

# CONNECTED

## Seasonal destination

Celebrating at the  
Newberry Opera House

**FRIENDLY  
FOLKS**

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**TRIMMING  
THE TREE**



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Rural broadband thrives in 2022

The commitment and professionalism of rural broadband providers creates lasting and substantive improvements, bringing essential services that bridge the gap in internet performance between rural and metropolitan areas. In many cases, NTCA members offer even more robust services than those available in larger cities.

In recent years, Congress has passed billions in funding for rural broadband. I was fortunate to attend a White House ceremony last year for the signing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which included over \$60 billion for broadband projects.

NTCA has worked to ensure this funding goes to communities that need it most, as well as to providers, such as yours, with a long history of servicing their neighbors with the highest-quality broadband.

While broadband expansion is a priority, we've continued our focus on advocacy, including working with the Federal Communications Commission to ensure the long-term viability of the Universal Service Fund. It's a program that helps Americans in hard-to-serve areas keep pace with services found in more densely populated communities.

We've also expanded our Smart Rural Community program to highlight the great things robust broadband access brings to rural America — it's not just cities that are "smart!" Over 240 providers are part of the program. Visit [smartruralcommunity.org](http://smartruralcommunity.org) for more information.

As we celebrate our wins from this year, we're looking forward to an even better 2023. 🍀

TO ALL WHO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

*Thank you*

FOR ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Fast internet access is essential for rural communities to thrive in a fast-changing, highly connected world.



*High-Speed Internet*



*Voice Communications*



*Videoconferencing*



*Telehealth*



*Business-level Data Tools*



*Online Education*



*Streaming Video & Music*

Professionals in your community make this possible — working daily to help you lead a better life.

*Thank you for all you do!*

# Business is booming

## Apps help small business owners thrive

Running a small business is no easy task. There's a long list of things to keep track of, from inventory and sales to payroll and budgeting. It can get overwhelming staying ahead of the curve.

Thankfully, there's a wide array of apps geared toward making the life of a small business owner easier. Listed below are some of the best apps in 2022 for small businesses.

### POINT OF SALE SYSTEMS

These systems allow small businesses to complete sales and ring up customers. According to NerdWallet, restaurants require POS systems that provide coordination and table management, while a retail store requires inventory management features.

**Square** — The POS offered by the financial tech company Square meets all these requirements and much more. Square is easy to use, offering transparent pricing, live support and compatibility with iPhone, iPad and Android devices. The first magnetic stripe credit card reader is free, and there is even a free plan available for small businesses that don't require advanced functions. While many payment processors have hidden monthly fees, Square doesn't charge by the month. Instead, you pay 2.6% + 10 cents for each credit card transaction for unlimited devices.

### ACCOUNTING AND BUDGETING

Accounting software helps small businesses that may not be able to hire a full-time, in-house accountant. With these apps, you can track profit margins, revenues, expenses and budgets to understand the health of your business.

**Intuit QuickBooks** — Intuit QuickBooks is the industry standard and leader for small business accounting software in 2022, according to NerdWallet. It offers a multitude of service tiers, so it can easily be scaled to the size of the business it serves. It is accessible anywhere from QuickBooks online to the cloud-based version. Some of QuickBooks' best features include a full suite of reports, double-entry accounting, ease of accessibility and sharing with outside accountants, live service bookkeeping support and easy mobile access. Pricing is \$25 a month with other monthly payment tiers (\$50, \$80 and \$180 respectively).

### PAYROLL

Paying employees on time is essential to operating a business. Extra help tracking hours and payments can allow small businesses owners to give attention to many other daily aspects of running their companies.



**Patriot Payroll** — While there are lots of payroll apps on the market, a majority of them are so high-priced that the cost outweighs the benefit of extra help for smaller companies. Patriot Payroll has an affordable price point — \$10 a month, plus \$4 an employee — while offering the same services and benefits as its more expensive counterparts. These services include a one-month free trial, HR support and coverage for up to 100 employees.

### INVENTORY

Tracking inventory is a crucial part of staying ahead of the curve for any business. It is no easy task without help, which is why large corporations dedicate entire teams and extensive software programs just for inventory.

**Sortly** — With built-in barcode scanning that can track stock across multiple warehouses, Sortly has everything you need to manage inventory on the go. It offers both barcode and QR code scanning, giving you the flexibility to use what works best for your business. It even has an offline mode, so a signal interruption won't slow you down. Keep scanning incoming and outgoing items and seamlessly sync up once you're back online. 📦

# Seasons of gratitude and progress

**G**reetings! I must admit, we are in my favorite time of the year. The temperatures have dropped a bit; there's just enough chill in the air to need a jacket. Football season is well underway, kids are going to homecoming, and the holiday season is ahead of us. Halloween. Thanksgiving. Christmas. New Year's. All of it wrapped up into one cozy season, with an undercurrent of togetherness and gratitude.



**JEFF WILSON**  
Chief Executive Officer

And there is so much to be grateful for.

I'm grateful for my WCTEL family. In October, our employees and their families came together for a tailgating party during an Erskine College game. It's a Saturday afternoon filled with good old-fashioned fun — Frisbees, lawn games, barbecue and football. Whenever I see our extended WCTEL family, I'm taken aback by what we collectively represent: citizens, volunteers, sons, daughters, parents, neighbors, friends and leaders, with WCTEL being our common thread. Each employee possesses a spirit of service and dedication to our customers and members — and each other. And when combined, we are indeed a family and a powerful force for good in our communities. The entire board of directors and I do not take that lightly. We bear great responsibility in taking care of them, so they can take care of you.

I'm also grateful for our communities. Make no mistake: this pocket of South Carolina is colorful, vibrant and vital. From our beautiful lakes and campgrounds, such as Hester's Bottom, which boasts breathtaking views and tranquility, to community festivals and celebrations, this area is alive. And, we're honored to keep it connected with high-speed fiber internet.

