

CONNECTED

Two Towns, One Community

Starr and Iva have
a great alliance

WELCOME ERIC
MCCALL
—
LESSONS FROM
THE ROAD



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

An investment for the future

Expanded broadband access will lift rural communities

In order to thrive, all communities — especially those in rural America — require opportunities and the modern communications tools so vital for jobs, education, health and so much more.

Thanks to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the NTCA's nearly 850 rural, community-based broadband providers now have fresh help as they work to complete their essential mission. This historic investment will go a long way to connecting all Americans, even in areas of the country that are the hardest to reach for service providers.

Of course, the work now truly begins to deliver on the promise this law offers. The FCC must prioritize areas of the greatest need. Also, we will work with all key parties to support state leaders as an unprecedented amount of resources flow into their broadband initiatives.

Care is needed to vet those seeking funding, to ensure they can truly supply the infrastructure and services they promise. Throughout the effort, we must remember that we need to do more than simply build networks. Our commitment must also be to sustain these vital communications systems and to ensure the services offered over them are affordable and will meet customer demands well into the future.

We're confident NTCA members will continue to serve their neighbors by solidifying existing networks and expanding service. No matter where they live, all Americans should have the same opportunity to access vital communications services needed not only today, but also for years to come. 📡

Communication at the speed of light

Fiber optics make it possible

At the end of the 1970s, Corning Inc. developed a technology that would reshape communications — fiber optics. Today, it's a critical component in the networks making our hyperconnected world possible. Streaming entertainment, social media, video calls, telehealth, online education, work-from-home jobs and so much more depend on this technology.

▶▶ DID YOU KNOW?

- Each fiber strand is made up of a glass core thinner than a human hair.
- Light signals are transmitted through the glass, just as you might send a signal down the tunnel.
- To keep the light from simply passing through the glass when it changes direction, the core is surrounded by a cladding that reflects light back into the glass.
- The process is similar to mirrors in a tunnel, bouncing the signal from side to side until it reaches its endpoint.
- A single fiber cable — each fiber is much thinner than copper wire — can bundle hundreds, or even thousands, of fiber strands.
- While incredibly thin, fiber is not brittle. A single strand is three times stronger than steel and more durable than copper.
- The glass core of a fiber cable is so pure that if the ocean was made of the same glass, you could stand on the surface and clearly see the ocean floor miles below. 📡





Take a **STAND!**

Avoid back and neck pain while working from home

Over the past couple of years, working from home has gone from a perk — one that only a few employers offered — to the norm for many. The benefits for employees range from having your dog as a co-worker to adding pajama pants to the professional wardrobe. But working from home can also come with hazards.

Whether you're camped out at a kitchen table, sprawled across the couch or luxuriating in bed all day, odds are your home setup isn't as ergonomic as that of an office. This may not be a big deal when you're working from home for short periods. But when those workdays add up to weeks or even months, poor posture and sedentary behavior can create serious back and neck pain.

The good news is that with the right furniture and a little daily activity, it's easy to strike a healthy balance with your work-from-home routine.

► GET ON YOUR FEET

Most people tend to hunch forward while sitting, which can put a lot of pressure on your lower back. Standing and

looking at a monitor at eye level, on the other hand, puts little strain on your neck and back, while also burning more calories than sitting.

That said, it isn't comfortable to stand for hours at a time. That's why the UPLIFT Standing Desk V2 is a good option for any remote office. The design enhances durability and comfort, and easy height adjustment encourages users to keep moving without settling into any position for too long.

► LOOK FOR SUPPORT

When you do decide to take a seat, getting the proper support can make a big difference. If you don't have an office chair, try putting a small pillow behind your lower back to maintain an arched posture. This practice will help put your upper body weight on the chair instead of your spine.

If you're ready to invest in a new chair, the Steelcase Gesture has been Wirecutter's pick for more than five years. However, if you're looking to spend less, the HON Ignition 2.0 is a more affordable option that makes few sacrifices in comfort.

► STAY ACTIVE

It's a good idea to take breaks throughout the day to move around and get the blood circulating. While you're at it, try some simple exercises like backbends, hamstring stretches and planks that can help strengthen your core and provide additional support for your lower back.

If you're looking for a guided workout, the Seven Home Workout app offers a wide variety of seven-minute routines that you can squeeze into a busy day. Or explore the Yoga Studio app to unwind with yoga classes for all levels of experience and guided meditations that take as few as five minutes.

