

CONNECTED

Bundling resources

Students launch
recycling effort

BROADBAND
BROADCAST

READY TO
CRUISE



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Building the broadband workforce

Partnerships prepare for future growth

As we greet the new year, it's natural to look ahead to the next 12 months, which will again show our members supporting rural America by providing critical broadband internet service. It has been gratifying to see providers like yours working so furiously to build out broadband to communities still waiting for robust service while also serving existing customers. Yet, the work is never truly done.

Whether it is installations, upgrades or maintenance, there is certainly more than enough work to go around. That is why it is fitting that NTCA is stepping up to help broadband workers. Because retention and recruitment in rural markets is more challenging than urban areas, we are especially proud to work with some new partners to support the broadband providers we represent in creating a 21st century workforce.

We recently joined the White House's Talent Pipeline Challenge, a call to action for employers, education and training providers, and others to support equitable workforce development in critical infrastructure sectors like broadband. We have partnered with Northwood Technical College, the National Rural Education Association and the Communications Workers of America to expand training and job opportunities for rural America's broadband workforce.

These efforts seek to prepare for immediate growth in the broadband industry because of significant funding for network deployment in the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act, as well as future demand for high-tech jobs.

It's an exciting time to work in broadband, and you are fortunate to live somewhere served by a committed community-based provider. As connections grow, so will the number and skills of broadband workers. Stay tuned for more information soon from your provider about these initiatives.

Happy New Year. 🍷

A nourishing change

FCC embraces new broadband labels

Rural broadband providers have a deserved reputation for openness, but not every national company can say the same — shopping for service can be trying.

The Federal Communications Commission, however, intends to require internet providers to prominently display a “nutrition label” clearly detailing the specifics of each plan. The FCC passed a rule late last year clearing the way for this change, although implementation may take time and require additional input.

The intent is to eliminate hidden fees, confusion about data caps and uncertainty about speeds and generally to shine a bright light on what can be a confusing choice.

Each label will show key information — details wise consumers should consider now:

- Monthly price and contract length
- Whether that price will change after a certain period and, if so, what it will change to
- A complete list of monthly and one-time fees, as well as any early termination fee
- Whether the company participates in the Affordable Connectivity Program and a link to check if the consumer qualifies
- Typical download and upload speeds
- Data cap and price for exceeding that cap
- And more

The FCC must complete additional steps before implementing this change, and internet service providers will have time to update websites and other sales material. 🗨️

THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

The FCC is working to limit confusion about broadband services by creating a “nutrition label” providers must display to consumers. While implementation might take time, the example label provided by the FCC offers a guide to information shoppers might consider now when choosing a service.

Broadband Facts

Provider Name
Service Plan Name and/or Speed Tier
Fixed or Mobile Broadband Consumer Disclosure

Monthly Price **[\$]**

This Monthly Price [is/is not] an introductory rate. [If introductory rate is applicable, identify length of introductory period and the rate that will apply after introductory period concludes]

This Monthly Price [does not] require[s] a [x year/x month] contract. [only required if applicable; if so, provide link to terms of contract]

Additional Charges & Terms

Provider Monthly Fees	[\$]
<small>[Itemize each fee]</small>	
One-time Fees at the Time of Purchase	[\$]
<small>[Itemize each fee]</small>	
Early Termination Fee	[\$]
Government Taxes	Varies by Location

Discounts & Bundles

Click Here for available billing discounts and pricing options for broadband service bundled with other services like video, phone, and wireless service, and use of your own equipment like modems and routers. [Any links to such discounts and pricing options on the provider's website must be provided in this section.]

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)

The ACP is a government program to help lower the monthly cost of internet service. To learn more about the ACP, including to find out whether you qualify, visit affordableconnectivity.gov.

Participates in the ACP **[Yes/No]**

Speeds Provided with Plan

Typical Download Speed	[] Mbps
Typical Upload Speed	[] Mbps
Typical Latency	[] Ms

Data Included with Monthly Price **[] GB**

Charges for Additional Data Usage **[\$/GB]**

Network Management [Read our Policy](#)

Privacy [Read our Policy](#)

Customer Support

Contact Us: example.com/support/ / (555) 555-5555

Learn more about the terms used on this label by visiting the Federal Communications Commission's Consumer Resource Center.

fcc.gov/consumer

[Unique Plan Identifier Ex. F0005937974123ABC456EMC789]

GONE PHISHING

Don't get hooked by a ransomware attack



If you lost access to everything on your personal or work computer, how much would you pay to get it back? It's a question more people are asking themselves as ransomware attacks have continued to grow in number and severity.

About 21% of all cyberattacks in 2021 were ransomware attacks, according to IBM Security, costing individuals and businesses an estimated \$20 billion. From 2013 to 2020, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center saw a 243% increase in ransomware reports. That growth comes thanks to services that offer ransomware-for-hire and the increased popularity of cryptocurrency, which make untraceable payments to these services easier than ever.

