

West Carolina Tel

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016

CONNECTED

SHOP LOCAL THIS SEASON

Merchants offer good
cheer and great buys

COMMUNITY THREADS

Sewing, a resurgent hobby,
helps unite neighbors

BREAKING OF BREAD

A seasonal slice that rises
to the occasion



CHANGES COMING to the LIFELINE PROGRAM

Lifeline is a federal program designed to help low-income Americans pay for vital telecommunications services. Important changes to the program will take effect Dec. 2, 2016, including the addition of broadband services.

For new subscribers, eligibility for Lifeline will be limited to the following criteria as of Dec. 2, 2016:

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

Consumers at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and those who qualified previously through any of the Tribal criteria will continue to be eligible for a Lifeline Program benefit.

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, customers must fill out standard forms, available at your local telephone company's office, as mandated by the Federal and/or State government. Your telephone company is not responsible for determining who qualifies for these programs or who receives assistance. Customers must meet specific criteria in order to obtain assistance with their local telephone service, and qualifying is dependent upon government-established guidelines. To qualify for Lifeline credit, each customer must apply and provide proof that he/she, or a household member for whom he/she is financially responsible, participates in at least one of the programs listed or that the customer meets the income-based requirements. Additional eligibility requirements may also apply. Consumers are allowed only one Lifeline program benefit per household. Lifeline can only be used for one source of communication — cell phone or landline.

Please see the January/February 2017 issue of this magazine for more details about the new Lifeline program, or contact your local telephone company to apply for this assistance.

Cord stackers are highly satisfied with their video viewing experience

With a broadband connection, there are countless hours of programming available from video streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu. However, a recent study revealed that consumers say one viewing strategy is most satisfying — taking advantage of the latest streaming options but pairing them with the tried-and-true programming found with traditional TV service.

The J.D. Power 2016 Streaming Video Satisfaction Study, released in August, found that 60 percent of streaming customers were “cord stackers,” those who watch streaming video in addition to a traditional paid TV service. This group reported the highest level of satisfaction among all groups, with 826 points on a 1,000-point scale.

Streaming's popularity is due not only to the variety of programming available, but also to the flexibility of being able to watch on smart TVs, tablets, smartphones and other devices.

In the J.D. Power study, satisfaction was lowest among “cord cutters,” those who choose to cancel their paid TV subscriptions.

Source: www.jdpower.com

STACK IT UP!



NTCA THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION RURAL CONNECTIONS

By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

Senate Caucus focuses on rural broadband issue

Depending on when you've opened this issue of your telco's magazine, the national election is a few days away or has just passed. You may already know who our next president of the United States will be. Regardless of the outcome, however, there will remain much work to do in this country to continue expanding broadband service into our rural regions.

That's one reason I am particularly excited about the work of the Senate Broadband Caucus. Launched this summer, the caucus was formed by U.S. Senators Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va.; Angus King, I-Maine; Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.; Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D.; and John Boozman, R-Ark. to “serve as a platform to engage in discussions across Committee jurisdictions and to inform Senators and their staff about emerging broadband issues,” according to the initial news release from the caucus.

I had the opportunity to moderate a caucus session in September, where the group pulled together representatives of various agencies to discuss ways to invest in rural broadband. It is encouraging to see such interest in rural broadband deployment in the U.S. Senate, especially across party lines. Telecommunications providers like yours have done a tremendous job bringing broadband to parts of rural America, but as we look across the country, there is still much work to be done. We are on the right track! ☑

Hey
telemarketers:
DO NOT CALL!

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) have established a National Do Not Call Registry. Joining this registry can drastically reduce the number of telemarketing calls you receive.



JUST THE FACTS ABOUT DO NOT CALL:

- Once you've registered, telemarketers have 31 days to stop calling your number.
- You can register up to three non-business telephone numbers. You can also register cellphone numbers; there is not a separate registry for cellphones.
- Your number will remain on the list permanently unless you disconnect the number or you choose to remove it.
- Some businesses are exempt from the Do Not Call Registry and may still be able to call your number. These include political organizations, charities, telephone

surveyors and businesses that you already have a relationship with.

Strict Federal Trade Commission rules make it illegal for telemarketers to do any of the following, regardless of whether or not your number is listed on the National Do Not Call Registry:

- Call before 8 a.m.
- Call after 9 p.m.
- Misrepresent what is being offered
- Threaten, intimidate or harass you
- Call again after you've asked them not to

ATTENTION LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS:

You must follow the Do Not Call rules

When you own or work for a local business, you likely don't think of yourself as the typical fast-talking, high-pressure telemarketer. However, local businesses that make phone calls to customers or potential customers should be aware that the same National Do Not Call Registry rules and regulations apply to them.