► MOVE AROUND

Time can get away from you during a busy workday, so it always helps to have a reminder when it's time to take a break. If you have an Apple Watch, you set the frequency of these reminders in the Activity app. For everyone else, apps like Stand Up! will schedule notifications throughout your workday to get up and move around. The Wakeout app will even suggest quick exercises for every room of the house. 🏠

Are you ready for the high-tech fast lane in 2022?

We're here to help you navigate the upcoming year

Happy new year! From everyone at WCTEL, we hope 2022 is off to a great start. After a season of celebration, the new year gives us a welcome break from weeks of holiday hustle and bustle. It also is a good time to pause and contemplate what's ahead, whether that's an upcoming vacation, a new job or major milestones like graduations or weddings.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

All that potential can be a little daunting. When looking forward, I often find it helpful to look back and appreciate the road that brought us where we are today, whether it's my own personal journey or the rapid evolution of the communications industry.

Consider the internet. Fifty years ago, only researchers had the first inkling of what was to come. In 1972, "All in the Family" was the top-rated TV show in the country. Roberta Flack's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" was at the top of the music charts. And researcher Ray Tomlinson had recently sent the world's first email to himself using ARPANET, a network of computers linked by phone lines to help Pentagon-funded research stations communicate.

Just a decade later, companies like Apple and Microsoft were already leading the personal computer revolution that put desktops in homes and offices. By 1992, people were receiving the first of many AOL software CDs. The squawk of computer modems soon filled homes as people used dial-up internet to connect to email and online message boards.

Nineteen years ago, the internet became even more of a social space with the launch of Friendster, a precursor to Facebook. Social networks wouldn't become fixtures on phones and mobile devices until the arrival of the iPhone in 2007 and the iPad three years later. Even then, the ability to bring medical expertise home with telehealth, take college-level classes from your couch or stream high-quality movies, music and TV shows — things we can take for granted today — would have seemed far-fetched.

In just five decades, we have seen online technology grow from computers that could only send a few characters of text into being the center of a deeply interconnected world. At WCTEL, we're proud to be a part of that story, because we have seen firsthand how the service we provide benefits lives and connects communities.

So, as you look ahead to the many possibilities a new year brings, take a moment to consider how far we've come. From staying connected with distant friends on social media to planning your next big adventure, how many of your goals wouldn't even be possible without fast, reliable internet service?

And, just as importantly, what innovation will be the next to transform our lives? I don't expect the pace of innovation to slow down, which is why we'll be here to make sure the services, tools and connections you need are always up to speed.

Here's to a wonderful 2022 as we all keep our eyes on the road ahead. 📞



CONNECTED

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

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On the Cover:



Community leaders have a shared vision of growth and cooperation to benefit both towns participating in the Starr-Iva Alliance. See story Page 8.

SEARCHING for the **BEST** STREAMING EXPERIENCE ?

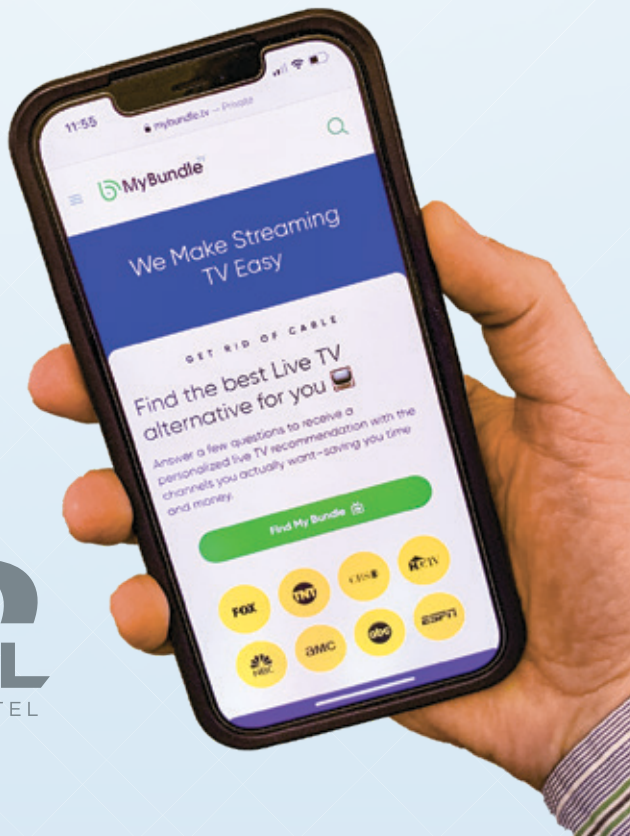
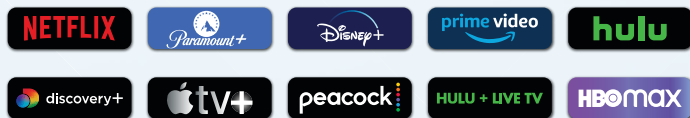
WCTEL has launched a helpful new tool for deciding which streaming platforms may work best for your family.