The FBI does not recommend victims of these attacks pay the ransom. Victims rarely see their data returned, and payment only encourages future attacks. Instead, the best protection against ransomware is to understand how it works, where it comes from and how to protect your data from the start.

WHAT IS RANSOMWARE?

Ransomware is a type of malware, or malicious software, which locks the victim

out of data on their computer until they pay for access to be restored. Most ransomware attacks target individuals, although attacks on large organizations with even bigger payouts have grown in popularity.

In the past, these situations largely involved attackers demanding a ransom to unlock the data. Today, most are "double extortion" assaults in which attackers demand payment for returning the data and to prevent it from being stolen again.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Ransomware can infect your computer in many of the same ways as any other virus:

- **Phishing emails** — These emails trick users into downloading a malicious attachment disguised as a harmless file or visiting a website that can download the ransomware through their browsers.
- **Software vulnerabilities** — Hackers can find holes in a piece of software's cybersecurity protection or buy information on these flaws to download the malware onto a device or network.
- **Stolen logins** — Whether they're obtained through phishing, purchased on the dark web or hacked by brute force,

stolen credentials give cybercriminals direct access to download malware onto a device.

- **Repurposed malware** — Some ransomware is actually malware developed for other attacks like stealing bank information, and it's reworked to encrypt and lock personal data.

HOW CAN I AVOID IT?

Since paying attackers is not a reliable way to deal with ransomware, the best defense is to protect yourself and your devices before an attack can begin:

- Keep backups of any important data to eliminate most of the leverage an attacker might have.
- Update your computer's software and operating system regularly to protect against the latest threats.
- Update your computer's cybersecurity tools to help response teams detect and react to new ransomware attacks faster.
- Always be aware of phishing, social engineering and other strategies that can lead to a ransomware attack. 

TO LEARN MORE, visit www.stopthinkconnect.org.

Communities. Heart. Service.

Here's to more in 2023

As I look toward 2023, I can't help but take stock in 2022 and what we collectively accomplished.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

Connecting you to the world is WCTEL's mission. Personally, it is one of the most gratifying initiatives of my career. As only the third CEO of this 70-year-old cooperative, I, together with the WCTEL family, stand on the shoulders of giants.

Our history is rich. Our values are the same ones that our incorporators had 70 years ago. Our mission remains the same: Serve. Do no harm. Preserve and protect our mission, our people. Evolve. Innovate. Take care of each other and our communities.

Those guiding principles are the litmus test that I apply to every new initiative. Does it accomplish all or some of these? If yes, it's worth pursuing. And if not, then perhaps we are losing focus and we need to reassess.

Last year was another historic year. We moved our final copper customers over to fiber, making us a 100% fiber network. Through a partnership with Blue Ridge Electric, we continued to build out a fiber network in the Upstate under the brand Upcountry Fiber. We grew our base in Greenwood and

Newberry. At year end, our customer base grew to 35,000. All of this growth drives our No. 1 goal: Preserve the legacy and sustainability of our original cooperative areas of Abbeville County, McCormick County, Iva and Starr.

We also invested in our communities in other ways. Two projects in particular remain at the forefront of my mind, and you'll read more on them in this issue.

One project came to us through Jackson McCall, son of our director Eric McCall. Jackson's idea was simple, but it has made a sweeping impact on our area, and it's one that is a model to be emulated around this country.

The Dixie High School FFA Wrap Recycling Program took on the challenge to reduce the amount of net wrap, hay twine and silage wrap entering the landfill. This type of leadership gives me so much hope for our future. These kids are a light in this world, and we are happy to support innovative concepts like this. You can read more on this on Page 13.

The second recent initiative was our Give Big, Get Gig Holiday Food Drive supporting food pantries in Abbeville, Iva, McCormick, Greenwood and Newberry. Customers who donated at least 3 items were eligible for an internet upgrade to our Gigabit internet package for the month of December. While we've received feedback from many happy customers who had housefuls of guests connecting to the internet over the holidays, the real winners were our communities. The need is great, especially over the holidays and extended school breaks. I couldn't be prouder of our customers, members and employees who joined together to help.

These are two examples of many. But, they fuel me. Just like our community fuels me. Progress, innovation, service and heart. WCTEL embodies all of it and all of you.

From our heart to yours, thank you. Let's have a great 2023 and do more great things together. 📧

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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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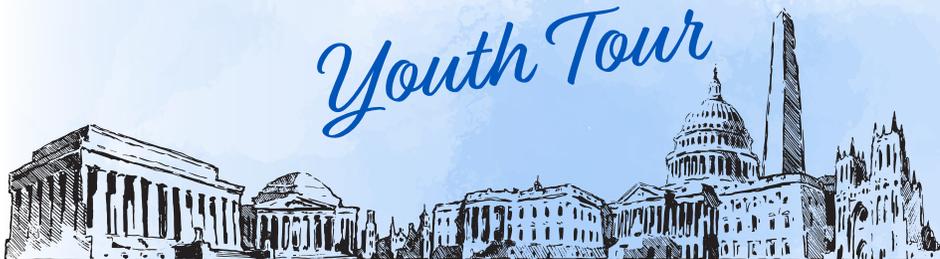
On the Cover:



FFA students at Dixie High School in Due West pioneered a new recycling program to collect and bundle wraps used for hay bales. See story Page 13.

