organic. It's totally natural. Bring your binoculars — the bird-watching is great. Or sign up for a fiber workshop. And helping out with the farm chores is always appreciated.

Left: Visitors to By Faith Farm enjoy an interactive experience.

Middle: At By Faith Farm in Joelton, Tennessee, the goal is to grow healthy food for those in need, and money raised from visitors helps feed the hungry.

Above: The carriage house at Kokovoko Breeding Farm can sleep five — perfect for families or friends traveling together.

The carriage house can sleep five, so bring the family — but leave your electronics at home. They won't work here. This is a chance to immerse your family in a totally different way of life. Stroll down the country roads, look for wildlife, play in the creek, baa at the sheep and visit the ponies — they always love a good brushing.

Nightly rate: \$50-\$200

Reservations: farmstayus.com

THE SHAGGY GOAT


Waleska, Georgia

Pet the goats, feed the chickens, learn about beekeeping, try your hand at gardening or hike or bike the nearby mountain trails. Or just spend the day lolling in your hammock. It's up to you. Your time is your own at The Shaggy Goat, a farm in the beauty of the Southern Appalachians of North Georgia.

Overnight accommodations are in a one-bedroom cottage on the property with views of the working farm, so join in and learn a thing or two. There's a pool just a few yards from the cottage — don't forget your bathing suits. On warm days, take your pillow outside and nap on the sleeping porch. Bring your own food, but don't be surprised to find the makings for s'mores in the evening or fresh-from-the-farm eggs and honey for breakfast. 🐐

Nightly rate: \$226

Reservations: Airbnb



The multiday gravel ride takes the BASC event to remote areas of the Palmetto State.

Photo by Matthew Crum-The Post and Courier




Adventurous cyclists take part in the Bicycle Across South Carolina event in October.

Photo by Stephen Massar, The Post and Courier

Outside Chances

McCormick Chamber and Economic Development heading to great outdoors

Story by JOHN CLAYTON



Dave Lerow and his pal, Jack, a 5-year-old English Lab, venture down a familiar path on the Savannah Valley Railroad Trail.

Photo by John Clayton

Savannah Lakes resident Dave Lerow and his pal, Jack, a 5-year-old English Lab, make the trek to and from the Mill Creek Trestle along the Savannah Valley Railroad Trail every day.

And that's exactly what McCormick County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charlotte Tallent and county Economic Development Director Mark Warner like to hear. They want local residents like Lerow and visitors alike to take advantage of the area's unique combination of outdoor recreation opportunities on land and on the water.

"Today, the trend is not to have only shops, restaurants and safe working environments but to have access to an abundance of outdoor activities, and one of those outdoor activities includes trail systems to hike, on- and off-road biking and horseback riding," Tallent says. "These types of outdoor amenities will attract a generational population from millennials to active retirees. With more than 50% of our county's land mass in a national forest, developing and improving on our existing trail systems is an absolute must to drive tourism and attract growth of the younger generation to our county. Because of our strategic locations to Augusta and Lake Thurmond at Clarks Hill, we have the ability to work across three to four counties in developing and expanding our trails for current and future demands for outdoor activities and become the South Carolina Freshwater Coast destination spot for all outdoor adventures."

Developing McCormick County's Savannah Valley Railroad Trail, which is to expand from 11 to 34 miles upon completion, and 18.7-mile Forks Area Trails System, along with the smaller Modoc/Stevens Creek Trail and Little River Blue Way, has become a priority for McCormick and local volunteers.

"Overall, the effort between the Economic Development Office and the Chamber of Commerce concentrates on increasing recreation opportunities in the area," Warner says, noting that recreation-related links on his department's website, discovermccormick.com, will connect with the more than 4 million annual visitors to Lake Thurmond. "We want more venues that support multiple forms of recreation and provide people places to experience while visiting Lake Thurmond and give them opportunities to hike, cycle and ride horseback if they want."

As part of the bigger picture, expanding McCormick County's trail system to connect with systems in Abbeville County at Calhoun Falls State Park, Edgefield County and across the Georgia state line into Columbia County is among Warner's goals. "It would be a four-county, two-state effort," he says.

