

CONNECTED

TIME-HONORED TRIBUTE

The lasting
legacy of the
"Major of St. Lo"

COOP CONNECTION

WCFIBER project expands
broadband reach locally

SCREEN TEST

Online tools help filmmakers
break boundaries



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Broadband is critical for working from home

Nearly all of us have spent at least some time this past year working from home. And while remote work surged during the pandemic, it certainly isn't a new idea. Between 2005 and 2017, according to Statista, there was a 159% increase in remote work.

Today 11.2% of Americans are working from home, up from 5.7% in 2019. And many are growing to prefer it — 22% of workers say they'd like to work from home permanently. I believe full-time remote work makes it difficult to create and maintain a collaborative work culture, but I do think that work is likely to have a new face when we get back to "normal."

The Foundation for Rural Service recently published a white paper entitled "Rural America's Critical Connections." (You can download it for free at www.frs.org.) The report cites a Global Workplace Analytics report that states, "Our best estimate is that 25-30% of the workforce will be working from home multiple days a week by the end of 2021."

What does this mean for broadband, that critical connection that helps us work remotely? It certainly means our country needs to continue the work to get broadband to everyone — and that in doing so we must build robust networks using technology proven to support the speeds and synchronous connections that working from home requires. Regardless of the work patterns and flexibility we see in the coming year, one thing is for certain: NTCA members such as your provider will continue to be at the forefront of connecting rural America. 



A free online resource helps female entrepreneurs

About 45% of businesses are owned or co-owned by women. Spanning a range of industries, most of these businesses are small with potential for growth. The federal Small Business Association wants to provide support.

The free, information-packed online Ascent program offers a range of helpful resources.

TAKE A JOURNEY

Experts in women's entrepreneurship created informational Journeys. Participants can choose any Journey, opting out of sessions with information they already know. Each Journey includes Excursions filled with resources needed to master a topic.



Exercises and tools



Fireside chats



Infographics



Success stories



Discussion guides



Videos



Key insights



Self-assessments

DO YOU NEED HELP WITH YOUR BUSINESS?

Visit ascent.sba.gov

Secure your Internet of Things

The Instant Pot, a pressure cooker, is one of the most popular small kitchen appliances of recent years. Naturally, there's a model capable of connecting to the internet via Wi-Fi — an example of the Internet of Things, or IoT.

Smart thermostats, door locks and security cameras are just a few devices on the IoT spectrum. Refrigerators, toys and a range of whimsical gadgets are all on the bandwagon. And businesses and industry, including agriculture, manufacturing and medicine, take advantage of connected devices.

Like the connected Instant Pot, which lets a cook control it via a smartphone app, IoT devices provide convenience, useful data and new ways of using technology. Cisco, a leader in networking systems, estimates that more than 75 billion such devices will be in use by 2025.

The utility of what is sometimes described as the fourth industrial revolution is balanced by the need for mindful caution. These devices offer people with bad intent potential doorways into private homes and businesses that use the internet-dependent gadgets.

Meanwhile, companies are finding new ways of leveraging these systems. One example is Amazon Sidewalk, which rolled out earlier this year. Here's how Amazon described the innovation: "Amazon Sidewalk is a shared network that helps devices like Amazon Echo, Ring security cameras, outdoor lights and motion sensors work better at home and beyond the front door."

Essentially, Sidewalk links your Amazon devices to those of your neighbors through a specialized network. Why? Well, imagine your internet goes down while you're out of town, making your security-focused Ring Doorbell useless. With Sidewalk, however, your internet-connected doorbell would keep right on working, relying on the internet connections of your neighbors to power the system. Everyone on the Sidewalk

system gives up a little bit of their internet bandwidth to this network. Instead of a smart home, Sidewalk can create a smart neighborhood.

Amazon released a detailed white paper outlining the system's security features. And while security experts have been quoted praising the company's efforts, others have expressed concern about privacy and the potential for hackers to target the system. Amazon Sidewalk can be turned off in the settings section of the company's smartphone app.

As IoT devices proliferate and offer new, practical ways to leverage the power of the internet, knowledge and a few practical security steps can offset possible risks. In the past, the FBI noted the need for IoT caution. "Unsecured devices can allow hackers a path into your router, giving the bad guy access to everything else on your home network that you thought was secure," Beth Anne Steele wrote for the Portland FBI office. [🔗](#)

Security tips for IoT devices

- Change the device's default password. Consider a different device if instructions for changing the password aren't readily available.
- Long passwords — as long as possible — work best. Make them unique to each IoT device.
- Many IoT devices connect to smartphone apps. Take a few minutes to understand the permissions granted to these apps. An internet search will help here, too.
- If possible, have a separate network for devices, such as an internet-connected refrigerator and a laptop containing sensitive information.
- Regularly update the devices, and turn off automatic updates.