Photo courtesy of Dixie High School

FRS Youth Tour



High school juniors are eligible for the Foundation for Rural Service's summertime visit to Washington, D.C. The trip will be May 31 to June 4. This unique opportunity offers a chance to learn about rural communications and visit historic sites in the nation's capital.

Applications are due by Feb. 8, 2023.

Applicants must live in the WCTEL service area, and their legal guardian/parent must be a WCTEL customer. They must be high school juniors (graduating in 2024) and must be under the age of 18 at the time of the tour.

Download an application at wctel.com/youthtour.

WCTEL & FRS Scholarship



Every year, WCTEL partners with the Foundation for Rural Service to provide a motivated senior with a scholarship to further their educational goals. This opportunity is not based on grade point average.

Scholarship applications must be submitted by Feb. 8, 2023.

Applicants must live in the WCTEL/WCFIBER service area and their legal guardian/parent must be a WCTEL/WCFIBER customer.

Apply at wctel.com/scholarship.

Give Big, Get Gig

WCTEL ends 2022 by serving our communities with the Give Big, Get Gig Holiday Food Drive. Any customer or member who donated at least three cans of food in November received a speed bump to our 1 Gig internet service for the month of December.

Members and business partners came through with many donations. Those

items were distributed across our communities, benefiting charities in Abbeville, McCormick, Iva, Greenwood and Newberry.

We are so grateful to everyone who donated to the drive to support those in our community and ensure that everyone has food on their tables this holiday season.



ABOVE: Sherri Anne Law, left, and a friend drop off food during the Give Big, Get Gig Holiday Food Drive.

LEFT: Account service representatives in WCFIBER's Greenwood office collect dozens of food drive donations. From left, Amanda Clark, Olivia Prince, Georganna Baylor, Courtney Dominick and Brad Dorn.

Brighten the winter

Plan now to cruise this year



Story by ANNE BRALY

When the days are cold, sun-down seems to arrive in the middle of the afternoon and skies are gray, there's no better time to turn daydreams of warm breezes, blue water and sand into reality. You might even save a little money while you're at it.

Cruising the Caribbean is a temptation thousands of people can't resist, and planning now can make a difference. "All of the major cruise lines have returned their fleets to full deployment," says Wes Rowland, president of cruiseexperts.com. "Cruising is back."

As a result, more cruise lovers are going to be on the water, and finding a deal for the best rooms and views is getting harder. There's so much to decide — dates, itineraries, cruise lines, room types and more. One of the first considerations is the port of origin. Fortunately, Southerners have options. In

Florida, you'll find ports in Tampa, Port Canaveral and Miami. Or, you can set sail from Charleston, South Carolina, or New Orleans. Even Galveston, Texas, can be a short, affordable flight away.

"It helps if you can find an experienced and trusted travel professional who can help you navigate the variables of a cruise purchase, understand your needs and expectations, help interpret value and give good guidance so you can make an informed decision in your best interest," Wes says.

The best cruise deals are not only about getting the lowest price. Cruise lines now offer attractive options, including amenities that once cost extra. Check out some of the top cruise sites online and you'll find that cruises now include more in the up-front price, such as beverage packages, tips, free specialty dining and Wi-Fi.