Visit wctel.com/streaming.

Click "Find My Bundle".

Then answer a few questions.

MyBundle.tv gives a comparison with pricing and which platforms would have your favorites.



LIFELINE SERVICE

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

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

- SNAP
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- VA Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension

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

Some states have additional qualifying programs, allowances and stipulations. Check with your local telecommunications provider for information about benefits that may be available in your state. To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, please visit lifelinesupport.org or call your local telecommunications provider.

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

Ancient treasures

Museums showcase geologic adventures



Story by ANNE BRALY

Entertaining kids while traveling isn't easy. But there are places just a smidge off the beaten track, outside the glitz and glamour of big cities, that will spark your child's interest. Here are some spots around the South that mix history and science in fun and interesting ways.

Falls of the Ohio State Park Clarksville, Indiana

Jump over the Kentucky state line into Indiana and hike across one of the world's most accessible Devonian-age fossil beds.

The 390-million-year-old fossil beds are among the largest exposed Devonian beds in the world. The park features a spectacular interpretive center, which features interactive, immersive exhibits.

While fossil collecting is prohibited on the beds and river bank, the park staff encourages visitors to explore and discover the many different fossils that can be found on the ancient sea bottom. And you can collect from rock piles

with fossils from the quarries behind the interpretive center, which is open Monday through Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday 1 to 5 p.m. The park grounds are open 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Fishing, hiking, fossil viewing, bird watching and picnicking are among the most popular activities. Admission is \$9 for ages 12 and up, \$7 for ages 5 to 11, and under 5 is free. Parking is \$2. For more information, visit fallsoftheohio.org.

Coon Creek Science Center Adamsville, Tennessee

Tennessee was once home to giant mosasaurs, sharks, crabs and clams when

the Gulf of Mexico spread its waters across the Volunteer State. Fossils of these early inhabitants reside at Coon Creek in rural McNairy County, one of the most important fossil sites in North America.

The Coon Creek Science Center is a great place for kids to visit and discover some amazing things. There are hands-on displays and activities, which allow them to learn through experiments in which they use their senses while having fun. There's a treasure trove of artifacts on display, so allow enough time to see everything. To learn more, visit memphismuseums.org.

Children learn about the dynamics of science in the Discovery Lab, one of several exhibits at the Hands On Children's Museum. At right, children can play while learning about science and discovery in the museum's Scheu Family Exhibit Hall & Art Studio in the General Shale Learning Center.



Folly Beach, South Carolina

Finding shark teeth on Folly Beach is a great way to learn about the giants that once roamed the seas — and the many that continue to do so — and Folly Beach is one of the best places to find their teeth and learn how to identify all the different species.

Wade into the water and start your hunt, sifting through the sand with special tools for shark teeth — maybe even one from a megalodon. For more information, or to book a tour, visit chsossiladventures.com.

Cook Museum of Natural Science Decatur, Alabama

Kids can learn all about the birds, the bees, the flowers and the trees and more by spending a day in Decatur at the Cook Museum of Natural Science, a museum that began with a small collection of insects from John Cook, the founder of Cook's Pest Control. It's now grown into a state-of-the-art museum with numerous exhibits including cave systems, the weather, outer space, rivers and streams, oceans and forests and more, including — yes — insects. Many exhibits include hands-on elements to keep kids busy and entertained. Log onto cookmuseum.org for more information and tickets.

Gray Fossil Site Gray, Tennessee

There was a time — some 5 million years ago — when small horses, mastodons, alligators, tapirs, rhinoceros, camels, saber-toothed tigers and other creatures roamed the hills and meadows

— sometimes peacefully, others not — around the South. And one of their favorite gathering places was a watering hole in what would become Gray, Tennessee, outside Johnson City.

Fast forward a few million years, and today, paleontologists are unearthing a massive amount of bones at the Gray Fossil Site. Experts say they could dig for another 100 years and still not find everything that lies beneath. Now, kids, parents, grandparents and others can come and see what paleontologists have found and learn so much more in the neighboring Hands On! Discovery Center.

“The fossil site itself offers an up-close experience where children of all ages can see an active dig site,” says Andy Marquette, the Discovery Center's president and CEO. “They can come within inches of giant fossils and learn about the process from finding a fossil to putting it in collections.”