Such connections would grow the county's multiuse trails system to over 60 miles to go with 1,200 miles of shoreline along 71,000-acre Lake Thurmond for outdoor enthusiasts.

Some of those enthusiasts will be pedaling through the area with the Bicycle Across South Carolina event Oct. 13-16. The event features three days of off-road and trail rides in McCormick County through the rolling hills and pines of Sumter National Forest.

Tallent says the event can be a showcase for the county's considerable outdoor offerings.

"My vision is that it will spotlight the outdoor assets our county has to offer and increase awareness of what it would be like to bring a vacation here," she says. "Or possibly think about bringing a small business here and live and play in a rural area with so much opportunity for a healthy lifestyle." 📱

‘Capitol-izing’ on opportunity

WCTEL awarded McCormick senior with FRS Youth Tour to D.C.

Story by ANNE BRALY

Six months ago, Jeremiah Fambrough knew little about broadband, but that changed when WCTEL selected the McCormick High School senior to represent the cooperative in Washington, D.C., at the Foundation for Rural Service (FRS) Youth Tour.

Since 1995, FRS has hosted youth tours, bringing hundreds of students from rural towns across America to the nation’s capital to meet with legislators and learn about how they make policies.

Among the important things Jeremiah learned was how so many people around the United States use broadband and how broadband benefits rural communities across the nation.

Broadband like that from WCTEL makes high-speed internet access possible via multiple types of technologies, including fiber optics, wireless and cable. Jeremiah says he’s lucky to have a strong internet connection that has aided him through his high school years in some unexpected ways. “I’ve been able to let people know that the internet is available to people, even if they have low incomes,” he says.

FRS Youth Tour is a five-day experience that offers 16- and 17-year-old students

more than an education in broadband technology. It gives them an opportunity to meet other students from similar backgrounds and visit sites around the District of Columbia.

“It gave me a chance to be sociable and explore Washington a little bit more than expected,” Jeremiah says, adding that of the many places the group visited, his favorites were the Museum of Natural History with its collection of wild animals from throughout the world and the Afro-Atlantic Histories exhibit at the National Gallery of Art.

But the biggest takeaways, Jeremiah says, were learning about the importance of broadband in getting quality internet into homes and also learning about the Affordable Connectivity Program. “I learned it’s for families in rural communities that have low incomes,” he says. “It gives them discounts on the cost of internet service.”

The Youth Tour application process included writing an essay and sending it to WCTEL. Jeremiah’s essay was about telephone cooperatives — what they are and how they help benefit rural communities. “WCTEL helped me in many ways to make the trip possible, like making sure I had all the documents and money needed for the tour. They were very supportive. It was very beneficial to learn everything I did on the tour,” he says.

Jeremiah plans to attend the University of South Carolina in Columbia to study environmental engineering and music following graduation in the spring of 2023. In addition to his interest in the environment, Jeremiah plays a mean bass drum. 🥁



TOP: Jeremiah Fambrough, second from left, and other high school students from across the country toured Washington landmarks, including the National Mall.

MIDDLE: The FRS Youth Tour has representatives from nearly all 50 states.

LEFT: The FRS Youth Tour makes a stop by the White House.

Photos courtesy of Foundation for Rural Service

Find your wavelength

Podcasts let you tune in to your passions



Podcasts have seen an explosion in popularity in recent years, thanks to their variety and the connections hosts forge with their listeners. If you've never listened to a podcast before, you can think of them like prerecorded radio shows on your favorite topics.

But, because listeners can download podcasts to a phone or computer and play them at any time, audiences can go as deep or as light as they want on a given topic. Podcasts also don't require the full attention video does, meaning you can drive to work, answer emails or cook dinner — all while continuing to enjoy your favorite programming.

In the early days of podcasting, following your favorite show meant navigating a technological obstacle course of downloads and synced devices. Today, the process is as easy as downloading an app.

Apps like Apple Podcasts and Stitcher make it easy to search thousands of the latest podcasts and subscribe to your

favorites for free. If you have the Spotify app, you're already set. Just go to the Search tab and choose "Podcasts & Shows" to start adding new discoveries to your list.