A legacy of service

Together, we've created a foundation for the future

Connecting a rural community such as ours to the world has never been easy. Decades ago, crews first strung telephone lines across a landscape that large nationwide companies chose to ignore, deeming the places we call home too rural and unworthy of the effort.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

Naturally, we never felt that way. After all, no one understands the importance of our home and places like it better than we do. The countless hours of work to create that first telephone system proved invaluable, opening new doors for businesses and individuals. All of that effort gave us a foundation for the future.

As new technologies appeared, we continued that original commitment to serving you by bringing you those innovations. Today, our internet services rival — and often greatly exceed — those found in metropolitan areas. Just as those first crews did when they engineered a telephone system, we've built and maintained a robust internet network.

The depth of my appreciation for the men and women who make these essential services possible only increases from year to year. No matter the challenge, they adapt and overcome. I'd like to humbly suggest that you benefit daily from those efforts.

Can you imagine not having an option to link a computer or mobile device to the internet? Work, entertainment, medical care, education and more rely on rock-solid service. In just a few decades, we've gone from marveling at the idea of being able to speak one-on-one to someone miles away via phone to having a world of information at our fingertips. We've never been so connected. In fact, internet services are as essential for many of us as water and electricity.

Despite our best efforts, though, no communications and technology company such as ours avoids adversity. It's how you overcome adversity that matters most. After all, no one escapes the power of nature. Across the nation, we've seen tornadoes, hurricanes, fires and more leave communities without the utilities many of us take for granted.

Every season of the calendar brings the possibility of an event capable of disrupting our systems. But our team maintains detailed plans to both avoid disruptions and to respond quickly if they do occur. Often, long hours of work are required to restore services after an outage. The environment in the field after an event like a severe storm may be dangerous. Yet, our crews always answer the call. Our office staff willingly puts in long hours to support the efforts. Everyone helps. And they do it gladly, because we understand how much you rely on the services we provide. They're essential, as is our commitment to you.

Our investment in not only expanding our services but also in maintaining existing infrastructure is significant and ongoing. The mission that began with construction of the first telephone lines continues. We believe in you, and our community. We prosper together. Regardless of the challenges, we embrace our commitment to serving you.

Everyone at WCTEL is proud of our heritage, a sentiment we wish to carry over to future generations that will continue to provide you the communication tools needed to thrive. Thank you for letting us be part of this community. 

The West Carolina Tel Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by West Carolina Telephone, © 2021. 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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On the Cover:



A Memorial Day tribute to Abbeville's Thomas Dry Howie. He was dubbed the "Major of St Lo" for his sacrifice during WWII.
See story Page 13.

West Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative Board Member Elections for 2021

At the Annual Meeting, scheduled for August 16, 2021, an election will elect three members for the Board of Directors. The three seats up for election this year are due to normal rotations as per the bylaws and are as follows:

Area 3 – Donalds

Area 5 – Antreville/Lowndesville

Area 8 – North McCormick

The three directors who currently hold these positions all plan to seek re-election.

A nominating committee will be appointed and shall select one or more members from each of these three areas to be nominated to the board. If you wish to notify the nominating committee of your interest in serving on the board, you may provide the company CEO a letter of intent which can be turned into any of the company offices during regular business hours no later than 5 p.m. on May 28, 2021. Materials on qualifications and how to file are also available upon

request from any of WCTEL offices. Please remember you must be a member from the area where the vacancy is occurring and meet the other qualifications outlined in the bylaws.

A person not nominated by the nominating committee may file as a petition candidate, which is more specifically described in the bylaws. In accordance with the bylaw requirements, petition candidates will have a period following the nominating committee's meeting to file as a petition candidate and still be listed on the election ballot provided they have met the bylaw qualifications to be a board member. Petitions must be received no later than 5 p.m. on June 29, 2021.

If you have any questions, you are encouraged to contact the CEO, Jeff Wilson at 864-446-2111.

This information is for notification of the process for board election only and is NOT the notice of the Annual Meeting.



Welcome to our team

Please welcome the newest WCTEL employee. **Drayton Epps** is a Network Ops Field Tech. He is from Abbeville, South Carolina, and lives in Anderson with his wife, Lauren, three dogs and two cats. Epps enjoys fishing and being out on the lake, and he loves Gamecock football.



**Know what's below.
Call before you dig.**

Marvelous vistas

Rhododendron make summertimes scenic

Story by ANNE P. BRALY

Climb to the top of Roan Mountain, a 5-mile ridgetop along the Appalachian Trail, in the month of June, and something magical happens. The view, normally green with vegetation, turns into a blanket of crimson as the rhododendron opens in full bloom.

