

CONNECTED

Faith in action

Bringing new life to
Main Street UMC

GIVE BIG,
GET GIG

SEASONAL
DESTINATIONS



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association


Committed to service and security

I always love hearing stories from the NTCA members who are bringing fast, reliable internet service to communities throughout rural America. It's exciting to see our providers pave the way for new jobs, better health care, fresh educational opportunities and so much more.

But their commitment to serving you goes beyond simply providing an excellent broadband network — they also want to help you navigate that online world safely.

Much of that work happens behind the scenes on their systems before you ever turn on a computer or search for something on your phone. But that's just the first line of defense in a world where your personal data — and, yes, even your money — are targets.

The experts at the National Cybersecurity Alliance, a nonprofit organization devoted to creating a more secure interconnected world, can help you figure out where to begin.

Multifactor authentication is a valuable way to add an extra layer of security to your online accounts but many people are unaware. Password manager software makes using complex and secure passwords easier, while keeping software updated and being aware of phishing attempts are also wise strategies. 



Add a layer of protection to your online journeys

Photo by A Stockphoto/Adobe Stock

The nonprofit National Cybersecurity Alliance is focusing its efforts in four specific areas: multifactor authentication, password management, software updates and phishing awareness.

HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR TIPS FOR YOUR SECURITY:



Multifactor authentication: For your online accounts, you likely have a password. But if there's an option for using multifactor authentication, go for it. Once activated on an account, you'll still need a password. But access will also require a one-time code delivered by text message or email.




Password management: Rather than trying to remember long, complex passwords, consider using software designed to not only store passwords but also make them easily accessible. There are several options, and most work in a similar fashion. You only need to remember one master password to unlock the rest.



Software updates: Both hardware and software manufacturers prioritize protecting you. Often when there's a potential problem discovered, they roll out software updates. So, it's important to be mindful of those changes and install updates regularly.



Phishing awareness: Whether it is a fake website or a bogus email that seems reputable, there is a range of phishing strategies designed to capture your personal information, money or both. They can be convincing, too. So, be cautious when receiving unsolicited messages, and verify requests for sensitive information before responding.

To learn more about online safety visit the National Cybersecurity Alliance at staysafeonline.org. 

Capture the season

Learn to make your photos pop

Whether it's Apple or Android, the photo technology in modern smartphones can create stunning images, complete with automatic adjustments for lighting and other effects. You don't have to look hard in the world of social media to see the results.

But give those images a closer look. Are they as good as they can be? While mobile software can clean up many of the more technical trouble spots, a few tried-and-true tips from the world of traditional photography can upgrade your seasonal or holiday photographs from passable to truly memorable.

SEEK THE LIGHT: For photography, there's a magical time just before sunset or after sunrise — the golden hour. The warm, soft light adds a natural artistic element, whether you're shooting a landscape or a portrait. So, when possible,

avoid the harsh light of the hours around noon and seek the golden rays instead.

KNOW THIS RULE AND WHEN TO BREAK IT: The idea of the rule of thirds is an artistic standard. An image is framed using two horizontal and two vertical lines to create nine equal parts. One strategy is to place the subject of the photo at one of the intersections to create a balanced composition. But you can also use the idea to know when to break the rule, shift the frame and take a unique photo.

GET THE CLOSE-UP: Don't be shy. Most phone cameras have a zoom feature. But you've got a better choice. Physically get closer to your subject, whether it's a person, flower or delicious dinner dish. Proximity not only makes it easier to frame the image but it also adds a sense of intimacy.

STEADY AS IT GOES: The latest phone cameras do well even when light is scarce. But there are limits, and sometimes when you're shooting in a dim room or when the sun is fading the resulting image can turn out blurry. A small tripod — there are plenty of phone-sized options — can help keep your photos sharp.