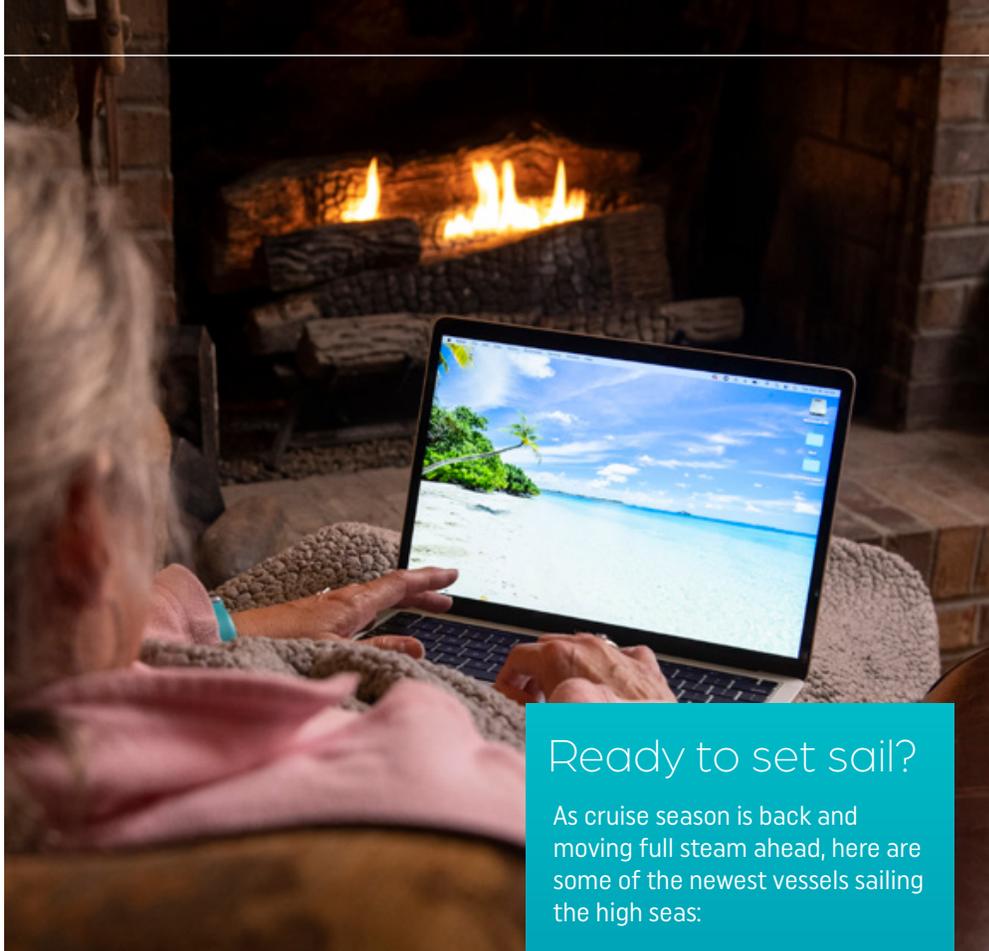
"It's a better value for the guest," Wes says. "Cruise lines took advantage of the unplanned downtime during the pandemic to retire the oldest ships from their fleets. With new ships coming on line, consumers have better choices of fabulous, amenity-packed ships than ever."

For example, Norwegian's 2023 schedule includes a seven-night cruise of the Western Caribbean, April 9-16, 2023, in a suite with a balcony for \$899 per person with double occupancy. The offer includes unlimited bar, a specialty dining experience, excursions and Wi-Fi.

CONSIDER 'SHOULDER SEASON'

Supply and demand determine rates, so if your travel dates are flexible take advantage of what budget cruisers consider the Holy Grail of deals — shoulder season. This window between the peak

blues



With cruises booking up for spring, planning now will help you find the adventure and pricing you want. So brighten the winter gloom with dreams of the sea.

and off-seasons, from late September through mid-November, offers the best deals and smaller crowds. “Sometimes it’s just the perception of when it’s better or worse to travel. You need to know what your priorities are,” Wes says.

TIPS FOR BUYING A CRUISE

If you choose to go it alone, do your homework. There’s no guarantee you’ll find the lowest rate, but these tips from cruiseexpert.com will help you be smarter about buying your vacation:

- Final deposits are due three months before the cruise. Usually, that’s the last date a cruise can be canceled without a penalty. This is when you can snag a good deal as cruise lines slash rates to try to fill empty cabins.
- Book for fall or spring when most families with school-age children cannot travel. There’s typically more

availability, and lower pricing, during these times.

- If you’re willing to risk it, book a Caribbean cruise during hurricane season when prices are much lower. Just be sure to invest in travel insurance and make sure your prepaid deposits and other expenses are covered.
- Aggregate sites — independent websites offering trips on multiple cruise lines — allow you to check out many options at once. Sites include cruisecritic.com, gotosea.com, cruises.com and cheapcruises.com.
- If you’re new to cruising and want to see if it’s right for you, try taking a short, two- to three-night cruise first. Royal Caribbean’s recently refurbished Freedom of the Seas is one option. It makes short cruises between Miami and the Bahamas. [👉](#)

Ready to set sail?

As cruise season is back and moving full steam ahead, here are some of the newest vessels sailing the high seas:

- ▶ Royal Caribbean's Odyssey of the Seas embarked on its first cruise in 2021 and is the first Quantum Ultra-Class Ship in North America offering bumper cars, glow-in-the-dark laser tag and virtual reality games. Passengers can kick back and relax beside the newly designed, resort-style pool. This ship is a game-changer for the cruise industry.
- ▶ Princess Cruises' Enchanted Princess launched in 2019 and offers a touch more sophistication than ships geared toward the teenage set. Dining options are excellent on all the cruise line's Medallion Class vessels, the category to which the Enchanted Princess belongs.
- ▶ MSC Cruises' Virtuosa set sail in 2019. There's a humanoid robot bartender in the Starship Club. The ship has the longest LED dome at sea, and it towers over a promenade of retail shops and restaurants. There are five pools that range from a waterpark for the kids to a quieter place to relax for adults.