“The views are spectacular — and that’s an understatement,” says Keith Kelley, ranger for the Cherokee National Forest, Watauga District.

It’s this view that people have been traveling to experience for generations, according to Jennifer Bauer. She is the author of three books about Roan Mountain. The most recent is “Roan Mountain: A Passage of Time.”

As early as the 1700s, botanists made their way up the mountain range to study

the flora and fauna. In 1794, Andre Micheaux discovered alpine species rarely found outside of the New England and Canadian latitudes. Five years later, John Fraser hiked up the mountain, collecting specimens of rhododendron and noting the existence of the fir tree we now know as the Fraser fir. And yet another early explorer was Elisha Mitchell, for whom Mount Mitchell is named.

But it wasn’t until the magnificent Cloudland Hotel opened high atop Roan Mountain that it became known to the general public and word of its rhododendron — the largest proliferation of wild rhododendron in the world — spread across the South and beyond. Today, little remains of the Cloudland other than a forest service marker providing information

about the hotel’s glorious heyday. But people continue to come to see the magnificent gardens tended by Mother Nature. Sometimes too many people, Kelley adds, so he offers a suggestion should you go.

“South of Carver’s Gap is an area known as the Rhododendron Gardens, which you can drive to, park and hike from there,” he says. “There is a small user fee you have to pay to enter the area, but it is well worth it. That area is accessed by turning south at Carver’s Gap.”

Bauer’s attachment to “The Roan,” as she calls it, began in college when she was a student at East Tennessee State University. Her botany professor introduced her to The Roan, and the rest, as they say, is history. She’s now been with Tennessee State Parks for 38 years, the first 21 of which were spent working as an interpretive ranger at Roan Mountain State Park. The position enabled her to conduct research in an effort to learn more about the natural history of The Roan and its people. Bauer is now the park ranger at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park in Elizabethton, Tennessee.

Roan’s highlands, which reach up to 6,285 feet at its peak, is where you’ll find the Rhododendron Gardens — toward the west end of the highlands at the end of a U.S. Forest Service road that turns off from Carver’s Gap at the North Carolina/Tennessee state line.

“When they are in full bloom, you see a sea of crimson flowers in areas where there are not many spruce and fir trees popping up among them,” Bauer says. “But even with the trees, it’s a beautiful sight. In other areas of the mountain, you’ll walk through areas that are in different stages of transition between balds to forests. In these areas the rhododendron reaches for the sun and blooms among the spruce and firs. All of these unique habitats present a feeling of great beauty and a sense of visiting an enchanted forest.”

Any time of year is worth visiting, Kelley notes. “But in June, the rhododendron are in bloom, along with some of the other vegetation, which offers incredible, breathtaking scenery.” 

Where does Roan Mountain get its name?

Some say the name refers to the reddish color of the mountain when rhododendron comes into bloom in early summer or when the mountain ash berries appear in autumn. But, according to the United States Department of Agriculture, there’s another theory. Some say it comes from Daniel Boone’s roan-colored horse, because the man and his horse were frequent visitors to the area.





Grow it yourself

Rhododendron grows best in cooler climates and acidic soil — definitely not the hard-packed red clay found throughout the South. There are hybrid varieties, though, that have been developed for the southern garden. But that's no guarantee they will survive. Rhododendrons do not like high heat and wet soil. However, if you're willing to try, here are some tips from Southern Living.

- **Start with heat-tolerant plants.**
- **Pay attention to the soil and have it tested for acidity. Also, plant your rhododendron in an area that drains quickly and contains lots of organic matter, such as chopped dead leaves, cow manure and ground bark. Again, no clay.**
- **If your ground is flat, plant the rhododendron in a raised bed.**
- **Finally, choose a location that is lightly shaded in the afternoon and shielded from strong winds.**

Balding

The Appalachian Trail travels along the highest ridges of the Roan Mountain range, which separates Tennessee and North Carolina. A portion of the highlands is a red spruce and Fraser fir forest. Other areas of The Roan are described as "bald" communities. Just as the name implies, balds are areas on mountaintops where the forest ends and thick vegetation of native grasses and/or shrubs begins. One of the most popular areas along the entire Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia is the portion that crosses the balds of Roan Mountain, says Jennifer Bauer, former ranger at Roan Mountain State Park and a board member of Friends of Roan Mountain.

How the balds developed is anyone's guess, but scientists now believe they may have formed during the last ice age when constant winds and freezing temperatures caused trees to make a hasty retreat down the mountaintop. Mammoths and other beasts acted as Mother Nature's personal weed eaters, keeping the balds grazed. Now that the woolly beasts are gone and temperatures have warmed, balds are beginning to grow some "hair." But Roan Mountain's balds still shine. Among the most popular are the balds starting at Carver's Gap and going north.