GIVE 'EM A BOOST: There's nothing wrong with a little editing, and most phones have great software built in. There are options for automatic adjustments, but don't be shy about exploring the possibilities. A little creative cropping or adjustments to settings like brightness can make a difference. You can even consider converting a photo to black-and-white for a classic look. 📱



Photos by JenKoltaman and MayatiniStudio/Adobe Stock

A year of progress, a season of gratitude

Greetings and welcome to the “ber” months. Fall, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s Eve punctuate the months of September, October, November and December. Some employees call it the cozy season.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

These months are when I start to reflect on the past year. One of the highlights late this summer was our 71st Annual Meeting of the Membership. You can review our 2023 highlights in our recently launched Annual Report, found at wctel.com/annual-report.

This year three board seats were up for election. I’m pleased to share that Aimee Gray – Area 1 – Starr, Robert Hester – Area 6 – Calhoun Falls and Tag Bussey – Area 9 – South McCormick, were all reelected to another term.

Our 2023 story is one of growth and a reinforced commitment to our cooperative areas.

Today we have fellow South Carolinians left behind in the digital divide. Fortunately, our federal and state governments recognize that internet is no longer a luxury, it’s a necessity.

So, they, too, are doing something about it. We’re grateful to

be their partners. This past year, the state of South Carolina entrusted us with \$40 million in federal funding to help connect the Upstate.

Through our subsidiary’s brand, Upcountry Fiber, more than 1,000 miles of fiber have been laid throughout the Upstate this past year, and more than 14,000 orders have been taken since the start of the project. The multiyear project comprises 6,000 miles and, when complete, will pass 65,000 addresses.

This growth allows us to continue to serve YOU, take care of our communities and be a cooperative force for support, service and good. It’s what allows us to continue to invest in our infrastructure, so you are receiving state-of-the-art service.


Other highlights from 2023 include strides in enrollment in the Federal Communications Commission’s Affordable Connectivity Program, which provides a \$30 monthly savings on internet service for qualified households.

We currently have 1,385 customers enrolled in the ACP program – a jump of almost 700 since last year. This year, anyone with a student enrolled in a public school within our area is eligible to receive this benefit. To learn more, go to wctel.com/acp or call our office at 864-446-2111.

I can’t touch on 2023 without mentioning WiFi X, which was launched in late spring this year.

WiFi X not only protects your homes from incoming threats and viruses, but it puts YOU in the driver’s seat of your home WiFi. It enables you to run speed tests, set up guest networks, change your WiFi password easily, prioritize bandwidth, and for parents, it gives you greater control and insight into your child’s internet usage.

Lastly, in this issue you’ll read about our second annual Give Big, Get Gig food drive. We are hoping to build off of that success and collect even more food.

I wish you a wonderful holiday season, and on behalf of every WCTEL and WCFIBER employee, we are humbled and honored to help connect you to the world and each other. 



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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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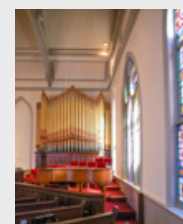
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On the Cover:



The Main Street United Methodist Church in Abbeville underwent a yearlong renovation project to modernize the building while preserving the traditional design. See story Page 12.

Photo by Matt Ledger

May the beauty of the holidays warm your spirit



WCTEL employees are grateful for the support of our members. We hope you enjoy a holiday season filled with family, friends and joy.

In observation of the upcoming holidays, WCTEL offices will be closed on the following dates:

- Thanksgiving: Nov. 23 and 24
- Christmas: Dec. 25 and 26
- New Year's Day: Jan. 1



Need help paying for internet?

The Affordable Connectivity Program is a Federal Communications Commission initiative to assist families and households struggling to afford internet service. The ACP provides a discount of up to \$30 a month.



To see if you qualify and to apply, call us at (864) 446-2111 or visit wctel.com/acp.

'Tis the season for easy payments

We're all looking for ways to save time as the holidays draw near.

WCTEL aims to make paying your monthly bill easier with SmartHub. Sign up for SmartHub text reminders about when the bill is due, or make it even easier with the autopay option.

To learn more, and to register for SmartHub, go to wctel.smarthub.coop. Smartphone users may download the SmartHub app from your app store. You'll need your account number and most recent billing statement to register.