CHANGING CHANNELS

Broadband provides many options for TV watching

Story by LAZ DENES

Streaming devices like Roku and the Amazon Fire TV Stick have been around for about a decade, and their popularity seems lasting as viewers tap into new ways of watching shows and movies. Just last July, streaming services for the first time drew more viewers than cable TV.

According to The Gauge, Nielsen's monthly review of viewership trends, streaming represented 34.8% of total television consumption during the month of July, compared to cable's 34.4% and broadcast TV's 21.6%.

None of this is news to Jimmy Wilson. The 78-year-old lifelong Abbeville

resident has streamed his favorite shows and movies for more than five years, and he enjoys the thousands of viewing options and the freedom to watch just about anything when it's most convenient for him.

That wasn't the case when he was a cable subscriber, and certainly not when over-the-air television was his only option. So, once WCFIBER became available in his area, he got to work outfitting his home with Roku streaming devices. Jimmy proved quite skilled at incorporating what was still relatively new technology into his life. "I hit the ground running," he says, admitting with a laugh that he still sees himself as more of a kid than a typical 78-year-old. "I've got a few more years to go before I'm old, just practicing so I know how to act when I get there."

Jimmy's setup includes a pair of Roku TVs, one in the living room and one in



Jimmy Wilson is among many viewers who are cutting the cord on cable service in favor of streaming services.



Photos by Matt Leigler

LEFT: Jimmy Wilson relaxes by his computer and searches for one of his favorite programs.

BELOW: A wall of posters commemorates the theatrical plays in which Jimmy has performed recently.

A karaoke machine keeps Jimmy ready for open-mic gospel singing at his church.



what he calls his entertainment room where his computer is. He has a television in his spare bedroom that's linked to a rooftop antenna, as well as a Roku stick. An Amazon Fire TV Stick is also plugged into the living room TV to give him additional options.

His day usually begins at 5 a.m. when he catches the local news and weather on one of his local over-the-air stations. He then scans the streaming channels for national news before embarking on his routine, which includes weekly Rotary Club meetings and responsibilities as an ambassador for the Abbeville Chamber of Commerce. He also volunteers at the Abbeville Opera House, where he has entertained in numerous theater productions, starting with the traveling salesman in "Arsenic and Old Lace" in 2016. It was the first time he had acted since high school. "I do the short parts — not the long ones with a lot of words to memorize," he says.

The evenings, when he's home, are when it's time to relax in front of the TV. With remote control in hand, Jimmy browses his free TV apps to see what catches his eye, usually with no particular show in mind. Old sitcoms are his favorites, as are classic game shows, black-and-white Westerns, horror movies and mysteries. The only requisite is that he doesn't have to pay to watch them. "There's no reason to pay to watch something on TV," Jimmy, a Coast Guard veteran, says. "If I have to pay to watch a particular show, I just move on to another app and keep looking until I find it for free. It's usually out there somewhere. That's the thing with TV, now — you can pretty much get whatever you want, when you want, and you can also get live channels. I can get about every news channel all the way across the United States. And if you missed something, you can always go find it. There were no do-overs with cable." 

Expanding options



Chase Charging

It takes a robust network like WCFIBER to meet the high-speed internet demands of today's typical household, according to Chase Charging, network technician in the WCTEL Network Operations Center.

More devices than ever rely on internet connectivity to function properly. A reliable, lightning-fast connection can keep a household running smoothly and efficiently, powering everything from streaming televisions and laptops, to smart watches, smart appliances, security systems, heating and air conditioning systems, robotic vacuums, wireless speakers, remote-control window shades and more.

Streaming media places the heaviest demands on the bandwidth in a typical home, but Chase says WCFIBER is more than up to the task, even when numerous devices are connected simultaneously. "I can watch a football game in the living room, my wife can watch Netflix in the bedroom, and the kids can watch Disney + and the speed is strong enough to make it all work seamlessly," he says.

"The same goes for the ability for people to work from home, and for kids to be schooled at home. Fiber has made it easier than ever to do these things, which COVID turned into a necessity more than convenience," Chase adds. "If COVID would have hit 10 years earlier, I don't think people would have found it as easy to work at home like they can now."

8 apps for every pet owner



Story by DREW WOOLLEY

New pets are always popular gifts around the holidays. But the new year is when the responsibility for all that feeding, walking and those never-ending bathroom breaks can really set in. Fortunately, technology is here to help you stay on top of all of your new best friend's needs, from training and wellness to games and socialization. Check out these apps to see how they can make pet care simpler, whether you're a new pet owner or an amateur zookeeper.