Not sure where to start? Here are a few of our favorites to get you going:

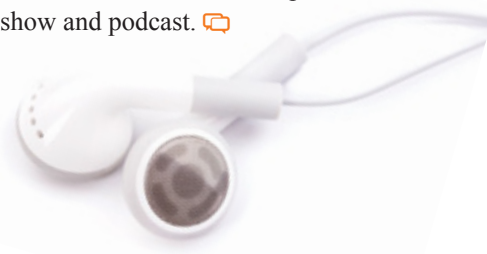
► **"Criminal"** — One of the first true crime hits, even before "Serial" hit the scene, "Criminal" tells the "stories of people who've done wrong, been wronged, or gotten caught somewhere in the middle." Going beyond tales of murder, it takes a critical look at the impact of crime on its victims and perpetrators.

► **"This American Life"** — "This American Life" has been on the air since 1995, so there are plenty of stories to catch up on. Described as little movies for radio, each episode is also a little different. But they all tell the true, entertaining and often surprising stories of the people and events shaping our American lives.

► **"The Big Picture"** — Struggling to keep up with the latest movie releases? Hosts Sean Fennessey and Amanda Dobbins run down all the movies you need to see while also discussing old favorites and interviewing the people behind them twice a week.

► **"Lore"** — Truth is scarier than fiction in this documentary podcast series that explores the dark corners of history. Gather around the audio campfire to listen in on true historical tales, legends and folklore biweekly.

► **"Sound Opinions"** — Chicago music critics Jim DeRogatis and Greg Kot know everyone's a critic. Each week, they get together to discuss music's greats, talk shop with artists and share their opinions on the latest releases on this independent radio show and podcast. 📻





The newest spectator sport

Streaming platforms like Twitch let gamers build massive followings

Gamers have thriving online communities, including platforms like Twitch, that give millions of fans from around the world a place to share their knowledge and experience, while also providing countless hours of entertainment.

WHY WATCH INSTEAD OF PLAY?

Staying up to date with the latest and greatest video games can be expensive and time consuming. Sometimes game descriptions and reviews aren't enough — it's better to see a game in action. Avid gamers can check out a Twitch stream to see if a game is right for them, gain insight into a game's features, and find updates and creative fixes to problems. Many people subscribe to Twitch channels just for the entertainment value.

It's also a way to engage with others in the gaming community. Live broadcasts

feature an interactive chat where viewers can talk with the streamer and other viewers. These connections with like-minded people and interesting personalities keep people interested and coming back for more.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF STREAMING YOUR GAMING?

There are many incentives for live-streamers. The revenue potential can be sky high — some streamers have built careers, earning millions and striking deals with game publishers to get exclusive early access to the newest games.

The higher a streaming channel's subscriber count, the more opportunities the streamer has for exclusive marketing partnerships. Viewers can also donate to the channel during the broadcast. The biggest Twitch streamers get most of their income from paid subscription fees. 💬

While the Twitch website and app are still the most popular, other platforms have sprouted up as well.

YouTube

YouTube's gaming section, youtube.com/gaming, has functions similar to Twitch, and it's gaining popularity with amateur streamers because its optimized search engine makes it easier for a beginner's content to get noticed.

The audience is shared with YouTube, so the potential pool of viewers is vastly greater than on Twitch. For streamers, YouTube has greater potential for earnings from advertisements.

Facebook Gaming

Facebook Gaming is growing as existing Facebook users check out the video gaming hub that can be easily accessed through the main social media site or [FB.gg](https://fb.gg).

There's also a Facebook Gaming app enthusiasts can download to discover content, connect with other gamers and casually play mobile games. Like the other popular streaming platforms, Facebook allows users easy access to uploads from their favorite streamers. But, like its main site, Facebook Gaming users can join groups and like topics to tailor their timelines to their specific interests.

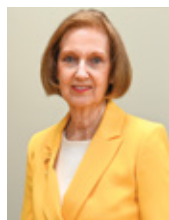


SERVING THOSE SERVED

WCTEL provides the co new telehealth office i

Story by LUIS CARRASCO

Telehealth is not new, but the pandemic-related push to remote interaction, as well as improvements in technology, make it an incredibly popular option today. For veterans in South Carolina, especially those in rural areas, speaking with a medical professional on a video call can be invaluable.