Our board of directors is continually looking at ways to bring more value to our employees and communities. One example of this is our new Volunteer Time Off policy, which grants each employee two days of paid leave to volunteer and serve. We had employees recently volunteer at the Second Harvest Food Bank, and this holiday season, many of them will be supporting a number of organizations throughout our service area that provide goods and services to families in need during the holiday season. Their service isn't limited to organizations, though. In short, we're challenging them to help where help is needed. As an organization, we support many initiatives. But when you combine that support with the boots-on-the-ground service of our people, that's where the real impact is made.

Lastly, I'm grateful for progress. When I think back to what telephone service did for our communities, it was a game changer. Now, I step back and I look at our 100% fiber network, and I wonder, "How could we possibly top this?" We have campgrounds and state parks with state-of-the-art, blazing-fast internet. We have remote lakes that are not just beautiful and full of fish, but they're connected to the world through internet. We have some of the best restaurants in the state right here at home that run on our service, making credit card transactions seamless and post-COVID touchless menus a breeze. We have families moving in from out of state, because they saw a home for sale on Zillow that came with acreage and fiber internet. We've had Realtors tell us that fiber sells homes. I contend that it doesn't sell homes; it makes a life. Remote careers can be had right here that would not have previously been possible. Telemedicine is connecting our veterans to their doctors.

The progress has no end. We are continually exploring ways to improve our customer experience, better our communities and innovate. Who knows where we'll be in 10 years? Chances are, we'll have gone very far ... without leaving home.

And THAT is the beauty of being a part of this family. YOU are a part of our family. Your future generations are, too. Together, we are building today and connecting it to tomorrow. [📧](#)

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

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#### On the Cover:



The historic Newberry Opera House will be a popular destination this season for holiday performances and Christmas concerts. See story Page 9.

Photo by Mary Alex Kopp

# Highlights from the 2022 Annual Meeting

“This past year tells a rich story — one of nimbleness, flexibility, innovation, growth, resiliency and spirit,” WCTEL’s CEO Jeff Wilson says. “As a cooperative, we’re more innovative than ever before. And we’re even more grateful.”

On June 27, WCTEL’s final copper customer was transitioned to fiber. This past year, the cooperative built 850 miles of fiber, adding 5,245 customers. The total fiber investment is \$200 million.

“Through smart and intentional growth, coupled with financial stewardship, we are setting our members, customers and employees up for a future of not only sustainability, but one where our communities and employees can thrive,” Wilson says.

## STRONG COMMUNITIES

In May, WCTEL opened two Veterans Telemedicine Centers in Abbeville and Greenwood. The result of a partnership between the Veterans Administration, Abbeville County Library System, Greenwood County Veterans Center and WCTEL, these centers are bridging the geographical divide by creating a digital gateway to veterans’ medical teams.

“We believe connected communities are stronger communities,” WCTEL Board President Wes McAllister says. “That became more apparent the last two years, when schools, businesses and meetings turned virtual. As a response, we’ve placed hot spots throughout our service territory to ensure everyone has access to high-speed WiFi.”



LEFT: WCTEL employees lend a hand working together for the benefit of the community.

BELOW: WCTEL Board Members participating in the WCTEL Annual Meeting.

WCFIBER gives back with gift bags during a Veterans Appreciation Day in July.

WCTEL employees greet attendees at the Abbeville Spring Festival.

This spring WCTEL hosted digital literacy classes for adults in Greenwood, and more are planned in other communities. Board members authorized a return of \$2.3 million in capital credits for 2022, bringing the 10-year total returned to our members to \$23.3 million.

“This growth allows us to continue to serve you, take care of our communities and be a cooperative force for support, service and goods. It allows us to partner and invest in our communities to ensure their sustainability and vitality,” McAllister says. “After all, Abbeville County, McCormick County and Starr-Iva are home to many of you. And they’re home to WCTEL.”

WCTEL’s expansion to WCFIBER and Upcountry Fiber will bring fiber internet to previously unserved and underserved areas. “We’re answering a need, and we’re investing in those communities,” Wilson says. “High-speed internet is life-changing, and we take our responsibility as a rural broadband provider seriously. It’s not just our mission — it’s our purpose.”



## Happy holidays!

In observance of the holidays, our offices will be closed on the following dates:

- **Thanksgiving: Thursday, Nov. 24, and Friday, Nov. 25**
- **Christmas: Friday, Dec. 23, and Monday, Dec. 26**
- **New Year’s Day: Monday, Jan. 2**

# Don't get your tinsel in a tangle

Story by ANNE BRALY

**D**ecorating the Christmas tree is a beloved holiday tradition, but before you can hang the ornaments, take photos of the grandkids beneath its boughs or open presents beside it, you've got to find one.

Visiting a Christmas tree farm can put you in the spirit of the season as you make family memories while supporting a local business. And you'll bring home the absolute freshest trees, wreaths and greenery possible, so everything will last much longer.

"The whole idea of starting a family tradition is about creating a fun environment that the whole family can participate in," says Greg Shell, who, along with his wife, Weeta, established Shell's Christmas Tree Farm in 1988 on their property in Tuscumbia, Alabama. "It gives people a chance to slow down and spend time together creating special memories."

It's a family business for Greg and Weeta, whose two sons, Aaron and Chad, have helped out on the farm since they were 8 years old. Now grown men, they bring their own families to help when the Christmas tree season is in full swing. With more than 3,000 trees growing on the 44-acre farm, would-be buyers have plenty of options. Available species include Virginia pine, Leyland cypress, variegated Leylands, Carolina sapphires and blue ice cypress. Also, the Shells bring in freshly cut Fraser firs from the Blue Ridge Mountains and sell them starting Thanksgiving Day.