Puppr — Every new dog owner could use some help with training. With Puppr, you have access to training videos, over 100 lessons,

live chats with trainers, progress tracking and more. Celebrity dog trainer Sara Carson leads the programs, and your pup will be able to keep up with her “super collies” in no time.



Cat Training Tips — If you're looking to establish ground rules with a new feline friend, the more streamlined Cat Training

Tips app is a good reference for practical tips on common issues like litter box training and scratching.



Pet First Aid — Every pet owner worries about what to do in an emergency situation. The Pet First Aid app from the American Red

Cross has you covered. It offers step-by-step instructions for situations like your pet being attacked by another animal or eating something toxic. You can even learn how to give your pet CPR, check for warning signs and look up the closest veterinary hospital.



11pets — Keeping up with your pet's medical needs on top of your own can be a challenge, which is why it helps to have an app like

11pets to keep everything covered. Store your furry friend's medical history, medication and vet schedules, or track their weight and nutrition to make sure they're on the healthy path.



Cat Fishing 2 — Humans aren't the only ones who enjoy a good mobile game. Cat Fishing 2 from Friskies is designed specifically for

cats, and you can download it to your phone or tablet. Start it up, place your device on the floor and let your cat kill time swiping at colorful fish on the screen.



BarkHappy — If you're looking for dog-friendly people and places in your area, BarkHappy is the app for you. Use the interactive

map to find hotels, restaurants, bars and more where your dog will be welcome. You can also send out the call if your pup goes missing or find nearby dogs with whom to set up a play date.



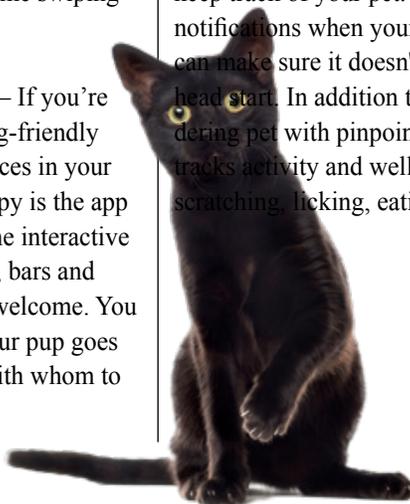
Rover — Rover is the top pet sitting app with over 200,000 caretakers in the U.S. and Canada. Rover's team handles the vetting,

and over 95% of reviewed services on the app have earned a five-star rating. Despite the name, Rover offers services for all kinds of pets, not just dogs. The app is also great for pet lovers looking for new job opportunities.



Whistle — You probably know an adventurous dog who likes to explore every chance it gets. With the

Whistle app and accompanying GPS tracker, it's never been easier to keep track of your pet. The app sends you notifications when your pet gets out so you can make sure it doesn't get too much of a head start. In addition to finding your wandering pet with pinpoint accuracy, the app tracks activity and wellness indicators like scratching, licking, eating and drinking. 🗨️



SIT, STAY, BINGE



Your furry friends might fetch the remote for these programs

With more TV shows streaming every day, there is more entertainment than anyone can keep up with. But did you know your pet might enjoy a good binge as much as you?

Programming for pets is on the rise but it's not a new idea. In 2012, the dog food brand Bakers began running a 60-second commercial targeted right at their canine consumers, complete with barking dogs to get their attention and high-pitched sounds human viewers couldn't hear.

If you're worried that your pets might get bored while you're away at work, or you just can't give them your full attention 24/7, consider some of this programming that can help stimulate, relax and even train your pet throughout the day.

DOGTV

When it comes to man's best friend, there's a dedicated streaming service to keep your dog happy and occupied. Available on major streaming devices like Roku, Chromecast and Apple TV, DOGTV offers a variety of programming.

Some programs offer playful sequences to prevent boredom and provide mental stimulation, while others offer calming scenes to keep pooches relaxed. Training programs help dogs get used to common

noises like doorbells and car sounds. There are even a few shows available for their humans.

SQUIRREL!

Think your furry friends might be getting bored while you're away from home? Many cats and dogs respond to videos of birds, squirrels and fish. Cats, in particular, are visual animals, making them more likely to be entertained and mentally enriched by watching the quick movements of prey across a screen.

Because dogs rely more on their sense of smell, breeds with better eyesight are more likely to show interest in the TV. They tend to respond to images of other dogs running or socializing and might try to interact as they would in real life by barking or sniffing. Fortunately, no matter what grabs your pets' attention, there are plenty of videos available on sites like YouTube designed to keep them occupied for hours while you're out.

FOR THE BIRDS

Birds can be extremely smart and emotionally sensitive animals, making it especially challenging to keep them occupied. Many birds have a natural interest in new sounds and colors, making the TV a

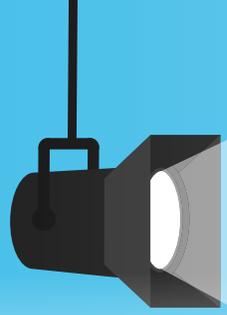
good way to keep them engaged throughout the day.