If you are a company, individual or organization that places telemarketing calls, it is very important that you familiarize yourself with the operations of the National Do Not Call Registry. Unless you fall under one of the established exceptions, such as telemarketing by charitable organizations or for prior business relationships, you may not make telemarketing calls to numbers included in the National Do Not Call Registry.

For information regarding National Do Not Call regulations, visit the National Do Not Call registry at www.telemarketing.donotcall.gov. You can find the Federal Communications Commission and Federal Trade Commission rules governing telemarketing and telephone solicitation at 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200 and 16 C.F.R. Part 310, respectively.

OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION:

The Do Not Call initiative, regulated by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), requires telephone service providers to notify customers of the National Do Not Call rules and regulations.

IT'S EASY!
ADD YOUR NUMBER TO THE
DO NOT CALL REGISTRY

Register online at
www.donotcall.gov
or call 888-382-1222.
For TTY, call 866-290-4236.

*You must call from the telephone number
you wish to register.*

Being Authentic

“In this ever-changing society, the most powerful and enduring brands are built from the heart. They are real and sustainable. Their foundations are stronger because of the human spirit, not an ad campaign. The companies that are lasting are those that are authentic.”

— Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

Judging by the success of Starbucks, Mr. Schultz clearly knows a little about business. But the reason this quote sticks with me is the last word: authentic. It's a word that apparently means a lot at the nation's most famous coffee company — and it's a word that means a lot to us here at WCTEL.

The first definition from Oxford Dictionaries says authentic means “of undisputed origin; genuine.” I like that, but the second and third definitions are even better: “made or done in the traditional or original way, or in a way that faithfully resembles an original” and “accurate or reliable.” Those last two definitions sum up why being authentic matters to WCTEL.

I think authentic is an overused word. We see it used to tout “authentic” Mexican or Italian food or “authentic” arrowheads or fossils at souvenir shops. But do you always believe the claim, or do you just assume it's mostly an empty boast?

In an age in which we're bombarded with companies, politicians and celebrities trying to portray themselves in a flattering way that may be 180 degrees from the truth, it's clear why someone or something being truly authentic carries weight with people.

Here at WCTEL, I can assure you that our commitment to our members is authentic. It's genuine, it's reliable and it's a commitment that faithfully resembles the original commitments our founders made to this community decades ago. This authenticity is seen in our work to deliver a better, more connected experience to our members by building a fiber network in our community.

To borrow more words from Mr. Schultz, we are a company that is built from the heart, real and sustainable.

But as Mr. Schultz's quote suggests, it's easy for a CEO to make such a claim. However, you can truly tell if a company is authentic by looking at the way its employees work every day.

Our commitment is demonstrated by our customer service team and installation technicians making sure you get the services you need. It's shown in the way our repair techs will stay late or come out in bad weather to fix problems you're having. It's in our engineering team and accounting staff working hard to maximize the amount of customers we can connect or upgrade for each dollar we invest.

That's how you can tell if a company is authentic. That's how you know WCTEL's commitment to you is authentic. And in Mr. Schultz's words, that's what will allow this company to endure and thrive for generations to come. ☺

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

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

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Produced for West Carolina Tel by:



On the Cover:



Andrew Hartsfield decorates Christmas trees in Lucille's Christmas Attic, named for his late grandmother who inspired him.
See story Page 12.

—Annual Meeting Highlights—

The West Carolina Board of Directors held its annual member meeting at the Long Cane AME Community Development Center in Abbeville, South Carolina, on Aug. 22, 2016.

The Rev. Julius Johnson gave the invocation and past president and current board member Lee Logan opened the meeting by remembering the many great years of service the late Jim Hester dedicated to the board. He then introduced WCTEL's newest board member, Robert Hester, who was appointed to the board shortly after his father, Jim Hester, passed away earlier this year.

Logan discussed WCTEL's ongoing support of the economic, educational and charitable endeavors in the areas the cooperative serves, such as the Freshwater Coast Community Foundation, supporting the Abbeville Strategic Plan. And he talked about revisions to the Capital Credit Policies to be more member-focused.

CEO and General Manager Jeff Wilson closed the meeting with the recognition of loyal employees and a brief overview on the continued expansion of the fiber network, on WCTEL's gigabit internet service, and on this year's capital credit retirement of approximately \$1.6 million.



The Rev. Julius Johnson addresses the crowd after his invocation. Pictured, from left, are Board Secretary Jane Stone, CEO Jeff Wilson, Johnson and past president and current board member Lee Logan.



The WCTEL offices will be closed the following dates during the upcoming holidays:

- Nov. 24 for Thanksgiving
- Dec. 26 for Christmas
- Jan. 2 for New Year's

Mark your calendars with the WCTEL TechLink class schedule

West Carolina is proud to offer free classes at our offices on various technology topics for our members.