They are, in order:

- **Round Bald**
- **Jane Bald**
- **Grassy Ridge**
- **Yellow Mountain**
- **Little Hump Mountain**
- **Hump Mountain**



WCTEL's Carter Burton checks schematics as crew members configure equipment.



Lineman Clayton Scott attaches a fiber line to one of Blue Ridge Electric's power poles.

Powerful partnership

WCFIBER service helps Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative members shine

Story and Photography by ANDREA AGARDY

The WCFIBER community is poised to welcome thousands of new customers to the family, thanks to a recent partnership with Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative.

The two cooperatives teamed up to offer high-speed internet service to families and businesses across the Blue Ridge service area. With nearly 68,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers spread across an 1,800-square-mile footprint, Blue Ridge Electric is the fourth-largest cooperative in South Carolina. It provides electricity to Anderson, Greenville, Oconee and Pickens counties, along with a small sliver of Spartanburg County.

“This is a long-term project, but we will

eventually have the opportunity to provide most of Blue Ridge’s customers with internet service,” says Shannon Sears, director of commercial operations for WCFIBER, a subsidiary of WCTEL. “This has the potential to more than double the size of our customer base.”

JOINING FORCES

The services now available to Blue Ridge customers, including phone and TV in addition to high-speed internet, come as the result of careful consideration. Blue Ridge spent two years studying the potential project. As part of that research, it learned that many of its customers were not satisfied with their current options for

internet service, with reliability issues and insufficient bandwidth ranking high on their list of concerns.

“Blue Ridge did a survey before they decided to take this on to see what the appetite was and if people would really benefit from it,” Sears says. “They had an overwhelming response of, ‘Yes!’”

Blue Ridge CEO Jim Lovinggood and Jeff Wilson, his WCFIBER counterpart, have known one another for years. They kept in touch as WCFIBER embarked on a partnership with the city of Newberry to extend fiber internet service to residents and businesses there. That successful fiber rollout sparked conversations between the two executives about how collaboration could benefit both their cooperatives.

While it was clear there was ample demand for dependable high-speed internet among Blue Ridge’s customer base, neither cooperative could afford to embark on the expensive and time-consuming endeavor alone. But together, they could provide the service the community was craving.

SAVING DOLLARS MAKES SENSE

As partners, the cooperatives will share costs and responsibilities. Blue Ridge will use its existing utility poles and infrastructure to build the network. WCFIBER is responsible for the fiber from the pole to each customer's building, as well as for all of the equipment inside those homes and businesses. WCFIBER will bill for these services independently.

Expanding the network to Blue Ridge's service area eliminates a lot of the risk usually associated with rolling out service to a new area. The partnership is a signal to Blue Ridge customers that WCFIBER is a trusted provider, saving the cooperative the time and expense often necessary to earn the confidence of potential customers.

"This co-op is already a well-established provider of broadband," Lovinggood says. "Its employee team has a proven record of accomplishment in delivering high-speed internet service to rural areas, coupled with impeccable customer service."

Blue Ridge is not just connecting its customers to a service they want. By becoming part of WCFIBER's network, they expect to enhance Blue Ridge's own operations over time. Access to fast and reliable broadband service will allow for new technologies that can improve electric-service dependability, along with power-cost efficiencies and more.

SLOW AND STEADY

With such a massive footprint to cover, the two co-ops will break the expansion into multiple projects and complete them over a number of years. "We plan to keep chipping away until the time that everyone who needs high-speed internet will have it," Lovinggood says. "Step by step, we're going to get there."

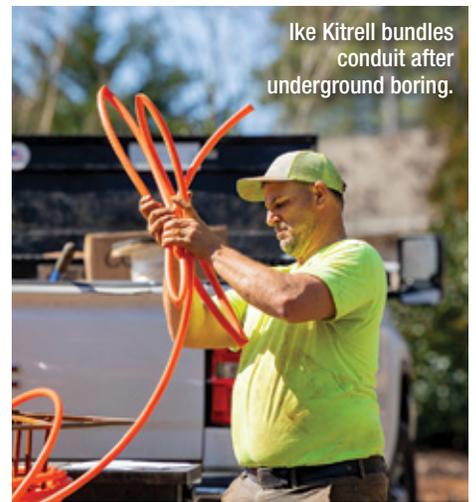
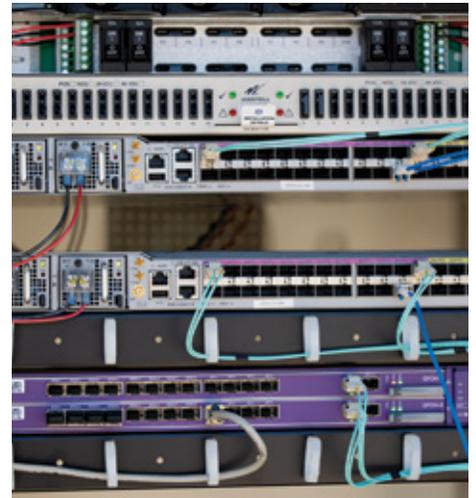
Construction plans come together in phases, with areas where the interest level is highest at the top of the to-do list. Prospective customers can learn more by visiting gigupblueridge.com, where they can also get on the list for service by simply entering their names and addresses. "When we go to build in an area, we pull up that address list, and we contact those people," says Virginia Smith, marketing