Dr. Ruth Mustard

Many places in the state are a long way from Columbia, says Dr. Ruth Mustard, associate director for nursing and patient services in the Columbia VA Health Care System. Not

everyone has the time or transportation to make the trip. “There are some fairly rural areas where telehealth is really important because if it can be worked out that way, they don’t have to come to the facility,” she says. “It’s a real benefit.”

The Columbia VA Health Care System, which serves a 36-county area in South Carolina, had almost 87,000



Dr. Ruth Mustard videoconferences with WCTEL Community Affairs and Economic Development Manager Stephen Taylor.

Photo courtesy of Columbia VA Health Care System

veterans enrolled last year, with more than a million outpatient visits and about 3,500 inpatient admissions at the main campus in Columbia. There are also clinics in Anderson, Florence, Greenville, Orangeburg, Rock Hill, Spartanburg and Sumter.

EXPANDING VIRTUAL ACCESS

The use of telehealth, sometimes called telemedicine, has increased over the last two years. The regional health care system handles between 3,000 and 3,500 appointments a day, with about a quarter of those now done through VA Video Connect, or VVC, a video call established through a secure, encrypted link.

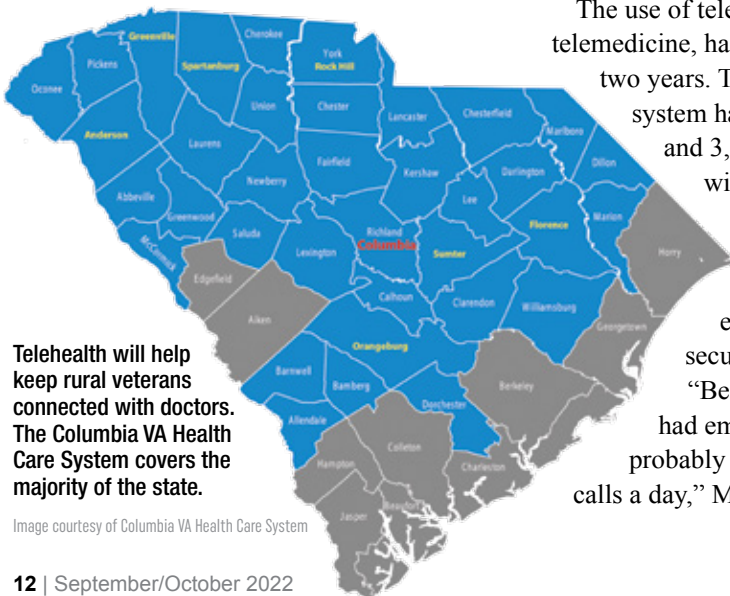
“Before the pandemic, we had embarked on VVC, but probably had no more than 20 calls a day,” Mustard says. “Today,

764 of those appointments were through Video Connect.”

Telemedicine is not limited to just a video chat. Using available VA telehealth devices, a user can pass along information including heart rate, glucose levels or blood pressure. All health data is kept confidential and handled securely. “There’s a lot of technology that’s available and getting developed that I think will make it even more useful,” Mustard says.

Nationally, over 2 million veterans received care through VA telehealth in 2021, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Mental health treatment makes up a large share of those appointments. “We have many veterans with mental health needs, many with post-traumatic stress disorder, that can be cared for using telehealth,” Mustard says. “We’ve even had group therapy using VA Video Connect.”

Through telehealth, veterans can establish a relationship with a mental



Telehealth will help keep rural veterans connected with doctors. The Columbia VA Health Care System covers the majority of the state.