Topic: Digital Picture Basics

- Nov. 7: Abbeville from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- Nov. 8: Iva from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- Nov. 10: McCormick in the Carolina Room of the River Grille at Tara from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.



Don't miss area CHRISTMAS PARADES

- Due West – Dec. 2 at 5:15 p.m.
- McCormick – Dec. 3 at 10 a.m.
- Abbeville – Dec. 3 at 11 a.m.
- Calhoun Falls – Dec. 3 at 2 p.m.
- Donalds – Dec. 3 at 2 p.m.
- Antreville – Dec. 10 at 11 a.m.
- Iva – Dec. 10 at 2 p.m.
- Lowndesville – Dec. 11 at 3 p.m.

Video on Demand New Release Schedule

For a small rental fee, WCTEL's Video on Demand service gives you access to new releases as many as eight weeks before Netflix or Redbox (designated by an *). To access Video on Demand, press the "VOD" or "On Demand" button on the remote or press the "Menu" button and look for "On Demand."

Nov. 1

- Star Trek Beyond
- Bad Moms*
- Nine Lives
- Anthropoid*



Nov. 8

- Indignation

Nov. 15

- War Dogs (2016)



Nov. 22

- Kubo and the Two Strings*
- Mechanic: Resurrection
- Hell or High Water
- Hands of Stone



Photo courtesy of Andrew Jackson Foundation.

The Hermitage



Photo courtesy of National Park Service.

Texas White House



Photo courtesy of National Park Service.

Lincoln Birthplace Symbolic Cabin

A PRESIDENTIAL TOUR

See how the South honors the nation's highest office

With the 58th inauguration of America's president just weeks away, visiting presidential homes or museums in person and exploring exhibits, artifacts, documents and photos offer an opportunity that's both educational and entertaining. A trip to any presidential site is a trip through our nation's past.

Here's a look at several locations around the South that keep history alive.

HERMITAGE, TENNESSEE

Originally a cotton farm with a two-story log cabin, the property President Andrew Jackson bought would become The Hermitage in 1804. There he constructed his mansion and over the years added additional buildings. The buildings are open for tours and offer a window into the lives of the Jackson family before and after the Civil War. Go room by room and see where the former general and president, along with his beloved wife, Rachel, entertained guests with stories of Jackson's military victories. Or see the bedroom where Jackson took his last breath, gazing at a portrait of his wife. A self-guided tour of the grounds around the mansion includes an inside look at slave cabins, the smokehouse, the gardens and Jackson's tomb. Also, stay to view "Born for the Storm," an exhibit using multimedia elements and objects from the extensive Hermitage collection.

"It gives our guests a thorough understanding of the life and times of our seventh president," says Jason Nelson, vice president of marketing.

► **Hours and information:** 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., March 15 to Oct. 15; and 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Oct. 16 to March 14. Online: thehermitage.com.

► **Also in Tennessee:** The home of President James K. Polk is in Columbia, and it has the largest collection of Polk artifacts in the country (www.jameskpolk.com). Also, in Greeneville you can visit the home of President Andrew Johnson and the cemetery where he is laid to rest (www.nps.gov).



TECH-SAVVY TRAVELER:

The National Park Service maintains dozens of historical sites including presidential birthplaces, libraries and other landmarks. Research parks and sites near you at **NPS.gov** or in the **Passport to Your National Parks** app.





Texas White House President's Office

STONEWALL, TEXAS

Take a tour of Texas' breathtaking Hill Country to visit the Texas White House, where former president Lyndon B. Johnson conducted much of his business in his family home. Ranger-led tours take you through his office, Lyndon and Lady Bird's separate bedrooms, the living room where the president met with heads of state, and more.

"It's a walk through time," says Dave Schafer, chief of interpretation for the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park.

The home is on the family's ranch property, where Johnson was born, lived, died and is now buried. Free, self-guided ranch tours are another option that allow visitors to stop by his boyhood home, schoolhouse and family cemetery.

- ▶ **Hours and information:** 10 a.m.-4 p.m., seven days. Online: www.nps.gov.
- ▶ **Also in Texas:** The George W. Bush boyhood home in Midland was also home for several years to President George H. W. Bush (www.bushmuseummidlandtx.com). The Eisenhower Birthplace State Historical Park, which has hiking trails and picnic areas, is in Denison (www.thc.state.tx.us).

HODGENVILLE, KENTUCKY

Most Americans are familiar with the birth cabin and boyhood home of our 16th president, Abraham Lincoln. But did you know that the homes are not the actual ones inhabited by the Lincoln family?

"Most folks are surprised to learn that, but both are historic cabins and are very similar to how the Lincolns would have lived," says Stacy Humphreys, chief of interpretation and resource management at the park.