representative for WCFIBER. "It makes it easier for them. They don't have to be checking the website constantly looking for updates. We contact them proactively when we come to their area."

BETTER TOGETHER

Not only does the partnership make sense from a financial standpoint, it also brought together two entities with complementary cultures and ideologies. Because both Blue Ridge and WCTEL are cooperatives, one of their core principles is dedication to making their communities better places to live, learn, work and raise families. By combining their resources to provide broadband service, which has never been more vital and in-demand, they can reach that goal more effectively and efficiently.

"Their company and ours share the same values in the way we approach customer service and service in general," Sears says. "This expansion will make our cooperative stronger and allow us to service our members well into the future. Part of our DNA is to serve underserved areas, and the Blue Ridge area is an underserved area for broadband. It's just a really, really good fit for us." 



Ike Kitrell bundles conduit after underground boring.



Crew members Kal Thompson, left, and Joel Powell cut segments of fiber to length before making connections.

Final cut

How the freedom of the internet is transforming filmmaking

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Some filmmakers learn their craft by making home movies in the backyard. Others go to film school. Madelaine Turner likes to say she got her education on YouTube.

“That’s essentially where I got my film degree,” she says. “Movies were my first love, but filmmaking wasn’t something I pursued for a long time. Until quarantine started.”

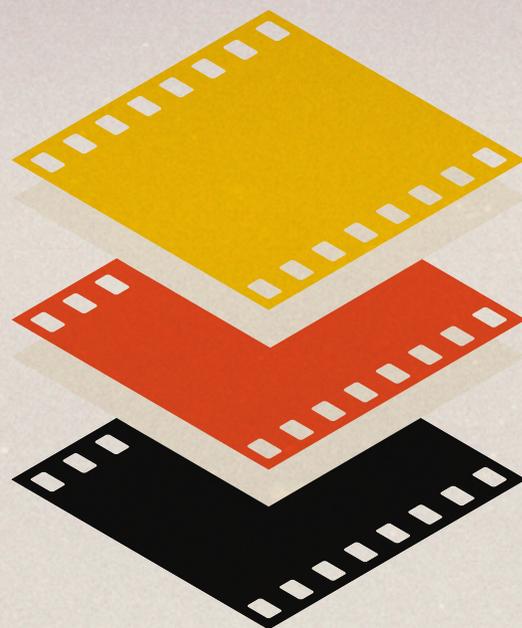
At 27 years old, the California native considers herself a senior by the standard of apps like TikTok. Of the app’s 500 million active users, nearly half are estimated to be in their teens and early 20s.

Originally, Turner’s quick videos were just a way to stay connected with her younger siblings. But she began to view the platform as a way to genuinely flex her creative muscle after a positive response to her Wes Anderson tribute video, “The Anderson Guide to Surviving a Global Pandemic,” filmed using only objects she had in her apartment.

“It gives you really specific boundaries with the content you’re allowed to create, which is 59 seconds,” she says. “So the challenge and excitement as a storyteller, director and creator is getting your point across and making those 59 seconds really enjoyable for your audience.”

Within those confines, Turner has explored her wide-ranging creative interests, from short films paying homage to Jane Austen costume dramas and French heist movies to abstract dream sequences and a cyberpunk take on “The Wizard of Oz.” Each new style gives her a chance to learn more about the filmmaking process both during and after filming.

“I’d never really used a green screen or After Effects before,” she says. “Now, taking on a new genre is really exciting because it allows me to push the boundaries of what I know how to do and challenges me to figure out how I can convey this effectively without having a whole production crew.”



Her growth as a filmmaker hasn’t gone unnoticed. As a freelance screenwriter, Turner has been able to point to her online portfolio and hundreds of thousands of followers to build connections within the movie industry. And thanks to the algorithms of apps like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, more people are discovering her work every day.