Hands On! Discovery Center Johnson City, Tennessee

The center grew from a small children's museum in downtown Johnson City to what it is today: a beautiful, new building with numerous interactive exhibits like the “dig pit” in the Paleo Hall where visitors can dig for themselves and see what actual paleontologists experience. Life-size replica skeletons of many of the creatures that once called the Gray Fossil Site home now surround the hall.

In addition to the paleo exhibits, the Main Exhibit Hall is the place where kids can make their own air rockets and air cars

If you go

- » **Where:** Hands On! Discover Center and Gray Fossil Site, 1212 Suncrest Dr., Gray, Tenn.
- » **Hours:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; 1-5 p.m. Sunday. Also, open on Mondays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during March, June, and July only.
- » **Information:** visithandson.org or 423-434-4263.

and see how fast these creations can go or spend time at the Bernoulli table while exploring the science of how objects are able to fly. They'll be having so much fun they may not realize they're learning many of the same things about energy that they learn in school, says the center's Director of Operations Keith Maultbay. “It makes science fun,” he says.

The second floor of Hands On! Discovery Center is all about the dig. Large glass windows allow views of the paleontologists at work, piecing together the intricate bones of a massive mastodon discovered in the center's backyard several years ago. Also on view in the collection room are more bones and tusks.

Buy a ticket and take a paleo tour of the dig site. Another ticket gets you into the Tesla Theater to witness an electrifying, Guinness record-holding experience that honors the great inventor Nikola Tesla. Watch in amazement as the world's most powerful, musical, bi-polar Tesla coil turns 240 volts into 200,000 volts of pure electricity. 🗨️

‘Two Towns, One Community’

Starr-Iva Alliance strives to help local businesses and more

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photos by MATT LEDGER

The town limits between Starr and Iva can easily become blurred, but that’s just fine with the folks who live there.

Starr and Iva are only a few miles apart along state Route 81 with Crescent High School, which many locals consider the focal point of the community, sitting almost directly in the middle of the two communities. The towns share just about everything, including the Starr-Iva Alliance, a volunteer organization dedicated to building up both communities through business and civic developments.

“These two communities are very tightly knit,” says Iva Town Manager Tim Taylor. “We share the same school district, and most folks here share the same churches. The city limits are defined by boundaries, but there’s certainly nothing that separates the two. They’re the same families and same people, and it’s been that way for years.”

Neither Starr nor Iva is large enough to create its own chamber of commerce to help serve local business interests, so the all-volunteer Starr-Iva Alliance came into existence to serve as a de facto chamber. Aimee Gray, who works with the local school district, serves as the Alliance’s chair. “I think the Starr-Iva Alliance is a worthy cause. I believe in it,” she says.

“As the gateway to the freshwater coast, our community has so many beautiful natural resources,” Gray says. “Our school district is ranked in the top 10 in the state, and we have state-of-the-art athletic and rodeo facilities, so we are proud of our community and want to do whatever we can to help the people and businesses in it. I like helping on the entrepreneurship front, especially. We have a lot of people with a lot of talents that just need a little help using those talents to start a business.”



The Starr-Iva Alliance is built on teamwork and sharing the assets of both communities. Board president Aimee Gray, center, meets with Starr Mayor Ed Sokol, left, and Iva Town Manager Tim Taylor planning events for the Peoples Bank 70th Anniversary.

The Alliance has also been involved in “Buy Local,” an initiative throughout the area, including Calhoun Falls, Starr, Iva, Abbeville and McCormick, that encourages residents to support local businesses and service providers. Gray and a small band of volunteers have also promoted local businesses through social media, and they’ve hosted workshops and other educational opportunities for current and prospective entrepreneurs looking to open in the community. And with the help of the Freshwater Coast Community Foundation, they’re starting to work on community beautification initiatives.

Taylor says these efforts are a win for the entire area. As town manager he focuses on business growth in Iva. “We’re always pleased and proud to see anything

develop in Starr, as well,” he says. “We’re hoping we’ll see some big changes in the town of Starr over the next couple of years.”

As residential growth in Anderson County trickles southward, Starr is poised to benefit from it, Taylor says. Starr Mayor Ed Sokol says volunteer organizations like the Starr-Iva Alliance, which operates under the motto “Two Towns, One Community” and helped celebrate the 70th anniversary of The Peoples Bank this past August, are vital in the area. “We put grants and everything we get right back into the community,” Sokol says. “We have a lot of volunteers — we’re all volunteers. We don’t take any pay, and we do a pretty good job of keeping everything together.”