More than 200,000 people come to Lincoln's birthplace annually to relive

his early life on the frontier and see the first Lincoln Memorial, circa 1910. The memorial includes a replica "birth cabin," and nearby is Sinking Spring, where the Lincoln family got their water.

In addition to the memorial, another favorite site in the park is Lincoln's boyhood home on Knob Creek, about 10 miles from the birthplace memorial and visitors center. It's a big park down a road off the beaten path.

Time your visit for Lincoln's birthday, Feb. 12, and witness a wreath-laying ceremony at about 10 a.m. that morning.

- ▶ **Hours and information:** 8 a.m.-4:45 p.m., seven days. Online: www.nps.gov.
- ▶ **Also in Kentucky:** Zachary Taylor National Cemetery is in Louisville and contains the mausoleum where the president and his wife, Margaret, are interred (<http://www.cem.va.gov>).



Monticello

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

High on the ridge overlooking the city of Charlottesville, Monticello makes a commanding statement. The home of President Thomas Jefferson, the stately plantation with its surrounding gardens, lies in stark contrast to the nearby slave cabins, reconstructed to show a dark but important side of Monticello's history.

Many regard the president's home, built in 1769, as his architectural biography, a structure that shows a mind as adept at engineering and agriculture as it was for politics.

One of the most interesting objects in the home is the great clock that Jefferson designed. It has exterior and interior faces, an hour-striking Chinese gong and a seven-day wall calendar.

"It reveals his desire for order, interest in technology and ability to adapt traditions," says Mia Magruder Dammann,



Into the Storm Exhibit • Hermitage

marketing associate with the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. "By any measure and in any age, Jefferson was a brilliant mind and the founding father who best embodied the American spirit of innovation."

- ▶ **Hours and information:** 10:15 a.m. (first tour), 4:10 p.m. (last tour). Online: www.monticello.org.
- ▶ **Also in Virginia:** Mount Vernon, home of George and Martha Washington, is in Mount Vernon (www.mountvernon.org). The Sherwood Forest Plantation was the Charles City home of the 10th U.S. President, John Tyler, from 1842 until his death in 1862 (www.sherwoodforest.org). Richmond's Tuckahoe Plantation, circa 1733, was the boyhood home of Thomas Jefferson (www.tuckahoeplantation.com).

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

A charming Southern town, Columbia lays claim to the only presidential site in South Carolina — the boyhood home of President Woodrow Wilson, our nation's 28th president. Recent renovations returned the structure to its original blueprint with furnishings and decor that closely match that seen by Wilson when he lived there as a teenager in the 1870s.

"Two very important things make this museum unique," says Fielding Freed, director of historic house museums for Historic Columbia. "First, it was the home of teenage Tommy (Woodrow) Wilson. Secondly, it's the only museum in the country that focuses on Reconstruction, a period that is often misunderstood but is a very important part of American history, from 1865 to 1876."

- ▶ **Hours and information:** 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. (Tuesday-Saturday tours); 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. (Sunday tours). Online: www.historiccolumbia.org.

During her first day with Community Threads, Gloria Bramble, of McCormick, brushes up on her familiarity with the sewing machine.



THE FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITY

Making new connections through sewing

BY JOHN CLAYTON

After turning 60, Margaret Utsey wanted to try something new, so she decided to visit the McCormick Arts Council at the Keturah (MACK).

She met with Heather McNally, the organization's program and marketing director, who suggested Utsey try a hobby with renewed popularity — sewing. A few days later, Utsey received a call from Belinda Ramsey, who introduced her to Community Threads, a group with 150 members.

"Community Threads is a tremendous program uniting our community one stitch at a

time," McNally says. "This is by far our most successful new and developing program that serves such a diverse group of members."

Utsey is now a committed member of the group. "I thoroughly enjoy it and have brought five more ladies to join since I did," says Utsey, who also volunteers at the chamber of commerce. "It's really great for McCormick County."

Utsey meets with other women three to four times each week, and they sew and help each other with various projects. Utsey has also bought three sewing machines to continue crafting at home. "But,

it's not as much fun sitting at home sewing by yourself," she says.

REPEATING PATTERN

Ramsey, Community Threads' organizer, says, "As a young girl, I would sit with my grandmother and watch as she carefully cut each patch for her latest quilt. She would follow along the plastic template that she made from the top of her butter tub."

Her grandmother, Mary Bishop, recycled frayed clothing, repurposing the good material into patchwork quilts, and worked as a seamstress who made suits. "I don't have

the talent that she had for fine sewing," Ramsey says. "For me, stitching, in whatever form, represents the generations who precede us and is something we need to cultivate and share."

Ramsey and her husband had often vacationed at Lake Thurmond and Elijah Clark State Park. When they decided to retire in 2013, the Ramseys chose McCormick for the tranquility. Within a few months, Belinda Ramsey approached MACK officials about holding sewing classes.