Do Not Call Registry

The National Do Not Call Registry gives you a choice about whether to receive telemarketing calls. The registry applies to all telemarketers except businesses with whom you have an existing relationship and certain nonprofit and political organizations.

Commercial telemarketers are not allowed to call you if your number is listed on the registry. Consumers may register their residential telephone numbers, including wireless numbers, on the National Do Not Call Registry at no cost, either by telephone or via the internet.

To register by phone, call 888-382-1222. For TTY, call 866-290-4236. You must call from the telephone number you wish to register. To obtain additional information, or to register online, please go to donotcall.gov.

Inclusion of your telephone number on the National Do Not Call registry becomes effective starting 31 days after registration. You may remove your number from the list at any time.



Seeking a dose of CHRISTMAS CHEER?

These towns embrace the holiday spirit

Story by ANNE BRALY

The annual tree-lighting is a favorite event during Christmas celebrations in Childersburg, Alabama.



Photo courtesy of the Alabama Tourism Department

Santa greets the crowds at the Christmas parade in downtown Franklin, Tennessee.



Photo courtesy of Visit Franklin

Southerners celebrate Christmas in a big way. Whether it's light displays so outrageous they'd impress the Griswolds or picture-perfect trimmed trees, no time or expense is spared to make sure the holidays are truly magical.

Every town celebrates the holidays a bit differently, but one thing they all have in common is an undeniable spirit of the season. Here are several Southern towns that roll out the red carpet during the holiday season.

CHILDERSBURG, ALABAMA

"There's something special about small towns in Alabama, like Childersburg, during the holiday season," says Brooklyn Lundy, public relations manager for the Alabama Tourism Department.

During the holidays, Childersburg takes advantage of its natural features, primarily the limestone caves found around this central Alabama town in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, including Majestic Caverns. It becomes a magical fantasyland during the holidays as it's transformed into Adventus, an event filled with Christmas shows, performances and holiday characters around every corner. It's a fun event for the entire family that happens for four evenings only — Dec. 9, 10, 16 and 17 from 5-9 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at majesticcaverns.com.

There's more to Christmas in Childersburg, though. The annual tree lighting, scheduled for Nov. 28 at 6 p.m. at the Butler-Harris Rainwater Museum, is a town favorite with hot chocolate and carriage rides offered to all those who attend. And the Christmas parade brings St. Nick to downtown on Dec. 21 starting at 6 p.m.

FRANKLIN, TENNESSEE

Franklin turns Christmas into a monthlong celebration. "Every weekend is a special event or festival in its own right in Franklin," says Matthew Maxey, director of public relations for the city of Franklin.

One of the most popular events, the two-day Dickens of a Christmas festival — set for Dec. 9-10 — draws at least 100,000 people to town each year.



Downtown Helen, Georgia, lights up for the holidays.

Photo courtesy of Helen CVB



The good citizens of Mercer County sing carols on the streets of Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

Photo courtesy of Harrodsburg-Mercer County

“Franklin’s charm, relaxed pace and Hallmark-movie feel throughout the historic downtown are a significant draw for visitors,” he says. “From window shopping the holiday displays along Main Street to catching holiday movies at our 1930s-era Franklin Theatre, visitors are able to step back in a simpler, classic holiday time.”

On Dec. 1 there will be a tree lighting, and the city will shine with local celebrity talent — this year hosted by popular Christian artist Matthew West — followed by the Christmas parade down the town’s historic Main Street on Dec. 2. For more ideas to fill your holiday weekends, log onto visitfranklin.com.

HELEN, GEORGIA

The population of this small mountain town in north Georgia swells from 256 to more than 2,500 during the holiday season as visitors clamor to enjoy an Alpine Christmas.

The Lighting of the Village will be held on Nov. 24 at 6 p.m., followed by the 16th annual Christkindlmarkt in downtown Helen on Nov. 25-26 and Dec. 2-3. The traditional German event features gifts, decorations and assorted foods, both sweet and savory. The Mistletoe Market is another favorite event and ideal for checking things off your Christmas list. It takes place Dec. 2-3 at the Helen Arts & Heritage Center.