If you're trying to expand your feathered friend's vocabulary, some programming might even help to train them while you're out. Repetition is key for helping any bird pick up a new word or phrase, and there are numerous videos available that will repeat common phrases for hours on end. Hit play and run, keeping your bird mentally engaged while you're away.

FUN AND GAMES

If your cat likes to curl up next to you during a gaming session, consider adding "Stray" to your list. When BlueTwelve Studio released its cat-themed adventure game last year, it was an instant hit with cat owners. But it turns out the game was just as interesting to their feline friends.

Videos and photos of players' cats being entranced by the digital kitty on screen became so popular that PlayStation even put out the call for submissions for a charity event with the hashtag #StrayReactions. The best ones went into a digital photo book presented to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals along with a \$25,000 donation. That's a win for everyone. 🐾



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.



LEE LOGAN is a native of Spartanburg. He earned his bachelor's degree from Erskine College in 1967 and a master's degree in education from the University of Georgia in 1969.

Early on, Lee worked as a counselor at John de la Howe School in McCormick. He then returned to Erskine, where he worked in development and administration for 33 years before retiring in 2006. Three years later, the college awarded him an honorary doctorate degree.

Lee has served on the WCTEL board since 1985, including a total of nine years as president. He is currently the audit committee chair. He also served with the Foundation for Rural Service from 2008-2013 and received the NTCA 2016 Director Lifetime Achievement award.

Lee married Eleanor Grier Logan in 1969, and they are members of the Due West Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. The couple has one son, Frank Ward Logan, and two daughters, Rebecca L. Gamble, and Ruth L. Burdette. They also have four grandchildren. Lee volunteers with local organizations focused on helping with public education.



ERIC MCCALL has enjoyed farm life for many years. "I got my first job on a farm working in broiler houses when I was 13," Eric says. "I worked through high school on a variety of different farms."

Eric also held jobs in construction before graduating from Clemson University with a degree in aquaculture, fisheries and wildlife biology. He now owns Bar E Enterprises and EcoSystems LLC.

He and his wife, Eden, are parents to Jackson and Olivia and stay active in their church. The couple owns a farm where they raise black and red baldy cattle. "We take the kids fishing in our farm ponds and on nearby lakes," Eric says. "Our family has a small garden for canned goods and jellies, along with keeping bees for honey. We try to grow as much of our own food as we can, but, believe me, we still spend plenty of money at the grocery store."

Eric says he has gained so much from the people in his community that he feels the need to give back. "My goal as a board member is to try to continue that trend," he says. "To ensure that whatever needs may exist in the future, West Carolina Tel is able to service the community." [📄](#)

Keeping it under wraps

Dixie High FFA launches rural recycling project

Story by JOHN CLAYTON



Dixie High School FFA students started a program collecting and recycling bale wrap.



Photos courtesy of Dixie High School

A unique recycling program at Due West's Dixie High School could serve as a model for other rural schools interested in helping local farmers and the environment.

As a service project in 2021, members of the Dixie High School Chapter of the National FFA Organization began collecting tons of the wrap used around high-moisture bales of hay from local farms for recycling.

Eric McCall is a cattle farmer and Abbeville Soil and Conservation District commissioner. His wife, Eden, was tired of watching the bulky pieces of wrap pile up on their farm. She challenged him and their son, Jackson, to find a solution.

"It seemed like every single farmer around here was thinking the same thing," Eric says. "Their land had big piles of trash on it just like I did, and we'd rather do something else with it besides haul it to the landfill or burn it."

Eager to find a solution, Eric made a cold call to Mumford Industries, a recycling company in nearby Ninety Six. After realizing that one of the primary components of the hay wrap is polyethylene — a recyclable material and the most widely used plastic in the world



WCTEL presented a \$2,500 donation to the FFA program at Dixie High School last fall.

— the company was interested in taking on the project.

During a family dinner, McCall mentioned his idea. His son, Jackson, said he and a few friends might help collect the wrap during one of his agriculture classes.

Jackson contacted Josh Murdoch the FFA advisor. They learned that the wrap could be compacted much like cardboard, so they adapted a donated cardboard compactor and the FFA students went to work. "The net wrap is very fibrous," Eric says. "The polyethylene plastic film actually bales up real nice and neat, but there's a couple of different types that we're able to recycle."

Eric and Josh figured the students would collect around 4,000 pounds of the material for recycling during the first year of the program. They were wrong. The

FFA members collected 20,000 pounds. The students' efforts have not gone unnoticed. The project has gained support from the local school system and business sponsors, including WCTEL.

Collecting the discarded pieces of hay wrap is hard dirty work, and FFA students learned a valuable lesson from the conservation project. "We've tried to teach the kids about stewardship in general," Eric says. "Plastics take so long to degrade. If we don't give that some thought, we're going to have a problem that outpaces the solution before too long."