In March 2014, she hosted a beginner quilting workshop for seven women. After a few more sessions, Ramsey knew

there was a foundation for a club and so did the MACK's McNally. "Community Threads has created numerous projects," McNally says. "All with the warmth of humanity interlaced with each unique individual and project. The MACK was fortunate in meeting a specialist with a passion for fabric arts."

NEEDLE ARTS FELLOWSHIP

The group has become a social outlet for the women, some of whom will host events in their homes. "It has grown from just a beginner class into a fellowship," Ramsey says. "It's a learning process when we get together, working on whatever project someone might have." Beginners learn simple stitches, safe usage of the sewing machine, and how to make a "mug rug," which looks like a place mat.

After starting around a single table in their space at the MACK, the growing club has relocated twice to find the right building. Now their workspace at 218 S. Main St. in McCormick has a dozen sewing machines and four workstations.

Most of the weekly sessions are attended by 15 to 20 women, some of whom are from surrounding counties, and half of the nearly 150 members had no previous sewing experience. Now, some work on elaborate quilts and table runners, while others teach techniques to those just beginning the hobby.

"If somebody wakes up and decides they want to sew, they start calling people, and pretty soon we've got a crowd," Ramsey says. "Come stitch with us" is the group's wel-

coming statement. Often, the conversations leave members in stitches, laughing at the local gossip and the occasional male visitor.

PROVIDING WARMTH AND COMFORT

Ramsey's first quilting project was for her son, Army Capt. Jon Ramsey, a member of the 82nd Airborne Division based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

He had requested a quilt with the emblem of his unit, and she shipped it to Afghanistan in 2009. She soon received several requests from paratroopers who served with her son. She created nine more quilts, each with an individual theme.

Members of Community Threads have worked on charity projects with local churches and other organizations. Some of the women belong to McCormick Ladies Day Out, which is a chapter of Project Linus, a national project that creates blankets for traumatized children. Jan Hogg is the president of Operation Quiet Comfort, a group sending comfort through their creations to members of the U.S. armed forces. The women also made 50 breast cancer awareness pillows for those undergoing treatment at the Self Regional Hospital in Greenwood.

The group is now working toward a MACK showcase on Nov. 4. "With the online marketplace, the possibility exists that Community Threads could be the start of a cottage industry in McCormick," Ramsey says. "But for now, our quilt ladies are enjoying the sewing sessions and the fellowship of this new version of the quilting circle. I think grandma would be proud." ☑



Belinda Ramsey started Community Threads as a class in which women learn how to quilt. It's become a diverse social group of women collaborating through crafting.



Belinda Ramsey, standing, chats with two Community Threads members, Linda Crochet and Nancy Mineo, during an afternoon sewing session.

Chris Nease

ENTERTAIN *with* ELEGANCE

A Q&A with Chris Nease, a blogger from Richmond, Virginia, who has entertained readers with her party ideas since 2008.

Check out her blog at
CELEBRATIONSATHOMEBLOG.COM

Q: How has blogging changed your life?

CN: I started my blog as a way to curate ideas for my new party styling business and found that I preferred the creative outlet that a blog provided over the party business. So when it began to take off and make money, I dropped the business to do the blog full time. It's been the dream job I never knew I wanted.

Q: What will readers find at your blog?

CN: Inspiration and ideas for the home hostess. The main focus is on home entertaining, party design, tips, recipes and do-it-yourself ideas.

Q: What is the primary thing a hostess can do to ensure her party runs smoothly?

CN: Have a properly cultivated guest list. When you bring together the right mix of people, the party practically runs itself.

Q: What is your favorite way to entertain during the holidays?

CN: I like to dress it up a little but still keep things fun, not stuffy. We've been hosting an annual Christmas cocktail party since 1998, and it's become one of my favorite days of the year. Everyone dresses up in cocktail attire and mingles over drinks and heavy hors d'oeuvres, and we end the night with some dancing. It's such a fun time!

Q: Is it best to stick with tried-and-true recipes?

CN: I love to break that rule! I'm known for trying new recipes for dinner parties or holidays because what better way to get a good gauge of how well it goes over?

Q: What can be done to dress up a party without too much fuss?

CN: Serve water or juice mixers in pretty decanters or pitchers; add fresh herb garnishes to food platters; fill glass vases or pretty bowls with ornaments; or make special ice for drinks using shaped silicone trays by freezing juice or adding berries to the water molds.

Q: Is it a good idea to count on guests to bring dishes if they offer?

CN: It really depends on the type of party. If I've already planned out the menu, I usually only take up offers of food from my closest friends. Otherwise, I'll suggest they bring a bottle of wine.

Q: What's an economical idea for a holiday centerpiece?