And what would Christmas in Helen be

like without its annual Christmas parade? That takes place on Dec. 9. For a list of all Christmas happenings in Helen, go to whitecountychamber.org.

“Helen has quickly become one of the top Christmas towns in the United States,” says Jerry Brown, executive director of the Alpine Helen/White County Convention and Visitors Bureau. “During the holiday season, the town turns its amazing village into a Christmas wonderland with a sprinkle of Bavarian charm that heightens the Christmas spirit.”

HARRODSBURG, KENTUCKY

“Santa’s elves are busy this year in Kentucky’s oldest town, trying to make Harrodsburg feel as much like a Hallmark movie as possible,” says Daarik Gray, executive director of Harrodsburg-Mercer County Tourist Commission. “One of the special things about being in a small town is that it truly does feel like you’re stepping into a Christmas movie, as everyone’s spirits seem to be a little higher, and the overall general mood of the community is jolly.”

Stores come alive with their windows decorated for the season. This year, the season kicks off on Dec. 1 with Christmas on Main, an event with food trucks, caroling, live music and more, including the Christmas parade at Anderson-Dean Community Park. The annual tree lighting happens on Dec. 2.

For more on Harrodsburg’s holiday festivities, visit mercercountyky.com.

GREER, SOUTH CAROLINA

Downtown Greer, best known as Greer Station, transforms itself into a Christmas fantasyland come the holiday season. With brick-paved streets and lampposts wrapped in garland and twinkling lights, as well as the two main roads leading into town festooned with candy canes, Christmas trees and shooting star lights, the city looks like a movie set, says Lindsey Shaffer, tourism specialist for the city of Greer.

The holiday season kicks off with Christmas in Greer, a one-weekend celebration that begins with arts, crafts, roaming carolers, s’mores and more before Santa comes to town and reads “T’was the Night Before Christmas.” Then the countdown to the lighting of the tree begins. It all happens at Greer City Park on Dec. 1.

The City of Greer will host Breakfast with Santa on Saturday, Dec. 2, and the Greer Farmers Market will be open Dec. 2-3 with local artisans so you can check off some items on your gift list.

Christmas in Greer weekend comes to a close with its annual Christmas parade on Sunday, Dec. 3.

For a complete rundown of all holiday festivities, go to discovergreer.com. 📱

Give Big Get Gig

WCTEL food drive returns this holiday season

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

WCTEL is set to kick off one of its most successful community promotions with the Give Big, Get Gig food drive for a second straight year.

The initial drive helped ensure families across the region experiencing food insecurity during the holidays had enough to eat. Nearly three tons of food donations were taken in during the 2022 food drive. In exchange for donating at least three nonperishable food items, WCTEL customers participating in the Give Big, Get Gig effort received a monthlong speed boost to WCTEL's 1 Gig top tier.

"We are fortunate to be in a position where we reach thousands of customers throughout western South Carolina," says WCTEL CEO Jeff Wilson. "It's a powerful statement to see so many people step up in a way that benefits their fellow neighbors and citizens so significantly."

Collections from the 2023 drive will once again benefit food pantries in Abbeville, Greenwood and McCormick counties, in addition to food banks in Iva and Newberry.

"It's vitally important that the business community wants to support us and what we try to do every day," says Andrea White, executive director of the Food Bank of Greenwood County. "We're seeing on average 150-200 people a week, and that is actually higher than it was last year."



WCTEL employees donate food and distribute the donations during the Give Big, Get Gig event benefiting local food shelters.



WCFIBER Account Services Representatives, from left, Olivia Prince, Robin Ramey, Emily Young and Courtney Dominick collect food items as customers drop them off.

Inflation over the past year has made food pantries such as those supported by Give Big, Get Gig even more vital to their communities. Food prices have increased around 11% over the past year, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics.

"It's affecting a broad spectrum of people in the community," White says. "For our clients, it's no coincidence that when inflation goes up, the number of people in

need goes up. They're sometimes on such tight budgets — even two-income families if they've got a couple of kids — their margin for error can be so small."