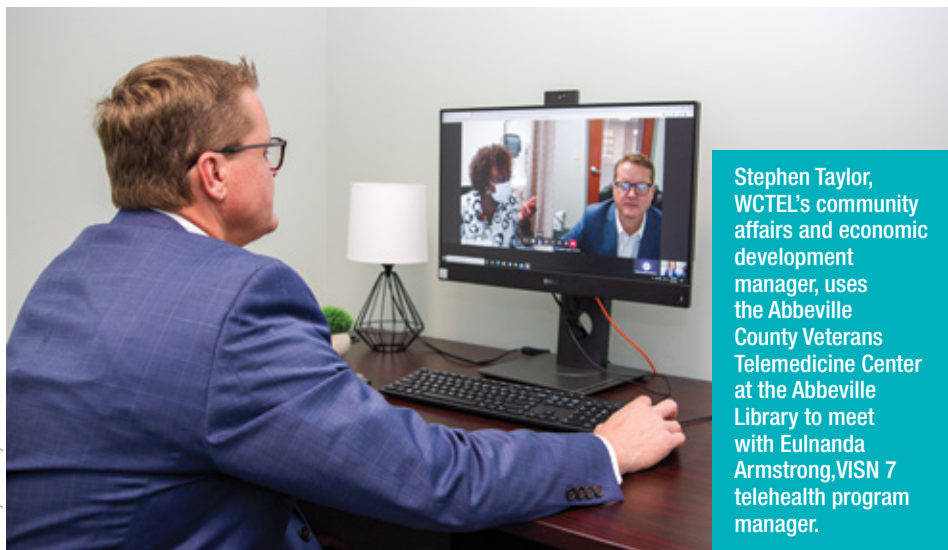
Image courtesy of Columbia VA Health Care System

WHO

Connection for a n Abbeville



Photo by John Clayton



Stephen Taylor, WCTEL's community affairs and economic development manager, uses the Abbeville County Veterans Telemedicine Center at the Abbeville Library to meet with Eulnanda Armstrong, VISN 7 telehealth program manager.

health practitioner, and medication can be prescribed or adjusted as needed. "Our post-9/11 veterans have sometimes been deployed numerous times and can have issues adjusting in the civilian world once they get out of the military," Mustard says. "Our social workers, counselors and psychologists are able to provide counseling, psychotherapy and evidence-based cognitive behavioral therapy. All of the counseling and the therapy can actually be done via Video Connect."

Asked whether telehealth persuaded veterans who may not have sought treatment otherwise to do so, Mustard says that while she has no data on that specifically, she is sure those cases exist. "In some of our communities, mental health options are pretty slim," she says.

SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

Although experts sing telehealth's praises, there are still challenges. Whether it's a lack of internet access, not having a

computer or difficulty navigating the technology, not everyone can take advantage of the opportunity.

That is why WCTEL has partnered with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to offer free telehealth connections to veterans at the Abbeville County Veterans Telemedicine Center, located inside the Abbeville County Library, and a telemedicine area at the Greenwood County Veterans Center.



Stephen Taylor

These centers not only provide needed technology, but they also have volunteers who help veterans conduct their appointments, says Stephen Taylor, community affairs and economic development strategist for WCTEL.

"Instead of having to drive to places like Columbia and Augusta, Georgia, we wanted to have accessibility to doctors

for people who may not have broadband or the equipment to do this," Taylor says. "Veterans have made sacrifices for us; this is us trying to give back to them."

Access centers like those set up by WCTEL will make telehealth possible for people who otherwise would not have the option to a technology that Mustard describes as "a godsend."

"It doesn't replace all in-person visits by any stretch, but it surely is a way to connect and even when you can see someone, rather than just talk to somebody on the telephone, it does make a difference," she says. 📞

BENEFITS OF TELEHEALTH

Virtual visits are growing in popularity. Though in-person office visits may be necessary in certain cases, there are many benefits of telehealth care.

- Limited physical contact reduces exposure to COVID-19.
- Virtual visits ensure you get health care wherever you are — at home, at work or even in your car.
- Virtual visits cut down on travel, time off from work and the need for child care.
- Virtual health care tools can shorten the wait for an appointment.
- Telehealth increases access to specialists who are located far away from your hometown.

Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

It's time to go LOW AND SLOW



Cooking ribs at a low temperature for a long time tenderizes the meat and adds delightful flavor.

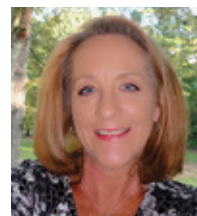
The aroma of smoke wafting through the air as meat slowly cooks goes hand in hand with a lazy summer afternoon. Smoking is not the same as grilling. There's a science to it that scares off some cooks, but break it down step by step, and you can become quite adept at making tender briskets and fall-off-the-bone ribs.