“It allows you to come across content from someone with virtually no following,” Turner says. “And from my perspective, I was putting my stuff out there and very quickly engaging an audience that gave me the permission to go bigger, further and more creative.”

That audience is one of the reasons Turner doesn’t expect she’ll ever stop making short-form videos online, even as she pursues her larger filmmaking dreams. The real-time feedback she receives on those platforms has already shaped her as a filmmaker and may come to shape the industry itself.

“A traditional filmmaker might go years in between films, whereas on TikTok you get this microenvironment of trying new things and getting that quick feedback,” she says.

“So I think I’ve been lucky to hyper-develop my style as a filmmaker because of that feedback loop. Hopefully I can be part of a generation of filmmakers that is able to bridge that gap between the internet and the mainstream.”



Madelaine Turner puts her spin on genres ranging from French heist movies to cyberpunk.



Long distance

For every film festival that was able to pivot to digital in 2020, there were many more that had to be canceled altogether. With so much of the industry on hold, a team of five cinephiles in Brooklyn started the entirely online Long Distance Film Festival, harnessing the power of broadband to give rural and urban filmmakers around the world an outlet for their creativity.

"There was a certain freedom to starting an all-online festival," says Festival Director Elias ZX. "It was much cheaper than doing it in person. We didn't sell tickets and had unlimited capacity so friends, family and fans of the filmmakers were able to join from around the globe and watch the festival in its entirety."

To pull it off, the team partnered with the independent Spectacle Theater and Kinoscope to stream its 15 selected short films to hundreds of viewers around the world. Plans for a second edition of the festival are already underway, with submissions open for 2021.



Industry standard



Oxford Film Festival Executive Director Melanie Addington was making last-minute arrangements for the Mississippi-based event when the state's governor banned gatherings of more than 100 people. Using Eventive's brand-new online festival platform, she quickly pivoted to take the event virtual.

"We were one of the first virtual festivals with Eventive and had to learn a lot very quickly, mostly that a lot of our community doesn't have good internet access," she says. "That was restricting in some ways, but it also expanded who could see them to a new audience."

Moving forward, Addington anticipates OFF will have a hybrid format, combining the accessibility of a virtual festival with the in-person experience of a live event.

"This will be what we do from here on out," she says. "Not everyone can travel to Oxford, but they can still take part in the experience. It makes absolute sense for this to become a standard in our industry."





HI! I'M AMANDA CLARK

In this column, you'll learn about technology and read simple tips to get the most out of your electronics. For more tips or help with your devices, be sure to read this column in future publications. I'm always happy to help!

DEVICE OF THE MONTH



Kindle Paperwhite

Do you want to do a bit of summer reading on the go, or is that stack of books by the bedside becoming unwieldy? Amazon's Kindle Paperwhite is a proven winner for digital books. The devices, easily held in one hand, have space for multiple books, offer screens readable even in bright sunlight and are designed for convenience. Amazon even touts the latest models as being waterproof.

Available from Amazon for \$129.99. Note this version includes ads on the device home screen.

Make the connection

WiFi links your devices to the internet

We search for it. We ask for it. Sometimes, we even share it. But what exactly is WiFi?

At its most basic, WiFi is a wireless networking standard that determines how devices communicate with one another. The term was developed by an international association of companies that emphasized security, reliability and interoperability. Now, everything from refrigerators and slow cookers to gaming consoles and streaming devices relies on WiFi connections and those standards.

So, that's the definition of what WiFi is. But what is it not? A WiFi connection alone isn't the internet. Instead, it's one route between your devices and the internet.

With WiFi, your devices are typically accessing a router that transmits and receives wireless signals. It's that router that has a physical link to the internet. It seems simple enough. Your devices transmit signals picked up by the WiFi router connected to the online world. Well, there are a few other points to consider. Not every WiFi router is equal.

WCTEL offers a worry free WiFi service that is managed 24/7 by WCTEL. The three WiFi options, starting at just \$4.95/month, are Standard, Extended, and Premium. These plans are designed to enable you to have the best WiFi experience possible no matter your home's

construction or size. Call us today to discuss the option that is best suited for you and your home!

A basic understanding of these WiFi standards can prove useful when connecting smart home gadgets like security cameras, light switches and more. Review the documentation for each device to make sure it's compatible with your WiFi setup.

POWER UP

Most computers and mobile devices can communicate through WiFi, giving you a reliable, wireless internet connection. There are some potential drawbacks, however, such as limited range, disruption by large metal objects — even something like a refrigerator — or stone walls.

It's always best to place your router as close as possible to the devices that need to connect. Generally, the center of a home is ideal. There are options, though, if obstructions block the signal or access is needed in multiple rooms. Extenders or WiFi systems that create a mesh of small connected WiFi access points throughout a house are among the possibilities.