Officials discussed the history of The Peoples Bank and its importance to community. They are, from left: state Rep. Jay West, Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette, state Sen. Mike Gambrell, U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan's Chief of Staff Rick Adkins, The Peoples Bank Chairman of the Board Matt Thrasher, Anderson County Council Member Ray Graham, Starr Mayor Ed Sokol, The Peoples Bank CEO Shawn McGee, Iva Mayor Bobby Gentry and Anderson Area Chamber of Commerce President Pam Christopher.

Local institution

The Peoples Bank has served Starr-Iva for generations

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photos by MATT LEDGER

The Peoples Bank has spent the past 70 years living up to its name in Anderson County.

A group of businessmen in the Starr-Iva community saw a need and decided to fill it seven decades ago. The bank marked its 70 years with a celebration this past summer and a display at the REVIVA Museum in downtown Iva.

“There was no financial institution in Iva at the time,” says Peoples Bank CEO Shawn McGee. “People in Starr and Iva had to drive to Anderson just to visit their banks, and that group of local businessmen decided they wanted and needed a bank in their hometown.” Since

the opening of that first location in 1951, The Peoples Bank has grown to seven branches, all in Anderson County, the newest one established in Pendleton in 2020.

Over the course of its existence, through good times and bad, the small, community bank has stayed true to its roots in the county and to its customers as the area has grown. In Starr-Iva, it has become a fixture in the business and civic communities, working with the Starr-Iva Alliance and other organizations to help its hometowns thrive.

During an era when smaller financial institutions are swallowed up by larger, national banks, The Peoples Bank is something of an anomaly, keeping personal service personal, indeed. “We started as a community bank, and that’s how it’s run today,” McGee says. “There are no majority shareholders. I think that it’s a comfort knowing that you can come in and see somebody if you need to. You can talk to somebody that you more than likely know from your church, your school or your community if there’s a problem you need to work on — and you can do it right there in your hometown.”

McGee served on the initial board for the Starr-Iva Alliance, an all-volunteer group dedicated to economic and business

QUICK FACTS

- The Peoples Bank received its charter in 1950 and began operations in January of 1951 with Dr. C.D. Evans as president and J.P. Patterson as executive vice president and head cashier. The continued dedication of former President J.R. McGee and Vice President Wallace Alewine has kept it as a community bank.
- The bank’s current main office in Iva has stood since 1976 at 801 E. Front St., a block away from the former bank on Main Street, which is now home to the REVIVA Museum and Visitors Center. The Peoples Bank currently employs more than 20 people at its main office in Iva.



Peoples Bank CEO Shawn McGee reflects on the bank’s legacy.

development in the two close-knit, neighboring communities. Serving the financial needs and interests of its customers is only where things start for The Peoples Bank, McGee says.

“We’ve certainly been very active in our local schools,” he says. “We teach financial literacy courses in the high schools in the county. We’ve been involved with our local fire departments, the Iva Museum and other nonprofits throughout Anderson County, not only financially but with our employees working with them as volunteers. We bring more to the community than just a financial aspect.”

Locator apps

Connected for safety and security

With the help of a locator app on a mobile phone, parents can be aware of just about anywhere their family members roam — assuming families have reviewed and accepted the app's policies.

While some might find this concept intrusive, these apps can be helpful for busy schedules or a comfort during troubling times, late nights or long trips. Here are a few of the top locator apps on the market and what they can do.

>> Life360


The premium version of Life360 can tell you where your family members' phones are at any given moment. Notifications

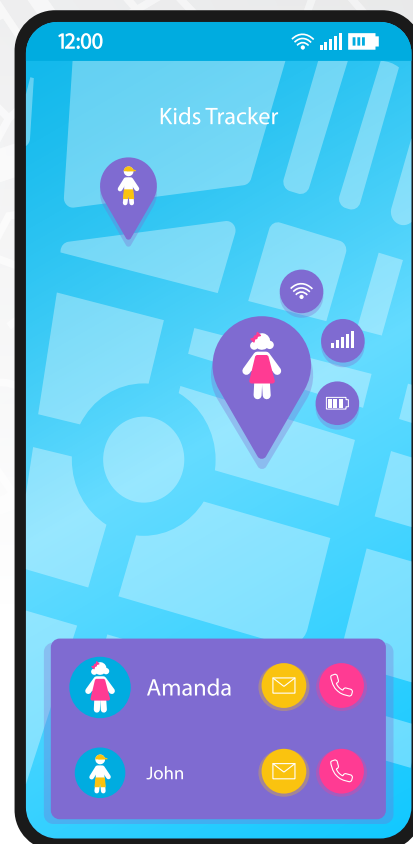
about events like a child arriving at school are easy to receive.