Shoppers receive tags with their names, and the Shells provide bow saws for those looking to cut their own trees. Or participants can simply tie their tags to trees, which staff will cut and then measure and shake before drilling holes in their bottoms and netting them for transport. Prices start at \$8 per foot.

But don't stop with the tree. Enjoy a warm cup of apple cider, visit with Santa, let the kids play in their own area, and enjoy the bonfire. There are also food trucks and a huge room filled with holiday greenery. "We're all about offering something for families to do together," Greg says. "And we're now seeing fourth-generation families visit our farm. It's pretty cool to see families want to continue to the next generation."

For more information, visit [shellschristmastreefarm.com](http://shellschristmastreefarm.com).

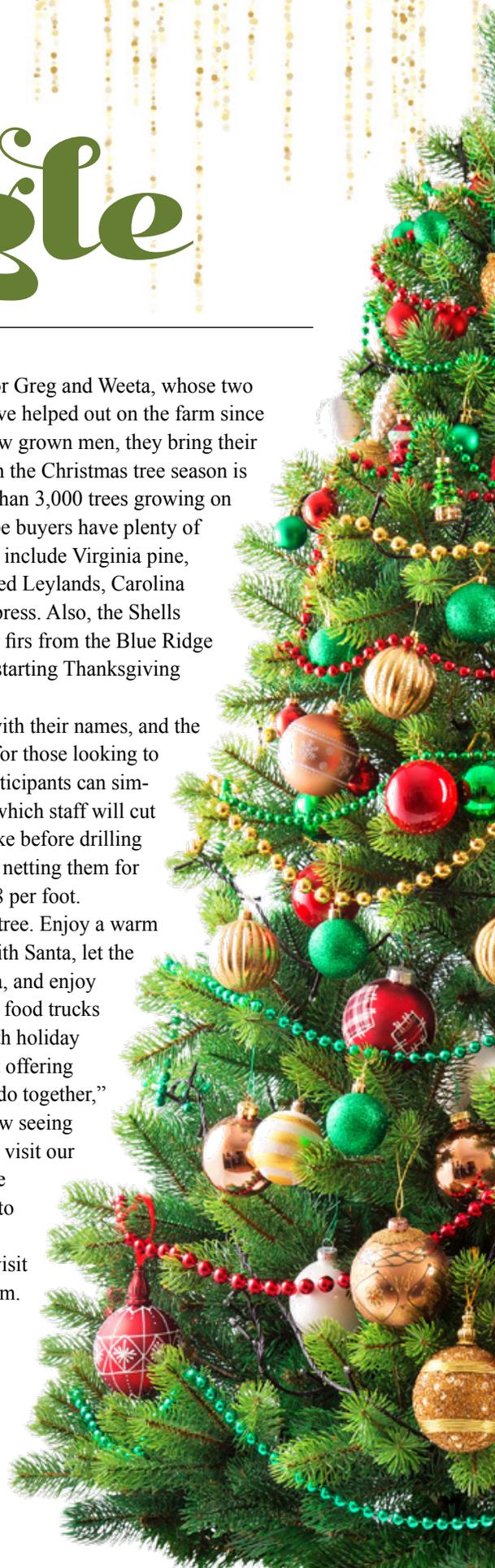
Get in the holiday spirit — visit a Christmas tree farm. You'll have a chance to make family memories, possibly sample tasty treats and return home with a fresh, beautiful tree.



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## TREE FARMS ACROSS THE SOUTH

**Sycamore Springs Christmas Tree Farm, Jamestown, Tennessee** — White and Scotch pines, Norway spruce and Leyland cypress. Search the Gingerbread Trail through the forest for the runaway gingerbread men, explore the Tree Treasure Maze to find the real treasure of Christmas. Browse in The Treehouse gift shop and enjoy homemade cookies, hot chocolate and apple cider. Full details are online at [sycamorespringsfarmtn.com](http://sycamorespringsfarmtn.com).

**Roberts Family Farm, Guston, Kentucky** — White pine, Fraser fir and balsam fir, plus local crafts and Momma Rob's Bakery. Learn more at [robertsfamilyfarmky.com](http://robertsfamilyfarmky.com).

**Lebanon Christmas Tree Farm, Ridgeville, South Carolina** — Leyland cypress, Carolina sapphire, spruce pine and Virginia pine. Also, hayrides, a barrel train ride for the kiddies and more. There's also an on-site restaurant, The Farmer's Daughter. Learn more at [lebanonchristmastree.com](http://lebanonchristmastree.com).

**Thornhill Farm Christmas Trees, Pisgah, Alabama** — Leyland cypress and white pines. Enjoy hot chocolate or warm cider while they cut, shake and bag your chosen tree for you. Online: [thornhillchristmastrees.com](http://thornhillchristmastrees.com).

**Green Cedar Tree Farm, Nicholasville, Kentucky** — Freshly cut Fraser firs and blue spruce trees from the Blue Ridge Mountains available on Saturday, Nov. 26, for the farm's annual Green Cedar Christmas, a festival with free hot cocoa, lessons in making holiday wreaths, farm animal encounters and live Christmas music. Also, find the perfect spot to get your family picture taken for your photo Christmas cards. Any trees left over will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. Details online at [greencedarfarm.com](http://greencedarfarm.com).