Smoking, more commonly known as barbecuing, takes time and patience. Defined simply, the technique takes a tough piece of meat and cooks it slowly over indirect heat for extended periods — often 12 to 16 hours and sometimes even more — while the smoke flavors the meat and gives it its mouthwatering flavor and texture. Any expert will tell you that the key to the best barbecue — that kind that wins competitions — is cooking it low and slow.

Cooking over high heat tends to dry the meat out very quickly. Any moisture within the meat is essentially blasted out, leaving it tough, dry and difficult to chew. Smoking meat slowly at a low temperature, on the other hand, keeps the moisture from evaporating too quickly, allowing you to achieve the perfect combination of tenderness and juiciness.

Here are two recipes that are good for beginners.

The 3-2-1 rib recipe is one many home smokers use. This method is easy and generally foolproof, creating ribs that are so tender you can pull the meat off the bone with your fingers. And pork butt is basically a no-brainer. Just rub it down with your favorite blend of seasonings or use the recipe that follows. Place it on the smoker and within just a few hours, you'll have tender pork perfect for sandwiches. Add a side of beans and some potato salad, and you'll have the makings of a beautiful, tasty summer dinner.



FOOD EDITOR
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IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.

Photography by MARK GILLILAND | Food Styling by RHONDA GILLILAND

3-2-1 RIBS METHOD

1 rack of ribs
Your favorite rub
Your favorite barbecue sauce

STEP THREE:

Liberal coat the ribs with rub and allow them to “marinate” while you bring the smoker to 225 F. Place the ribs in the smoker, and add whatever wood chunks you want — cherry or hickory are popular. Smoke the ribs for 3 hours, maintaining the 225 F temperature. If you are smoking thinner back ribs, you may want to smoke them for just 2 hours. Any longer, and you may find the ribs dry out too much.

STEP TWO:

The second stage is when the

meat tenderizes. Remove the ribs from the smoker and wrap them tightly in foil. This steams the meat and the result is tender, juicy ribs. Just before closing each rack of ribs in the foil, put a little bit of beer or apple juice in with the ribs. This helps the steaming process. Put the ribs, wrapped in foil, back in the smoker for 2 hours at 225 degrees.

STEP ONE:

This final stage is when you sauce the ribs. Use your favorite barbecue sauce to liberal coat the ribs on both sides before placing them back in the smoker for a final hour. The result should be a rack of ribs you'll never forget.



SMOKED BUTT

Smoked pork butt is a good one for beginners. The meat is not expensive, and the result is a mouthful of summer.

- 1 (7-8 pound) bone-in pork butt
- Olive oil
- Water

Dry rub:

- 1/4 cup light brown sugar packed
- 2 tablespoons black pepper, coarsely ground
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon dried minced onions
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Spritz:

- 1/4 cup apple juice
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar

Prepare the smoker: Fill the hopper of your smoker with wood pellets, applewood, hickory, pecan or cherry. Start the smoker on the smoke setting for 5 to 10 minutes. Increase heat to 250 F.

Fill a small baking dish with water and set aside.

Prepare the pork butt: Place all dry rub ingredients in a small bowl and stir with a fork to combine. Place pork butt on a baking sheet and rub the entire butt with olive oil. Sprinkle the seasonings over it and rub them in, covering every bit of the butt.

Place the baking dish filled with water on the grate on one side of the smoker.

Fill a small spray bottle with the apple juice and apple cider vinegar and set aside.

Place pork shoulder on the grate and close the lid. Keep the smoker temperature around 250 to 275 F while smoking during these first several hours. Smoke for approximately 4 hours, spritzing with the spray bottle every hour.

Check the internal temperature of the pork using a meat thermometer. By this time, the pork should be at least 145 F.

Completely spritz the pork one last time and carefully wrap it in aluminum foil. Place pork back into the smoker and lower temperature to 225 F. Smoke pork about



A perfectly cooked pork butt is a great start to a summer sandwich.

another 4 hours, but do not spritz during this stage of cooking.

Check the internal temperature of the pork shoulder using a meat thermometer. You're looking for your pork shoulder to be about 200 F. Anywhere from 195 to 205 F is a good range. Remove pork from the smoker and let rest for at least 20 minutes but up to 2 hours. Shred or chop as desired. 🍴



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