>> Glympse

The free Glympse app lets friends and loved ones know your travel status, so you never have to worry if you're running late. They'll know. Users can send a Glympse alert to anyone with a web-enabled device.

>> iSharing

Know where your friend or family member is at any moment. The iSharing app provides real-time alerts when someone leaves home, work or school. In-app messaging is just one of the features, some of which are only available in the premium version. 



Money wise

Financial education with digital tools

Fewer than half of U.S. states require students to complete personal finance education, although there have been recent efforts in many states to focus on this form of education.

There is, however, a wealth of online resources and apps to help parents teach children to safely navigate the financial seas. Here are a few of the sites and apps available to parents looking to teach their kids real-world money lessons:

CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU

The role of the CFPB, which Congress established in 2010, is to hold financial institutions accountable for following federal financial laws and to protect and educate consumers.

The bureau's website, consumerfinance.gov, has a section dedicated to youth financial literacy and offers more than 200 educational activities designed for kids of all ages. The list of topics is extensive and includes entrepreneurship, budgeting, managing credit and preventing fraud and identity theft.


FAMZOO

FamZoo is a comprehensive finance app for families. It creates a virtual family bank with parents in the banker's seat. Through the app, parents can pay their children's allowances, track their spending and savings and even encourage charitable giving.

FamZoo isn't free — the cost ranges between \$2.50 and \$5.99 a month depending on which option you choose. One- and two-month free trials are available at famzoo.com.

GOHENRY

GoHenry, aimed at kids as young as 6 years old, provides parents with a prepaid debit card for their children and an app the whole family can use to keep track of spending, savings and progress toward financial goals.

GoHenry offers a one-month free trial, after which, the service charges a monthly fee of \$3.99 per child. For more information, visit gohenry.com. 

Which MUSIC STREAMING SERVICE is right for you?



It's never been easier to discover a new favorite band or find that hidden gem of a song you can't stop playing on repeat. A wealth of music streaming apps boast exhaustive libraries, classic hits and new buried treasures all at your fingertips. Whether you're looking for crystal clear audio, curated playlists or a soundtrack to keep up with your runs, there's something for everyone if you know where to look.

SPOTIFY

Spotify is synonymous with music streaming for a reason. Its interface is easy to navigate and always has new recommendations based on what you're already listening to. If you have friends on the service, you can share your listening activity and see what others are playing from Spotify's library of 70 million tracks. Audio quality, on the other hand, varies based on your account. Free users can stream at decent qualities if they're listening on standard headphones or a Bluetooth speaker. Premium users can stream at higher quality for \$10 a month, and Spotify has announced plans to roll out a hi-fi tier with lossless audio quality in the future.

APPLE MUSIC

Apple Music's social options are similar to what you'll find on Spotify, even if there are fewer curated options for discovering new favorites. But the real selling point is audio quality.

Audiophiles can enjoy lossless tracks at the base tier of \$10 a month with about 20 million tracks currently available at the highest quality. Apple says the rest of its 70 million-plus track library will be available in that format by the end of the year.

TIDAL

TIDAL used to have the crown when it came to lossless audio, but at \$20 a month it's now a tough sell against other more affordable options. If you can't wait for Apple Music to update its library, TIDAL's catalog is already fully available in lossless format, with a few even streaming at "Master" quality up to 9,216 Kbps. And while TIDAL may have made its name with major hip-hop artists, the genres available now are about as diverse as other top streaming apps.

AMAZON MUSIC

The biggest benefit of Amazon's music service is that it's already available to anyone with a Prime subscription. But that may not get you as much as you think. Despite having access to more than 75 million tracks, ad-free tier users may notice certain albums and artists are off-limits without a paid subscription. At least that buys you access to lossless audio, but if you're looking for easy access and discoverability, there are probably better options. 📱

WHAT IS LOSSLESS AUDIO?

Most music streaming services compress audio files to save space. That means some data has to be discarded, and audio quality suffers. Lossless audio still compresses these files but retains all the details of the original audio recording. You can hear the difference most often in frequencies like those from the crash of a cymbal in a rock song or the bass of a hip-hop track.

Higher-quality audio tracks are also much larger than lossy audio formats. So make sure you have the necessary data coverage if you're streaming on the go and adequate bandwidth if you're listening over the internet at home.



Hi! I'M AMANDA CLARK.

With this column, we're going to explore the digital world, specifically how you can get the most out of everything from computers and mobile devices to online services and apps. The possibilities are endless, and I'm here to help.