A GROUP EFFORT

WCTEL employees were instrumental last year in collecting and delivering donations among the five different food banks in time for the holidays. "It warms my

Photography contributed by WCTEL

heart to have such a promotion because of being able to give back to our community and getting our customers involved in something so worthwhile,” says Tosha Hanna, an account services representative in WCTEL’s Abbeville office. “I thought, ‘What a difference we’re making in our community.’ All we did was offer the upgrade for 30 days, and the outpouring of love and support we got back from the community was amazing.”

It was only fair that if WCTEL asked its customers to make food donations, WCTEL give something back to them.

“Our customers don’t need an incentive to give, but we also wanted to thank them,” Wilson says. “December can be a busy time for everyone. Guests and family members fill up homes, many of which are connecting to WiFi as they play games, stream their favorite shows, work from home and hook up new home security equipment. If we can help their holiday experience by giving them a little speed boost in exchange for helping their fellow neighbors, it’s a no-brainer.”

Stephen Taylor, WCTEL community affairs/economic development strategist, was among the cooperative’s employees who made deliveries to the area food banks last December. “I was able to deliver some of the donations with our team, and it was exciting to see how very appreciative they were for the food that we were able to donate,” he says. “Giving back to the community is always a great feeling.”

FILLING A NEED

The Iva Food Bank, located at the First Baptist Church of Iva, has been serving the area for nearly two decades, handing out food every two weeks to those in need. Iva Food Bank Director Betty Richey says her organization, staffed by a small band of volunteers, serves 1,000-1,500 people per month.

The timing of Give Big, Get Gig couldn’t be better. “That’s when people spend more on electric bills and heating bills,” Richey says. “The kids are home from school for a couple of weeks, and

there’s no fresh produce from gardens. Then you’ve got Christmas, and parents are trying to buy presents for the kids so they’ll have something under the tree. So, during the holidays it’s usually the roughest.”

Coordinated drives such as Give Big, Get Gig are helpful, but Richey says every donation is appreciated as the Iva Food Bank tries to serve those in need from a large area. Some come from Anderson, Pickens County, Calhoun Falls and Lowndesville. “It’s always a blessing, no matter what,” she says.

Organizers at WCTEL of the now-annual food drive hope that Give Big, Get Gig will grow, building on its initial success and continuing to help those in need in time for the holidays.

“I just can’t put into words how much we appreciate it,” says Mike Shirley, food bank director for United Christian Ministries of Abbeville County. “Our churches, individuals and businesses all around the community do an excellent job, and we’re just blessed.”



Supported agencies

- United Christian Ministries of Abbeville County
- Food Bank of Greenwood County
- Iva Food Bank
- McCormick Helping Hands United
- Newberry Living Hope Foundation Food Pantry

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: WCTEL Account Services Representative Tosha Hanna helps with Give Big, Get Gig.

WCTEL Logistics Specialist Kendall Ryans, left, and WCTEL Outside Plant Engineering Manager Mark Crawford get ready to deliver the food collected during the Give Big, Get Gig campaign.

WCTEL Director of Commercial Operations Shannon Sears, left, and Account Services Representative Dee Morton hustle to fill another box with food.



Iva Food Bank Manager Betty Richey, center, receives a large load of food to stock the shelves from WCTEL Director of Engineering/Construction Jeff Robinson, left, and LeeAnne Burdette, account services representative.

Passion project

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program
inspires a love of learning



Story by JEN CALHOUN

Getting a book in the mail always made Andrea Robertson's children hop with joy. "Kids hardly ever get mail, so they just loved it," says the Lafayette, Tennessee-based educator and mother of three. "I think that excitement most definitely helped fuel their interest in reading and learning."

Andrea's children received the monthly books through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, a program that sends free books to children from birth to 5 years old no matter the family's income.

Although her children have aged out of the program, Andrea believes it has had a positive impact on their futures. "Having books from an early age helps children build content knowledge that they might not get otherwise," she says. "It helps give them a foundation that's so important when they get to school."