CN: This is my no-cost favorite: Lay a wide ribbon down the center of the table like a runner. Then add evergreen clippings down the center and fill in with pine cones, ornaments and candles. 📺



OTHER ENTERTAINING BLOGS:

► **PIZZAZZERIE.COM**

Nashville-area blogger Courtney Whitmore entertains readers with her wit and passion for parties.

► **EVERYDAYLIVING.ME**

A faith-based blog that shares decorating tips and homespun recipes from Alabama for a memorable holiday gathering.

A high-tech wishlist

DON'T MISS OUT ON THE LATEST GADGETS

Christmas isn't about the getting — it's about the joy of giving! Getting someone the perfect gift could be the highlight of the season for them and for you. Here's a guide for some of the hottest technology items this season.

STREAMING TV BOX

Three brands currently dominate the streaming entertainment box marketplace: Roku, Apple TV and Amazon Fire. Once set up and connected to your home broadband router, each will allow viewers to stream Netflix, Hulu and other subscription-based video services and channels straight to their TV. Features on different models vary, but some distinctions — like Amazon's voice-command remote, Apple TV's features when linked to other Apple products, and Roku's price and versatility — give each one its own advantages.



CHROMECAST

Chromecast allows you to send the video you're watching on your phone or tablet straight to your television. The small hockey puck-shaped dongle turns your television into a giant monitor for TV shows, movies, music, sports and games. But that's not the end to the Chromecast lineup. Chromecast Audio allows you to turn any speaker into a Wi-Fi-enabled network of sound. One device allows you to connect a speaker to your phone or tablet wirelessly. More dongles mean more speakers can be linked to synchronize your music across multiple rooms of your home. Both Chromecast and Chromecast Audio are \$35.

SMART WATCHES

While connected timepieces were a novelty last Christmas, they are moving into the mainstream for this gift-giving season. While many consider the Apple Watch (\$350-\$10,000) to be the top of the class, others, like the Samsung Gear S2, the Pebble Steel (\$150) and the Moto 360 (\$300 and up), offer similar features to keep you connected with their own unique style.



SAMSUNG GEAR VR

Technology enthusiasts have been talking about (and wishing for) good virtual reality devices for years. Now, they may have arrived with the Samsung Gear VR (\$100).



Insert your Samsung phone into the device in order to play games and watch movies in an entirely new experience.

GIFT CARDS

Don't forget that many online services offer gift credits that allow the recipient the chance to pick out exactly what they want. Here are a few gift card ideas for:



Music lovers: Pandora, Spotify, iTunes



Shoppers: Amazon Prime Membership (for free shipping)



Gamers: Steam



Movie lovers: Netflix, iTunes, Amazon



Photo lovers: Shutterfly, Snapfish



Book lovers: Amazon Kindle Store, iTunes (for iBooks).

DRIVING DATA INTERPRETERS

A handful of gadgets, led by the Mojio (\$99), allow users to basically connect their car's engine to their smartphones. The device plugs into the car's OBD2 port (where the mechanic reads the "Check Engine" codes) and connects to a mobile app that can provide information on how the car is running, where it has been and what it may need in order to keep putting on the miles. Open this gift early if you've got some holiday travel in your plans.





Deason's Flowers and Gifts owner Betty Walton creates festive displays for Christmas.



The Red Rooster Emporium and Art Gallery carries a locally made line of dolls as well as vintage items from numerous vendors.



Families search for the perfect tree at Turkey Creek Christmas Tree Farm.

Keep it local this Christmas

Find unique gifts at local stores

BY MATT LEDGER

Enjoying Clark Griswold, Ralphie Parker or George Bailey romping through classic Christmas movies, listening to holiday favorites while setting up trees, and baking goodies to share with loved ones are traditions many families look forward to each Christmas season.

This year, many store owners will untangle strands of lights and spruce up their window displays with trees and snowmen in hopes of continuing another tradition — local holiday shopping.

The trend of shopping at mom-and-pop stores for the holidays is growing each year, especially for handcrafted or American-made gifts.

In 2010, American Express started Small Business Saturday as a way to focus on the benefits of spending on local merchants. For every \$10 spent at small businesses, nearly \$8 stays within the local economy. Comparatively, big-box or franchise stores account for about \$1.

"Many people who come to visit family will hit the stores when they're here," says Charlotte Tallent, executive director of the McCormick County Chamber of Commerce. "The appeal of shopping in McCormick will continue to grow as we develop a broader offering of different shops in years to come."

DEASON'S FLOWERS

For people who begin decorating early for Christmas to avoid the lines at big-box stores, Deason's Flowers at 106 Court Square in Abbeville makes a perfect alternative to Black Friday shopping.