DEVICE OF THE MONTH



Fitbit Inspire 2

Are you planning a fresh workout regimen for the new year? Consider a little technological boost with the Fitbit Inspire 2, the most affordable smartwatch offered by Fitbit. It will track your heart rate, the number of minutes you're active and much more. It's slim and available in multiple styles. And, yes, it even tells time. Price: About \$100 from a range of online stores.

Power it UP

Solve the puzzle of your phone charger

Does your phone power charger ever seem like a mystery to you? Beyond the kind of connections used — generally USB for an Android device and Lightning for iPhones — not all chargers are the same, and the way you properly charge a phone can be counterintuitive.

So, what's the fastest way to juice up your device, and how do you keep your phone powered up for longer? Charge ahead for those answers and more.

FROM FAST TO FASTEST

Who has the time for slow? If you need a quick boost, you can get it via fast charging. Depending on the type of connection, some phones allow for far more power to come into your device. USB-A tops out at 12 watts for an iPhone, as well as for many Android phones. But, USB-C can have phones drawing power at 15, 18 or 20 watts.

Don't worry, you can't overcharge your phone. It will only draw as much power as it can handle. So, don't pay extra for a 45-watt charger.

WIRELESS CONVENIENCE

With a wireless charger, you can pick up your phone, do a quick check of email or Facebook and then set it back down to charge — no cable needed.

While wireless charging can be a little faster than 5-watt charging, it's still slower than wired connections. However, you trade speed for convenience.

BEDSIDE MANNER

Phone batteries degrade over time, with a lifespan of between three and five years. To slow deterioration, avoid a common mistake — don't leave your phone charging overnight.

Ideally, you want to keep your phone's charge between 30% and 90% throughout the day. Pushing a lithium-ion battery to its full charge causes it to age faster, but so does allowing it to drop too far in the opposite direction. If the battery does fall below 20%, be sure to enable any power saving features. Some phones, including the iPhone with iOS 13 and later, can also help you with optimal charging, including alerting when your battery is powered past 80%. [📱](#)

Meet Eric McCall

Before becoming a member of the West Carolina Tel board of directors, Eric McCall looked to give back to the community. As the pandemic showed the importance of having reliable internet service, he realized the best way to accomplish his goal was to help people in this part of the state stay connected.

“West Carolina Tel is a growing company, and I just want to be involved in helping the decision-making process as much as I can, making sure we’re providing our customers with excellent service, first and foremost,” he says.

Eric, 43, joined the board after an appointment in April before his recent election to a three-year term. He has focused on learning as much as he can about West Carolina Tel and its history. Being on the board of one of the first rural telephone cooperatives to offer access to the internet comes with special responsibilities.

“I’m walking into a situation that has been very well-managed — exceedingly well-managed,” he says. “I’m just kind of trying to figure out where we are, where we’re headed, and try to anticipate some of the challenges on the horizon.”



Eric McCall holds his 6-year-old daughter, Olivia, during a family photo with his wife, Edén, and 16-year-old son, Jackson.



Having fast, reliable internet service is vital for entertainment, education, business and for folks working from home, Eric says. It is also crucial in helping the community grow as people look outside big cities for places to live. “You look at the housing market and how many people right now are relocating, moving to different geographical areas,” he says. “I think one thing on people’s minds is, ‘All right, if I move here, do I have a good internet connection?’”

PERSONAL PURSUITS

His experiences through his businesses and through his church motivated Eric to take on a larger role. A graduate of Clemson University with a degree in aquaculture, fisheries and wildlife biology, he is putting his science background



Eric McCall and a crew of roofers reconstruct an old mule barn moved from Starr to Pendleton, South Carolina, for use as a museum.

to the test. While the board doesn’t deal with day-to-day operations, it sets the overall direction, so it’s critical that he understands not only the financial side of things but also the latest developments in technology and cybersecurity.

Along with being on the board and taking advantage of any conferences and educational opportunities available, Eric enjoys spending time with family. He and his wife, Edén, have a son, Jackson, and a younger daughter, Olivia. The family is active in church.

In 2003, Eric started Bar E Enterprises, which does construction. He later branched out and formed another company that specializes in custom planting and habitat management. “Eventually, you find yourself at a point in life where you’re like, ‘You know, I’ve gained so much from the folks in my community. I need to find some kind of way to give back,’” he says.

Eric hopes his time on the board helps keep the community on the right track. “Decisions that were made years ago have put our community in a good position right now,” he says. “My goal as a board member is to try to continue that trend — that whatever needs may exist in the future, West Carolina Tel is able to service the community.”