And please remember one thing if your internet-connected devices seem to be lagging. A great trouble-shooting technique is to unplug your router, wait a minute and reconnect it. That won't solve every problem, but it's a great starting point. ☑



Lasting legacy

'Major of Saint-Lo' story still powerful in local lore

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Hometown heroes come in all shapes and sizes, but the memory of an Abbeville native son remains larger than life after more than 75 years.

Military legend enconces the story of Maj. Thomas Dry Howie, from The Citadel to Staunton Military Academy in Virginia to town centers in Abbeville and Saint-Lo in France. There are tributes from Hollywood and even the Abbeville Opera House.

Howie was killed in battle on July 17, 1944, as he led Allied forces determined to break through German lines at Saint-Lo. His nephew, Abbeville resident Thomas Dry Howie II, carries on his uncle's name, as well as service in the National Guard, and the Howie family keeps alive the story of the World War II hero who is still memorialized in Saint-Lo.

"It's humbling," says his namesake nephew, who often refers to his uncle as "The Major." "We didn't do anything, but he did, and we kind of got shot in the fracas. We have greatly benefited from his great legacy, and we are deeply proud of it."

In addition to Howie II, Thomas Dry "Tige" Howie III and his young son, Thomas Dry Howie IV, now carry on the lineage and name.

Maj. Howie's story continues on two continents after more than seven decades. The people of Saint-Lo, now a town of around 20,000 near the Normandy coast, revere him. The place was then a strategic lynchpin for Allied forces attempting to retake France and then-occupied Europe from Nazi Germany.

A Citadel graduate and National Guardsman, Howie led a battalion and spearheaded the Saint-Lo breakout that ultimately turned the tide of battle for the Allies. He died before reaching Saint-Lo, but

Tom Howie and family members during one of several trips to WWII memorial sites at Howie Circle in St. Lo, France.



Major Howie's headstone on the Abbeville square.

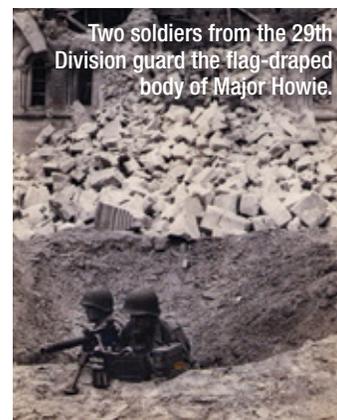
his troops carried his flag-draped body into the town and placed him on the fallen walls of a church there. "After five weeks, the total invasion force was still within 15 miles of the beach," Thomas Howie II says. "They were still in grave danger of being pushed back into the ocean, and that would've been a major failure."

Busts stand as monuments to the major in Saint-Lo and at the Staunton Military Academy in Virginia, where he was a teacher and coach. The Howie Carillon and Bell Tower stands watch at The Citadel, and a monument sits in front of the Abbeville County Courthouse.

And there have been other tributes. In 2018, local Abbeville playwright and radio personality Shelley Reid debuted a theatrical production

called "See You in Saint-Lo," which was reportedly the major's response to his superiors when he was asked to lead the offensive. Also, the protagonist of the 1998 Oscar-winning film "Saving Private Ryan" — Capt. John Miller, a citizen soldier who had been a teacher and coach before the war, and who was portrayed by actor Tom Hanks — is said to be loosely based on Howie.

"The writer called my cousin, Sally, and said, 'Did you see the movie about your dad?' She didn't know what he was talking about," Thomas Howie II says. "And he told her the character Tom Hanks played was based on the information they had read about the Major of Saint-Lo. He had been a teacher and a coach, just like my uncle." 📱



Two soldiers from the 29th Division guard the flag-draped body of Major Howie.



Perfectly pleasing peas

Enjoy a surprisingly flexible legume

If you're denying yourself the simple beauty of peas, it's time to rethink your weekly menu. Full of healthy benefits and flavor, they should be a part of everyone's diet.

Peas' nutrition profile includes manganese, protein, fiber, vitamin A and folate, with lots of lesser vitamins to boot. And their neutral flavor allows them to go from smoothies at breakfast to salads for lunch and pot pies for dinner. They're inexpensive and add a lot of texture and color to any plate.