**Turkey Creek Christmas Tree Farm, McCormick, South Carolina** — White pine, Virginia pine, Leyland cypress, Eastern red cedar, blue ice cypress and Carolina sapphire. Play area for the kids. Check out the farm's Facebook page for the latest offerings. Learn more at [turkeycreekchristmastreefarm.com](http://turkeycreekchristmastreefarm.com). 📱

## Tips for a fresh tree

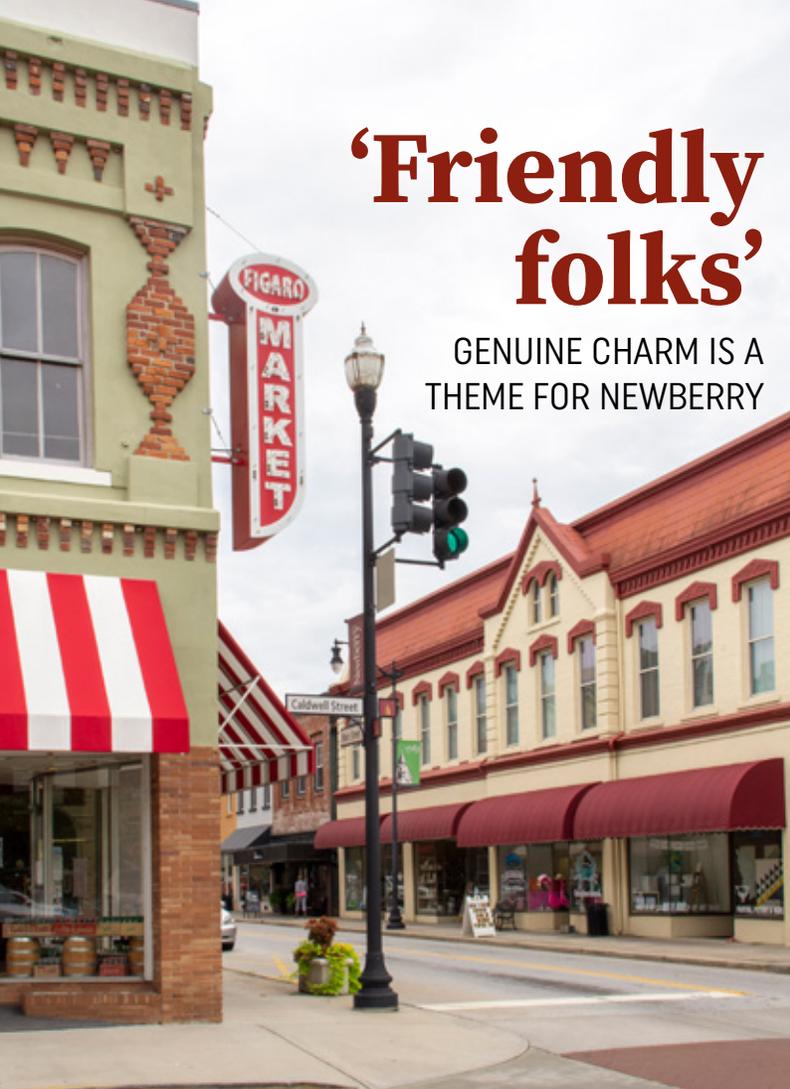
Naturally, a newly cut tree is going to be fresher than one that's been on a lot for a while, but it still needs some TLC. Here are some tips to help your tree last the season:

- 🌲 Start with a healthy, vibrant tree. You're going to get that from a tree farm, but be sure to trim any lower or dead branches.
- 🌲 Make a clean, straight cut across the bottom. Most tree farms will do this for you and drill a hole in the bottom if you have the kind of tree stand that needs one.
- 🌲 Water, water, water. Get the tree in water as soon as you come home and continue to water every day.
- 🌲 Keep the tree cool and away from any heat source that will dry it out.
- 🌲 Use LED lights. They don't get as hot, though they won't give the traditional light you may desire.
- 🌲 After Christmas, recycle your Christmas tree. Many towns offer a free service that turns them into mulch.

©Timmy/Adobe Stock

# ‘Friendly folks’

GENUINE CHARM IS A THEME FOR NEWBERRY



LEFT: Figaro Market features a wide array of gourmet grocery goods.

BELOW: Newberry Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Michelle Long took the helm of the organization in 2016.



Photography by Matt Ledger

The words “A Fiber Connected Community – Powered by WCFIBER” appear prominently on the home page of the city of Newberry website. “We have a lot of folks coming in looking for a place to live, and we have people looking for seasons — a lot of people from up north, or from Florida. And we’re able to say, ‘Hey, we’ve got fiber, and the service is incredible.’ That’s been a great selling point,” Michelle says.

WCFIBER has certainly helped generate attention among homebuyers as construction continues at Newberry Landing, the city’s first new subdivision project since the 1980s. Downtown businesses also have reaped the benefits of high-speed fiber since its arrival late last year. “It was just a fabulous thing when they committed to connecting the city of Newberry,” Michelle says. “It was huge from an economic development standpoint. It’s great for our existing businesses and for attracting new businesses. We have one furniture store called EuroLux Home — they have a storefront — but well over 90% of their business is done online, and they couldn’t be happier.”

The chamber goes to great lengths to promote local businesses and the farmers market through its website, [newberrycountychamber.com](http://newberrycountychamber.com), and its social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram.

The chamber’s online presence also includes a weekly e-newsletter. In addition to providing news and information, the newsletter acts as an interactive sounding board where business owners have the chance to voice the topics they want to explore. The chamber, in turn, hosts workshops featuring guest speakers who are experts on the topics of interest. “We’ll have workshops talking about insurance or overtime policies or we’ll put human resource managers together from local businesses so they can network and discuss trends — that sort of thing,” Michelle says. “We stress the importance of businesses communicating with us so we can get that feedback and build strength in numbers. Our goal is to be an entire chamber of people speaking with one voice.” 

Story by LAZ DENES

There’s an unmistakable sense of humility when Michelle Long, executive director of the Newberry County Chamber of Commerce, talks about the organization she first joined in 2012.