The Dixie High School students' project could benefit students and farmers in rural communities throughout western South Carolina and across the country.

"This project has provided a platform for members to interact with our stakeholders and develop critical thinking skills in dealing with logistical issues," Josh says. "They have the power and ability to create a plan for a workable solution for better ways of material handling that impact the environment." 🌱

AIR FRYERS

can solve dinnertime dilemmas

The savior of simple dishes and leftover pizza

Air fryers have crisped their way into America's heart. Ranging from models with one knob and a basket to others with lots of bells and whistles, they've become as common in the American kitchen as toasters and coffeepots.

So how do you know which air fryer is the best fit for you?

You'll become a champion of the air fryer with the Ninja. Priced around \$150, it has a large basket and multiple settings that allow for dehydrating, reheating, baking and, oh yes, air frying. If you plan to do a good bit of cooking in your air fryer, this may be the model for you.

But if you're cooking for one, or just want to see if an air fryer is right for you, then a less-expensive option like Dash's air fryer — \$49.95 at online retailers — might be better. With just one setting and a compact size, it's perfect for one baked potato, a handful of French fries or a chicken thigh or two. It comes in multiple colors to add a little pizzazz to your kitchen counter.

It goes without saying that air frying is a healthier alternative to deep frying. Think of an air fryer as multiple appliances in one. It cooks quickly like a microwave, toasts like a toaster oven and fries like a deep fryer.

These kitchen wonders work magic on vegetables, proteins and baked goods because they're basically small convection ovens. They have a fan-and-exhaust system that blows hot air across your food for even cooking and browning. It works just as well whether you're making breaded onion rings from the freezer, roasting fresh broccoli or frying up some wings. Baking powder in the rub helps make air fryer wings crispy.



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Photography by MARK GILLILAND | Food Styling by RHONDA GILLILAND



AIR FRYER CHICKEN WINGS

- 12 chicken wings, whole
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup Buffalo hot sauce

Cut the wings into pieces so you have 24 wings. Preheat the air fryer to 380 F. Spray the fryer basket after preheating. Place the wings in a large bowl and add olive oil, garlic powder, baking powder, salt, cayenne pepper and

black pepper. Toss wings until fully covered. Place the wings in a single layer — as many as will fit without overlapping — on the air fryer basket.

Air fry the wings at 380 F for 20 minutes, flipping them every 5 minutes. Increase the temperature to 400 F and cook an additional 2 minutes for extra crispy skin. Use a digital meat thermometer to ensure the internal temperature is 165 F.

Carefully remove the wings from the air fryer, cover with Buffalo sauce and serve with your favorite sides.



CRISPY AIR FRYER POTATOES

- 1 pound small Yukon Gold potatoes, halved
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon Cajun seasoning (optional)
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Lemon wedge, for serving
- Freshly chopped parsley, for garnish

In a large bowl, toss potatoes with oil, garlic powder, Italian seasoning and Cajun seasoning, if using. Season with salt and pepper.

Place potatoes in basket of air fryer and cook at 400 F for 10 minutes. Shake basket and stir potatoes, and then cook until potatoes are golden and tender, 8 to 10 minutes more. Squeeze lemon juice over cooked potatoes and garnish with parsley before serving.

AIR FRYER EGG ROLLS

- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1/2 pound ground pork or ground chicken
- 4 cups coleslaw mix
- 1/2 cup matchstick-cut carrots
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 green onions, sliced
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons rice or white vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/8 teaspoon Chinese 5-spice seasoning
- 12 egg roll wrappers
- Nonstick cooking spray
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Sweet chili sauce, duck sauce or hot mustard sauce, for dipping

Heat sesame oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the pork and cook until crumbled and cooked through, about 4 minutes. Add the coleslaw mix, carrots, ginger and garlic. Cook 2-3 minutes or until the cabbage has wilted.

Remove from the heat; stir in the green onions, soy sauce, vinegar, pepper, salt and 5-spice seasoning. Transfer to a plate and let cool slightly.

Place 1 egg roll wrapper flat on a work surface with the points of the wrapper facing up and down (like a diamond). Place about 1/3 cup of the pork/chicken mixture in the middle of the wrapper. Dip your fingers in water and dampen the edges of the wrapper. Fold the left and then right points of the wrapper in toward the center. Fold the bottom point over the center just like you would a burrito, rolling the wrapper toward the remaining point to form a tight cylinder. Press edges to seal. Place on a plate and cover with a dry towel. Repeat the process with remaining wrappers and pork/chicken mixture.

Preheat the air fryer to 375 F and spray the air fryer basket with cooking spray. Brush the tops of the egg rolls with olive oil. Working in batches, place the egg rolls in the basket and cook 7 minutes. Flip the egg rolls over and brush with more oil. Cook for an additional 2 minutes. Serve with your favorite dipping sauce. 📺





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