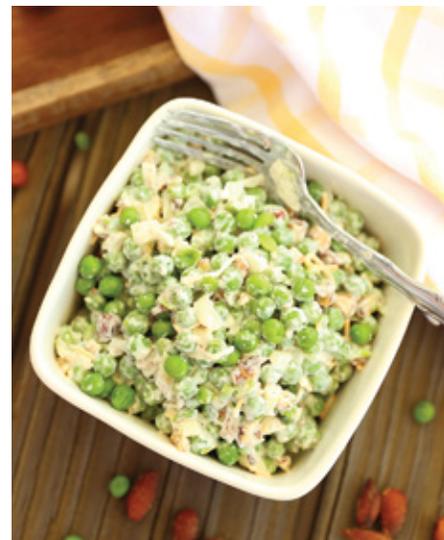
Try tossing them with pasta and a creamy Alfredo sauce. Or use peas as a topping for a baked potato with cheese and sour cream. You can also make an incredible pesto sauce for buttery rounds of crusty bread. Simply add a bag of

frozen peas to a handful of mint leaves and a half cup of Parmesan cheese, blend them together in a food processor and add olive oil as the machine is running until you get a smooth, thick consistency.

If you're lucky enough to have a garden full of the green pods filled with fresh peas, you've done yourself a favor. Just go outside and grab a handful of taste and nutrition. If not, grab a bag of frozen peas — they're just as good for you.



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



PEA SALAD WITH SMOKED ALMONDS

- 2 (16-ounce) packages frozen peas
- 6 ounces smoke-flavored almonds, finely chopped
- 1/2 a sweet onion or more, to taste, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise (reduced fat OK)
- 1/2 cup sour cream (light OK)
- Ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese

Place frozen peas in a colander and rinse them under cold water until thawed. Drain and transfer them to a large bowl. Add the almonds and onions. Mix well. Fold mayonnaise, sour cream and black pepper into the pea mixture until evenly coated. Transfer to a serving container and top with shredded cheese. Cover and refrigerate until serving. Before serving, you may want to blend cheese into the mixture, or leave it on top for a prettier presentation.





GREEN PEA BANANA SMOOTHIE

- 1/2 cup frozen green peas
- 1 frozen banana
- 1 cup spinach
- 4 mint leaves or more, to taste
- 1 1/2 cups almond milk
- 1 tablespoon almond butter, optional

Combine all ingredients in a blender. Blend until smooth, about 1 minute. Add more almond milk if needed to achieve your desired consistency.

CREAMY CHICKEN POT PIE

Peas add taste, color and texture to this creamy dish.

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes
- 1/2 cup cold buttermilk
- 1 or 2 tablespoons cold water
- 1 large egg, beaten, for the egg wash

For the pot pie filling:

- 1/4 cup unsalted butter
- 1/3 cup diced onion
- 2 medium carrots sliced (about 1 cup)
- 1 stalk celery sliced (about 1/2 cup)
- 2 cloves garlic minced
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 1/2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh Italian parsley
- 1 3/4 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 3 cups shredded chicken or turkey
- 1 cup frozen peas

First, make the pie dough. Combine the flour, sugar and salt in a large bowl. Add the cubed butter and toss to coat.

Dump the mixture out onto a clean surface and use a rolling pin to roll the butter into thin sheets, combining it with the flour. Use a bench scraper to scrape the rolling pin and to bring the mixture back into a pile as necessary. Continue until all of the butter is incorporated into the flour. The mixture will be very flaky. Return the mixture to the bowl and place it in the freezer for 15 minutes to chill the butter.

Remove from the freezer and add the buttermilk. Use a spoon, and then your hands, to stir the mixture until it comes together into a ball. If the mixture is too dry, add the water a tablespoon at a time. Divide the dough into 2 parts and flatten them into disks. Wrap each disk in plastic wrap and chill in the fridge while you make the filling.

To make the filling, heat the butter over medium-high heat in a large skillet. Add the onions, carrots, celery and garlic and cook until tender, stirring occasionally. Whisk in the flour, salt, black pepper, thyme, parsley, chicken broth and heavy cream. Whisk until there are no flour lumps, then simmer over medium-low heat for 10 minutes or until the sauce has thickened. Stir in the shredded chicken or turkey and frozen peas. Remove from heat and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Remove the pie dough from the refrigerator. On a lightly floured surface, use a rolling pin to roll out the dough into a 12-inch circle. Dough should be about 1/4 inch thick. Transfer the dough to a 9-inch pie pan. Pat with your fingers, making sure it is smooth. Trim the extra overhang of dough with a knife and discard.

Pour the filling into the dough-lined pie pan. Roll out the second disk of dough and carefully cover the pie. Trim the extra overhang off the sides. Seal the edges by crimping with a fork or your fingers. With a sharp knife, slice a few small slits in the center of the top crust. Using a pastry brush, brush the crust and edges with a beaten egg.

Bake for 45 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown. Cool for 10 minutes, allowing the filling to settle and thicken a bit. Cut into slices and serve.





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