“We’re small, but we’re trying to be mighty,” says the lifelong resident of the county who hails from the town of Prosperity. This might register as a slight understatement, considering the chamber today stands roughly 350 members strong and has been a resounding voice representing businesses and economic interests throughout Newberry County for more than a century.

Michelle assumed the role of executive director in 2016 and oversees the chamber’s vast portfolio of programs and events, including leadership, young professionals and mentoring groups for adults as well as high school students. That program lineup includes the Grow Newberry Farmers Market, regular Business Over Breakfast meetings, the annual Ag + Art Tour of Newberry County, the Christmas Tour of Homes and A Newberry New Year’s celebration.

The Newberry Chamber also runs the county’s tourism center, playing a pivotal role in attracting new residents to the area. In addition to the county’s rich history and scenic beauty, one of the major selling points, Michelle says, is the availability of high-speed fiber internet.

# Raise the curtain

## The historic legacy of the Newberry Opera House

Story by ANNE BRALY

In an age when viewers can take in entertainment from the palms of their hands or enjoy live performances from the comfort of a family room, people continue to fill the seats at the Newberry Opera House. That tradition lives on with a full schedule for the 2022-23 season.



Anne Smith

“And we continue to grow every year, adding shows and expanding beyond our tower into the community,” says Anne Smith, interim executive director of the historic opera house.

Internet from WCFIBER is vital to the opera house’s success, opening an avenue for spreading the word about new performances and sold-out shows and any information necessary for the organization’s survival. “The world is moving in the direction of digital advertising, and the benefits of having fast, reliable internet are immeasurable,” Anne says. “We must get the word out about our season, and WCFIBER provides us the tools to do so.”

### A HISTORIC CULTURAL HUB

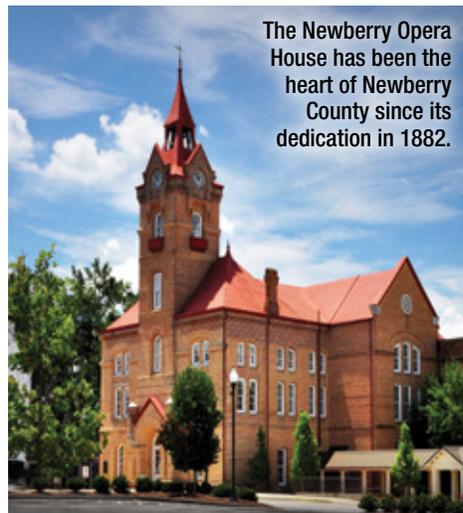
The McKibben Street structure, which local contractors built in 1882 using granite from a nearby quarry, is now solely the home of the Newberry Opera House, but it once housed governmental agencies — a police station with three jail cells, a fire station and a clerk’s office. As a venue for entertainment, it featured a ticket office, greenroom, cloakroom and three dressing rooms. It stands as a beacon in the historic downtown with its 130-foot-high clock tower crowned with a weathervane shaped like a gar, one of many fish species in the nearby Saluda River.

In its heyday as the go-to place for entertainment in late 1800s and early to mid 1900s — long before the advent of modern movie theater complexes — the

opera house showcased plays from touring companies and actors, including Tallulah Bankhead, Tex Ritter and members of the Barrymore family, according to historical records.

But its popularity as an entertainment venue fell by the wayside around 1959, when the concept of modern theaters took hold. The doors of the opera house closed, and thoughts of demolition took root. A group of concerned citizens, members of the Newberry Historical Society, raised the funds needed to renovate the crumbling structure and bring it up to code. They married history with modern construction, including state-of-the-art sound systems, lighting, comfort and an orchestra pit that easily accommodates Broadway and operatic productions.

The new Newberry Opera House opened in 1998, boasting 426 seats, and has played host to renowned performers like Willie Nelson, Roberta Flack, Wynton Marsalis, Michael Bolton and Olivia Newton-John. Local acts also offer a variety of artistic genres, from bluegrass to ballet, making the Newberry Opera House a place for more than just opera. “It’s wonderful that small venues are able to have headline productions,” Anne says. “It makes for a wonderful evening.”

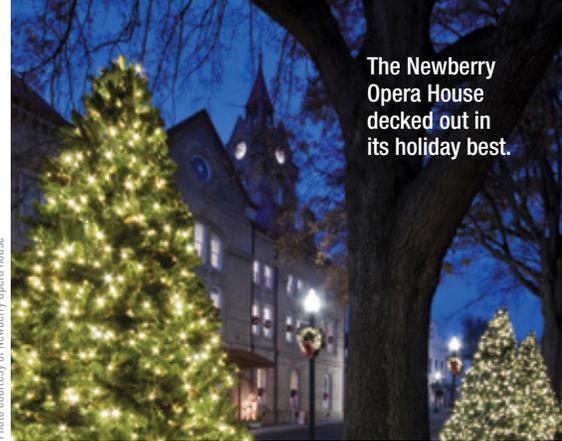


The Newberry Opera House has been the heart of Newberry County since its dedication in 1882.

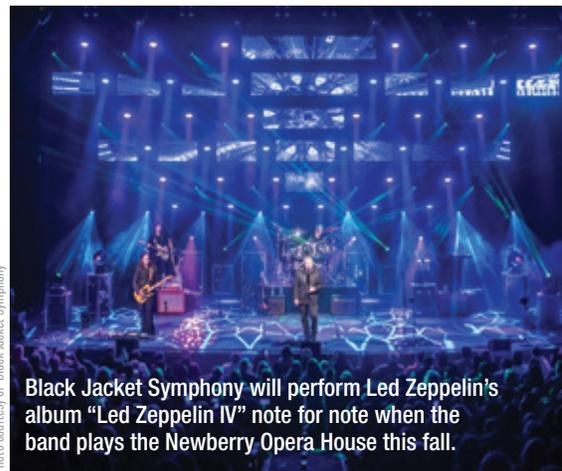
Photo courtesy of Newberry Opera House

Photo courtesy of Black Jacket Symphony

Photo courtesy of Newberry Opera House



The Newberry Opera House decked out in its holiday best.