"We sell more fresh-cut centerpiece arrangements than anything else," says Betty Walton, owner. "With being right on the square, we get excellent walk-in business, especially when they have the plays and festivals that draw many people downtown."

She is the third generation to run the family store, which opened in 1937. The

store also carries ornaments, wreaths and the traditional poinsettia. She suggests placing decoration orders early to get the best selection. "People often bring us their own containers and tell us what they want," she says.

TURKEY CREEK CHRISTMAS TREE FARM

In 1989, Dale and Sheila Cullum, of McCormick, decided to start a Christmas tree farm, which does have its challenges. Some trees don't grow straight for the ideal symmetrical look, while weather and even grazing deer claim others. "We have to plant about three trees for every one that we sell," Dale Cullum says. "We plant around 800 trees each year, so we have some of the best-looking ones around."

Most families tree shopping spend an hour or two roaming the 20-acre property, choosing between several species, including Carolina Sapphire, Eastern Red Cedar



Children enjoy a ride around the festive grounds of Turkey Creek Christmas Tree Farm.



Andrew Hartsfield decorates the various trees in Lucille's Christmas Attic.



The latest holiday decorating trend leans toward fibers and colors with a natural woodland feel.



and Virginia Pine. "We allow them to hand cut the tree they select, or we will cut it for them," Cullum says. Just like in the classic Christmas movies, families can spend an afternoon searching for the perfect specimen — 4 feet to 16 feet tall — to take home and decorate.

"Probably half of our customers will return each year," Cullum says. "We have customers coming now that will show me a photo of when they were here as a child, and they're now bringing their kids to the farm." For three of the past four years, Turkey Creek trees have placed Best in Show for Christmas trees at the South Carolina State Fair in Columbia.

THE RED ROOSTER EMPORIUM AND ART GALLERY

One of the trends for the past two seasons is rustic country decor, with decorations made from natural materials such as burlap and barnwood. The Red Rooster Emporium and Art Gallery in McCormick has a diverse mix of 40 vendors, ranging from vintage collectibles to hand-crafted items.

"We're lucky to have many loyal shop-

pers that check here first to see if something is available before considering the drive to Greenwood or Augusta," owner Shaaron Kohl says. "It takes a community effort to help make small local businesses successful."

The store, which features complimentary gift wrapping, will be one of several stops on the Art Trot by the McCormick Arts Council at the Keturah.

URBAN 2 COUNTRY

Andrew Hartsfield began expanding an antique store two years ago. His biggest sellers at the holidays are the jams and jellies of Stonewall Kitchen Foods and the Southern Fried Cotton T-shirt line. "I carry as many American-made items as I can," Hartsfield says. "Since I started, I've seen a big increase in the number of local shoppers who come to the store."

On the second floor of the store, he added Lucille's Christmas Attic as a tribute. "My grandmother created handmade novelties, and years ago she had her own fabric store," Hartsfield says. "She was my original inspiration, and she wanted me to one day open a store of my own." 📺

Another fun annual event is the MACK's Art Trot, which has the participation of many local merchants. "The whole town comes to life when they light the tree," says Shaaron Kohl, owner of the The Red Rooster Emporium and Art Gallery. "It's a fun Friday evening with the choir singing Christmas carols."

The new merchants association wants to reinvent the downtown that night, says Missy Wines, executive director of the Abbeville Chamber of Commerce. "Participating shops will feature demonstrations of crafters from yesteryear, such as a blacksmith or a shoe cobbler," she says. Locals and visitors will enjoy the vintage appeal of the event, reminiscent of the classic Christmas movies on WCTEL channels during the holiday season.

"Some of the merchants will also have events for kids, including Letters to Santa and cookies with Mrs. Claus," Wines says. The weekend will also include a Christmas parade, craft show, lighting-of-the-tree ceremony and a tour of homes sponsored by the Abbeville Chamber of Commerce. The MACK Artisan Gallery shop offers locally crafted gifts from more than 35 artists.

"When you shop local, it is for a more personalized gift," Wines says. "That way, the gift is unique and more special to the person receiving it."

If you're looking for vintage decorations or wanting the scents of a genuine Christmas tree, there are a few local businesses that can help. "I feel that savvy shoppers could get most of their Christmas shopping finished here during our various festivals," Tallent says.

Mark your Calendars

- ▶ **Nov. 19** — "An Old South Christmas" event by the Abbeville merchants on the Abbeville square.
- ▶ **Nov. 25** — Opening day for Turkey Creek Christmas Tree Farm, when many parents bring their children to select trees the day after Thanksgiving.
- ▶ **Nov. 25** — MACK's Art Trot, from 6-8 p.m., featuring local artist and instructor Bill Updegraff.
- ▶ **Dec. 2 and 3** — Abbeville Christmas parade, craft show, tree-lighting ceremony and a tour of homes.