ROUX the day

It's a given that pretty much everything is improved by the addition of a sauce. That's why we put mustard on hot dogs and ketchup on fries. Good sauces cling to food, which means they need body.

There are many ways to achieve this, including making a roux, the foundation for wonderful sauces for meats, fish, poultry and vegetables. But it's also the beginning of many pots of gumbo, and roux is the underpinning for unbelievably creamy Creole dishes.

Roux is nothing more than equal parts of butter or oil and flour. The addition of warm liquid, whether water, stock or milk, works to swell the small granules of flour, which trap the liquid to thicken the roux. Careful though — one of the most important things to remember when making a roux is to avoid adding the flour to a hot liquid. The result is something every cook dreads: a lumpy sauce.

In French cuisine, roux is cooked to one of three stages: white, blond or brown. In New Orleans, where roux is the beginning

of so many dishes, roux becomes a chameleon. It can change from brown to red and to black. The longer the roux cooks, the darker and more intensely flavored it gets.

Cooking the roux has two main benefits. First, it gets rid of the raw, starchy flavor of the flour. Second — and this is with darker roux — it adds color to a dish. White and blond roux are used for light-colored sauces, such as cheese sauce and bechamel. Brown roux is used for darker sauces, such as stews and gravies.

Here is a recipe for basic roux. Add milk and shredded cheese for a lovely cheese sauce for vegetables. Or, use roux as the foundation for gumbo or mac and cheese. It's a versatile concoction that's an important step in making so many good foods.



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



BASIC ROUX

- 1 stick (8 tablespoons)
unsalted butter or 1/2 cup
peanut oil
- 1/2 cup flour

In a large pot or skillet, warm the butter or peanut oil to medium heat and then stir in the flour. Cook for 10 minutes, constantly stirring, to make a lightly browned roux, or continue stirring and cooking for up to 30 minutes for a dark roux. The roux will darken as you stir, from very light brown to copper or peanut butter brown, then to light chocolate brown, then dark chocolate brown and then very, very dark brown.



SEAFOOD GUMBO

- 1 recipe basic roux (dark brown)

Vegetables:

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 cup chopped green onions
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped

Tomato sauce:

- 6 cups water
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons salt, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce, or to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

Seafood and okra:

- 1 pound fresh or frozen chopped okra
- 1 pound white fish such as catfish, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 1/2 pounds peeled and deveined shrimp

Final seasonings:

- 1 tablespoon gumbo file powder, or to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste

In a large pot, make a basic roux, allowing it to cook to a dark brown stage.

In a separate skillet, melt the tablespoon of butter over medium heat. Add and stir the celery, green onions and bell pepper, cooking until tender, about 10 minutes. Add the cooked vegetables to the pot with the roux.

Stir the water, tomato sauce, Worcestershire sauce, garlic, salt, hot pepper sauce and thyme into the vegetable mixture. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil, reduce heat to medium low and simmer for 1 hour.

Stir okra into the vegetable mixture and cook it until tender, about 15 minutes. Add the fish, stir gently, and cook it until the flesh is easily flaked with a fork, about 5 minutes. Gently stir shrimp into the mixture and cook until the shrimp are bright pink, about 3 minutes. Season with the file powder and more salt; stir. Makes about 8 servings.



©Mark Gilliland



THREE-CHEESE MAC AND CHEESE With Bechamel Sauce

- 1/3 cup butter
- 1 shallot, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic minced
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 2+ cups whole milk
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1/4 teaspoon white pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon dry mustard, preferably Colman's
- 8 ounces Gruyere cheese, shredded
- 6 ounces sharp white cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
- 1/2 tablespoon salt
- 2 pounds macaroni, cooked

Melt the butter and saute the shallot, then whisk in the flour and cornstarch to a thick paste. This is your roux. Cook the roux on medium-low heat until it is light brown. Add the milk and cream and cook it, stirring, until the sauce comes to a simmer. Remove from heat and keep stirring about 4 minutes. The sauce will thicken as it cools. This is your bechamel sauce.

To the sauce, add and stir in the white pepper, cayenne pepper and dry mustard. Test the temperature with your finger. If it's too hot to touch, let it cool longer. If it's just uncomfortably warm, it's the perfect time to add the cheeses in stages, stirring constantly. Add extra milk if it's too thick. Taste the sauce, and add salt if it's needed. Pour the sauce over the cooked and drained pasta and stir. Serve immediately. Makes 12-14 servings. 🍴





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