Black Jacket Symphony will perform Led Zeppelin’s album “Led Zeppelin IV” note for note when the band plays the Newberry Opera House this fall.

### Holiday season at the Opera House

Newberry Opera House hosts more than 100 performances annually. Here’s the schedule of some major productions during the holiday season.

**Nov. 5** — Gaelic Storm, an Irish band featured in “Titanic”

**Nov. 19** — Black Jacket Symphony featuring “Led Zeppelin IV”

**Nov. 20** — Grammy award winner Ruben Studdard, winner of “American Idol” 2003

**Dec. 1** — Country music singer Aaron Tippin

**Dec. 10** — “It’s a Wonderful Life” radio play

**Dec. 16** — Tupelo Honey: Van Morrison Celebration

For tickets and more information, visit [newberryoperahouse.com](http://newberryoperahouse.com), or call 803-276-6264.

Find the Newberry Opera House online at:

- ▶ [instagram.com/nbyoperahouse](https://www.instagram.com/nbyoperahouse)
- ▶ [facebook.com/nbyoperahouse](https://www.facebook.com/nbyoperahouse)
- ▶ [twitter.com/NbyOperaHouse](https://twitter.com/NbyOperaHouse)

# Your *connected* gift guide

## 6 gift ideas that make the most of your high-speed internet

The holiday shopping season is here, and there has never been a better time to find the perfect gadget that takes advantage of your high-speed internet connection. From tools that make working from home look good to devices to unwind with, high-speed service will help these gifts shine for the techie in your life.

### 1. Google Nest Hub, \$50

Give the gift of better mornings with the Google

Nest Hub. Designed for the bedside, it can track sleep quality, update you on the weather and your calendar, stream music and video and control any smart home appliances you might have. It even has a built-in light sensor to make sure the screen is never too bright. Let's see an alarm clock do that.



### 2. Sonos Roam, \$180

The Roam is the perfect portable speaker for anyone on the move. Stream music, podcasts and more with great audio quality and take them from one room to the next with ease. Roam's Wi-Fi support automatically joins any other Sonos speakers around the house and also works as a smart speaker, connecting to Amazon's Alexa or Google Assistant.



### 3. Kindle Paperwhite, \$140

For the bookworm in the family, the Kindle Paperwhite is still the best e-reader around. The glare-free display is just like reading on real paper, while the 2021 model adds a warm light option to make reading at night easier on the eyes. Purchase new books or download old favorites in seconds without ever leaving your



favorite reading chair.

### 4. Logitech C920S Webcam, \$74

More people are working from home than ever before, so help the remote workers in your life look good while being productive. This Logitech webcam will offer a big upgrade over any built-in camera. It's also ideal for the livestreamers, offering great video quality at an affordable price.



### 5. Xbox Game Pass, \$9.99/month

If you're giving or receiving an Xbox Series X, Game Pass is a no-brainer. Essentially Netflix for games, the service offers hundreds of games on demand, from the biggest Xbox exclusives available on launch day to creative indies from your favorite developers. Download games in minutes with a fiber connection and discover something new.



### 6. Apple AirTag, \$30

Know someone who's always losing their keys? These tiny Bluetooth trackers are here to help. Attach them to your keys or anything else you're prone to misplacing, and the AirTag will leverage the network of nearby Apple devices to locate it — in some cases, within inches. For the Android user, the Tile Mate is just as handy. ☑



# Tasty app-etizers

## 6 digital tools to level up your kitchen skills

Even the most experienced home cooks can use a little inspiration now and then. Fortunately, it's never been easier to find. The wide variety of cooking apps and websites available today make it easy to plan meals and even eat healthier. Whether you're looking to ditch the stacks of faded recipes, make something new or find video instructions to walk you through every step, these tools will bring a little extra flavor to your kitchen.



**SideChef** — If you're just starting out in the kitchen, SideChef is great for learning the basics. A cooking novice created the app for beginners, and it does away with fancy culinary terminology and instead offers dynamic guidance through recipes, providing step-by-step photos, hands-free voice commands and built-in timers. There are over 18,000 interactive smart recipes to try out, so pick your favorite and get cooking.



**Food Network Kitchen** — Craving something you just saw on the Food Network? The Food Network Kitchen features recipes from fan-favorite personalities and food writers, along with prep time, cook time and difficulty level. Any fan of the network will feel right at home in the app, which lets you search more than 80,000 recipes for categories like grilling, baking, kid-friendly and dairy-free.



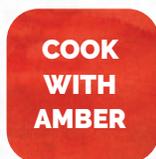
**Cookpad** — For those looking for a more social cooking experience, Cookpad offers a community of home chefs around the world. Discover new ideas, share photos, ask questions and exchange advice. You can even take part in cooking challenges or online cooking classes. And since Cookpad's user base is global, there are plenty of international recipes to satisfy an adventurous palate.