TALENTED AND TASTY

A baker gives her recipe secrets

The scent of freshly baked bread wafts through the air every time the door to Blackbird Bakery opens, and during the holiday season it never stops opening. Breads are the centerpiece of many holiday meals, and no one knows this better than bakery owner Carla Perkins.

“We sell lots of bread for both personal enjoyment and for gifts,” she says.

Apple-cinnamon, Tennessee sweet sourdough, jalapeno cheddar — they’re just a handful of the tempting breads filling the bakery just off the main road through Bristol, Virginia’s historic downtown.

Take a seat inside and feast your eyes on the confections housed within the bakery’s cases. Cookies, pies, doughnuts, cakes, tarts, cupcakes and yes, breads — all freshly made daily.

You’d think Carla has spent a lifetime learning her craft. Not so.

“I grew up around some of the best bakers — my mom and sister,” she says. “But I never took an interest in it until I got married.”

But even then, baking was more a curious, albeit delicious, hobby rather than a career. But before long, baking became her passion. She left her job as a special education teacher and opened the bakery

with her husband, Randall.

“I’ve never looked back,” she adds.

That was in 2008 after spending a year renovating the old building. It’s now a shining example of urban renewal, revealing its former life as a Masonic temple building with a handsome staircase, high ceilings and expansive windows. But since opening day, even more work has been put into the business, expanding it a couple of times. There’s been a demand for extra seating and a space for parties and other private events. Also, the kitchen is now on its third expansion. And the baking continues.

Perkins says that the bakery’s success is quite a triumph due to the fact that she’s had no formal training. But some people are born to it. And Carla Perkins was.

“I never turn down an opportunity to gain more insight and knowledge of the baking process, though,” she says. “At the Blackbird, I am surrounded by lots of talented bakers who continue to show me

new and better ways to do things.”

So when baking bread at home, something she enjoys doing during the holidays when and if she has the time — “The continued popularity of Blackbird leaves me very little time to do so,” she says — Perkins has learned that using ingredients, such as eggs, at room temperature is the key to success.

“Also, the creaming of butter and sugar cannot be understated,” she adds.

Here are some of her favorites, recipes you may make at home and that will likely become holiday traditions. 📖



Carla Perkins, who opened Blackbird Bakery with her husband, Randall, shows off a loaf of Cranberry Nut Orange Bread.



Food Editor **Anne P. Braly** is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Prior to pursuing a freelance career, she spent 21 years as food editor and feature writer at a regional newspaper.

CRANBERRY NUT ORANGE BREAD

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup (1/2 stick) salted butter
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 1 1/2 cups chopped cranberries
- 1 cup chopped pecans

Heat oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan. In a large bowl, sift together flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Combine well. Cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. In a separate bowl, stir together egg, orange zest and orange juice. Gradually stir in flour mixture. Stir just until flour is moistened. Gently fold in cranberries and nuts. Pour into prepared pan and bake for 60-75 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Transfer to wire rack; let stand

for 5 minutes. Remove bread from pan and place on wire rack. Cool completely before slicing. Makes 1 loaf.

SWEET POTATO BREAD

- 1 1/2 cups cooked, mashed sweet potatoes (Approximately 2 medium or 1 large sweet potato)
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/4 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/4 cups granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup light brown sugar, packed
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- Pinch of salt

Heat oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan. Set aside. Peel sweet potatoes and cut into medium-sized cubes. Place

in small saucepan and cover with water; bring to a boil, cover and reduce heat. Cook until fork tender; drain and mash with fork or mixer. Cool completely before using. Once cool, combine sweet potatoes, eggs, oil, buttermilk and vanilla. Mix well and set aside. In a large mixing bowl, combine all dry ingredients and whisk to combine. Add wet mixture to dry mix and stir just until combined. Pour batter into prepared pan and bake for 60-70 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Let stand in pan for 10 minutes before removing to rack to cool. Makes 1 loaf.

Note: This recipe can be altered by adding 1 cup of golden raisins or 1 cup of chopped nuts. A nut-based streusel added to the top of the batter before baking would also be delicious.

PINEAPPLE NUT BREAD

- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups canned crushed pineapple, drained
- 2/3 cup milk
- 1/4 cup (1/2 stick) salted butter, melted
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup shredded, sweetened coconut
- 1/2 cup macadamia nuts, chopped

Heat oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan. Set aside. In a medium bowl, mix together flour, sugar, baking powder, ginger, baking soda and salt. Set aside. In a medium bowl, combine pineapple, milk, melted butter and egg. Mix well. Add wet mixture to the dry mixture and mix until just combined. Fold in coconut and nuts. Spread into prepared pan and bake for 50-60 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes before removing. Remove from pan and cool on a wire rack. Makes 1 loaf. 📖





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