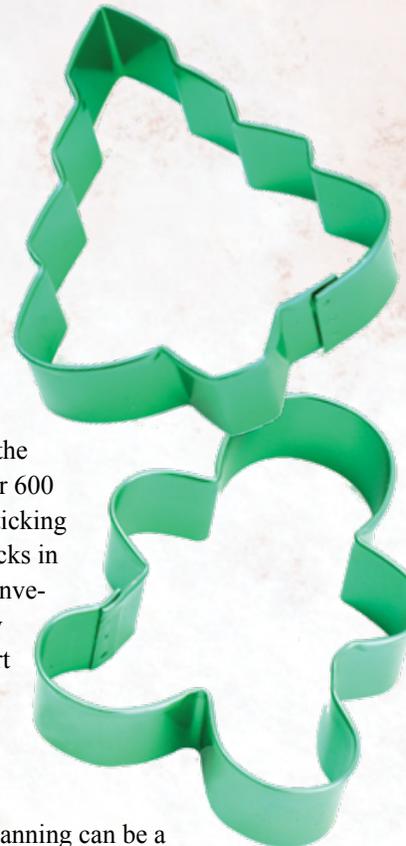
**Forks** — From vegan lifestyle site Forks Over Knives, the Forks app offers over 600 recipes for anyone sticking to a plant-based diet. What the app lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality, convenience and ease of use. There are new recipes each week, and you can export your favorites to have a ready-made shopping list for your next grocery trip.

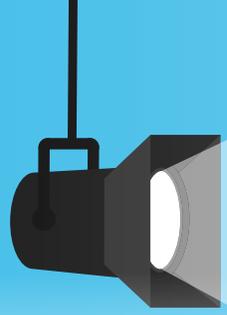


**Mealime** — Meal planning can be a headache, but Mealime makes it easy. The app curates recipe suggestions based on your preferences to help you find healthy new favorites. They're all guaranteed to take 30 minutes or less to cook, but you can also import recipes from the web to add more options.



**Cook with Amber** — Teenage cook Amber Kelley has been encouraging kids to get in the kitchen since 2012. Today, college keeps her pretty busy. But her YouTube channel, Cook with Amber, still features years' worth of videos that walk kids through their own healthy and delicious kitchen adventures so you can make dinner and memories together. 📺





# WCTEL Spotlight: Board of Directors

The WCTEL Board of Directors is made up of nine elected members from areas in our service territory. In the next few editions of Connected, we'll share the stories of each of these leaders.



**AIMEE GRAY**, who represents the Starr area, has served on the WCTEL Board since April 2022. She graduated from Clemson University with a degree in technical marketing and a minor in computer science.

After graduation, Aimee worked for General Electric as a sourcing manager. In 2001, she

chose a new career path in education, teaching entrepreneurship at Crescent High School for 13 years. For the past five years, she has served as the chief information officer for Anderson School District 3. She also serves on the board of the Freshwater Coast Community Foundation and the Upcountry Fiber Foundation.

“Professionally, I’ve had the pleasure of partnering with WCTEL on multiple projects and consider them a valuable resource for managed IT services and high speed connectivity,” Aimee says. “At my home, we are fortunate to have WCFIBER, so my oldest two kids could attend their online college classes.”

Aimee and her husband, Cade, will soon celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. They have three children, Landon, 23, a recent Wofford College graduate; Ivey, 20, a junior at Clemson majoring in industrial engineering; and Caroline, 14, an eighth grader at Starr-Iva Middle School. The family loves to go on long road trips and spends many weekends at athletic events.



Aimee Gray and her husband, Cade, with their three children, from left, Landon, Ivey and Caroline.



**DARREN LEWIS** is beginning his second term on the board, representing Abbeville. He graduated Sherman College of Chiropractic in 1992. He built his own practice, Lewis Chiropractic, during his 30-year career.

“When I was young I admired my uncle, Dr. Horace Lewis, who was a chiropractor in Abbeville

for 30 years,” Darren says. “So, I decided to follow in his footsteps. After graduation, I began my career in the same office where he practiced. I enjoy the closeness of our community and getting to know my patients personally.”

Darren’s mother, Judy Lewis, retired from WCTEL after 35 years of service. “I have seen how WCTEL has grown and changed over the last 50 years,” Darren recalls. “I can remember when all WCTEL had to offer to our home was telephone service. Now, we have telephone, high-speed internet, HD TV and alarm systems. WCTEL has become the blueprint for other co-ops to follow, not only with the services we provide, but also the quality of customer service we offer and the quality of care we provide our employees.”

He and his wife of 25 years, Natali Hodges Lewis, are both Abbeville natives. Darren and Natali have two children, a daughter, Hana Grace, and a son, Christian. Christian and his wife, Anna Grace, have a son, Campbell.

Darren likes to spend time with family and is an avid sports fan and golfer. He is an active member of Friendship Worship Center and a member on the Rotary Board, Abbeville Athletic Booster Board and participates in the Angel Tree bike distribution. 



The Lewis family includes, from left, Christian, Campbell, Anna Grace, Darren, Natali and Hana Grace.

# A NEW ERA

## The City of Newberry is ready for a renaissance

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

**H**igh-speed internet is one reason Newberry enjoys significant residential growth as well as a flurry of new businesses.

“A lot of places in South Carolina have probably seen a little bit more residential development than we have,” says Newberry City Manager Matthew DeWitt. “But we’ve noticed that the addition of fiber has helped bring new businesses, which have brought increased interest in housing.”

The addition of Newberry Landing, an 82-site residential development of homes in the \$220,000-\$305,000 range, ended a 40-year housing drought in the city.

Now, city leaders are hoping to make up for lost time with Newberry Landing and another proposed residential development that includes plans for construction of 327 single-family homes over the next five years. The new residential options could help house employees of local manufacturers like Samsung and workers in the growing business community.

Business license revenue in Newberry is up 16.9% since 2017. National retailers like Starbucks, Firehouse Subs and Harbor Freight now call the city home. “We want to be the place with that small-town Southern charm but where you can still conduct business like you need to,” DeWitt says. “We’ve really invested in our downtown because towns like ours are as alive as our downtowns are.”

It all comes back to the quality of life and amenities the small city, located along I-26 between Greenville and Columbia, offers. “Small towns like Newberry have so many great attributes,” says Newberry Mayor Foster Senn. “There’s a sense of community. There’s generally a better pace for a lot of people, and when you combine that



Photography by Matt Ledger

**TOP:** Newberry officials present WCTEL representatives with a replica of the Joseph P. Riley award that the city received for its fiber network. From left, Newberry Utility Director Tim Baker, City Manager Matt DeWitt, Mayor Foster Senn, WCTEL Board President Wes McAllister and WCTEL CEO Jeff Wilson.

**RIGHT:** City Manager Matt DeWitt, left, and Mayor Foster Senn stand proudly in front of Newberry City Hall.



with the broadband that WCFIBER and the city have partnered to bring here, then you’ve got the best of both worlds.”

In some ways, DeWitt says, Newberry has learned from its past, such as the effort to provide electricity in the early 1900s. “The city leaders at that time got together and found a way to bring power into Newberry, and we were one of the first municipal power providers in the state of South Carolina,” he says. “Fast forward to 2020 and 2021, we’re in the same place with internet providers. We approached several large providers with the same partnership we entered with WCFIBER, but they scoffed at us and

said we wouldn’t find anybody to partner with us like that, but lo and behold, we were able to find WCFIBER.”

Like electricity did over 100 years ago, dependable, high-speed fiber internet service is spurring growth for Newberry. “The timing of the WCFIBER project has worked out beautifully,” says Senn, who is also a small business owner in his hometown. “Residents and businesses were really frustrated with our internet services because they were slow and unreliable. Now, it’s fast and extremely reliable, and that’s been so beneficial for our residents and our business community.”

# A tasty tradition

Celebrate the season with sweet holiday treats

**B**aking is a time-honored tradition in so many households this time of year. Kids love sprinkles, and holiday hosts appreciate having sweets on hand for unexpected guests and tasty gifts for neighbors and friends.

There are a few important tips that can make your holiday baking a stress-free experience and perhaps a little more rewarding for those who will be enjoying the results of your efforts. Many of us have had baking disasters that weren't funny at the time but made for entertaining stories later. That doesn't need to be the case, though, if you:

▶ **Organize** — Make lists of all the things

you want to bake and the ingredients you'll need. Do this a couple of days ahead of time so you can decide what will need to be frozen and used in coming weeks, such as cookie dough.

▶ **Check your pantry for the essentials** — Make sure you have plenty of sugar, flour, butter, eggs and the all-important extracts of the holiday season: vanilla, almond and, oh, yes, peppermint. There's nothing more aggravating than getting halfway through a recipe only to open the sugar bag and discover it's nearly empty. Don't forget cooking spray and parchment paper, too. You'll be needing them.

▶ **Make sure you have plenty of room in your refrigerator** — Some baked goods need to be chilled. This is a good time to throw out what's been in the fridge a little too long or to use up any leftovers.

▶ **Ponder presentation** — Check your closets and cabinets for decorative cookie tins. You'll need them for more than just cookies, they're also great for caramel corn, fudge, brownies and bars. A colorful holiday tin is so much more festive than a zip-top bag with a stick-on bow.

Now, get baking. It's almost Christmas!



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

Photography by MARK GILLILAND | Food Styling by RHONDA GILLILAND





## HOLIDAY CARAMEL CORN

*One word of caution: be sure to weed out all of the unpopped kernels so there are no unexpectedly hard bites in this delicious, sweet-salty snack.*

- 3 quarts popped popcorn (about 2 bags microwave popcorn, popped)
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter (no substitute)
- 1 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1/4 cup dark corn syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups mixed nuts

Heat oven to 250 F.

Place popped popcorn into a large, 4-inch-deep buttered baking pan, and place it in the oven to keep warm. In a large saucepan, melt the butter over

low heat. Stir in brown sugar, corn syrup and salt. Bring to a soft boil, stirring constantly. Boil without stirring for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and quickly stir in the baking soda and vanilla.

Remove popcorn from the oven. Slowly pour syrup mixture over popcorn, and add nuts, mixing well. This may prove a bit difficult at first, as the caramel mixture hardens quickly once removed from the heat. But as you stir it while it's baking in the oven, it will soften and get much easier to stir.

Butter a large cookie sheet, and turn the popcorn mixture into the pan. Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. You don't want the popcorn to get overly browned. Remove from the oven and cool completely. Break apart. Store in tightly covered tins.



## CRANBERRY ORANGE HOLIDAY NUT BREAD

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 cup butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel
- 3/4 cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- 6 ounces chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease the bottom of a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan and set aside.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Stir in the butter until the mixture is crumbly. Stir

in the orange peel, orange juice, vanilla and eggs, just until the batter comes together. Be careful not to overmix. Fold in the fresh cranberries and nuts.

Transfer the batter to the prepared baking pan. Bake until a wooden toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean: about 50 minutes to 1 hour. Cool in the pan for 5 minutes before loosening the sides of the loaf from the pan. Transfer the loaf to a rack to cool completely before slicing. Let cool completely and wrap with plastic wrap.



## PEANUT BUTTER STARS

*A classic holiday cookie. These freeze well, so make plenty to enjoy throughout the season.*

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup peanut butter
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar

- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- Chocolate kisses or stars

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

In a large mixing bowl, beat shortening and peanut butter with an electric mixer on medium-high speed for 30 seconds. Add 1/2 cup of the granulated sugar, along with the brown sugar, baking powder and baking soda. Beat until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in egg, milk and vanilla until combined. Beat in as much of the flour as you can with the mixer. Stir in any remaining flour.

Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll balls in 1/4 cup granulated sugar. Place 2 inches apart on an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake for 10-12 minutes or until edges are firm and bottoms are lightly browned.

Immediately press a chocolate star or kiss into the center of each cookie. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool. Store in airtight containers. Makes 54 cookies. 📄



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# Not *all* traditions have to be old



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