FOR THE LOVE OF BOOKS

Today, more than 2 million children are enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

The programs, which are established and maintained locally, are available in all 50 states, including 15 statewide programs — with more starting up every year.

The Macon County Education Foundation in East Tennessee was one of the earliest adopters of the program, says Linda McCrary, one of the founders of the foundation and its president at the time. "Our board was approached by a member of the Tennessee Library Association Board to be a champion for this new program that the library board was sponsoring," says Linda, a former educator and the program's local coordinator.

The foundation's board agreed readily, she says. Soon after in 2004, then-Gov. Phil Bredesen and the Dollywood Foundation partnered to create the Tennessee Governor's Books from Birth Foundation. The governor's foundation paid 50% of the program's costs while local organizations funded the rest in their communities. Today, the Macon County Education Foundation also receives help paying for the program from the county commission and school board.



Set it up!

If your city or county does not offer an Imagination Library program, there are ways to set one up. Visit [imaginationlibrary.com](https://www.imaginationlibrary.com) to learn out more or to find a program in your area.

POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY

These partnerships are good for the community at large, says Nora Briggs, executive director of the Dollywood Foundation, which launched the first program nearly 30 years ago. “Simply getting books into the home changes the trajectory of children, families and communities,” she says. “Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is an accomplished, simple and effective way to make communities better places to live by supporting and nurturing a love of books, shared family time and early learning.”

While the goal is to inspire a lifetime love of reading to give children opportunities to succeed, research shows an even greater impact. The program has led to significantly stronger reading skills and a better understanding of letter and word concepts when children start school. In addition, the establishment of reading routines has been found to bring about increased stability, emotional well-being and an improved family atmosphere, according to summaries of research distributed by The Imagination Library.

ON A MISSION

Dolly Parton started the book-gifting program in Sevier County, Tennessee, in 1995, as a tribute to her father, Robert Lee Parton Sr., who worked as a sharecropper and went on to farm his own acreage. Despite his lack of education, he had a knack for turning a profit. “He was the smartest man I have ever known, but I know in my heart his inability to read probably kept him from fulfilling all of his dreams,” Dolly says.

Now, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library has gifted nearly 200 million books to children in the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and the Republic of Ireland. More than 24 million books were gifted in 2022 — a nearly 12% increase over 2021.

And while the program started small, Dolly’s ambitions for it grew as other organizations and volunteer groups implemented the Imagination Library

concept in their own communities. “Inspiring kids to love to read became my mission,” she says.

WORKING ON A DREAM

Communities that invest in children from a young age show a commitment to bettering their cities and towns, says Linda, who was an educator for 37 years and founder of the Macon County Education Foundation.

To make sure education ranked high in children’s minds, they need a strong foundation from birth. Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library fit the bill. “Placing books in the hands of children is the basis of educating children,” Linda says. “It’s the basis for preparing them for school.”

The importance of the work done by volunteers, government officials and local businesses isn’t lost on Dolly. “The seeds of dreams are often found in books, and the seeds you help plant in your community can grow across the world,” Dolly says. 📖



Photos contributed by Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dolly's daddy



Robert Lee Parton, Dolly Parton's late father, never learned to read or write — not because he didn't want to, but because he needed to work to help his family survive. His parents raised 15 children in the mountains of East Tennessee, where food was scarce and the one-room schoolhouse was more than a mile away, Dolly wrote in her 2020 memoir, “Songteller: My Life in Lyrics.”

As an adult raising 12 kids of his own, Robert planted tobacco in the rugged and rocky hills of East Tennessee but often took on construction jobs to make ends meet. Money was always tight. When Dolly was born, he paid the doctor with a sack of cornmeal instead of cash.

“He was such a smart person. I always thought that if Daddy had an education, there's no telling what he could have been,” Dolly wrote. “Because he knew how to barter, he knew how to bargain. He knew how to make everything work, and he knew how to count money. He knew exactly what everything was worth, how much he was going to make from that tobacco crop, what he could trade and how he could make it all work.”

While he was embarrassed about his lack of literacy skills for most of his life, Robert took pride in Dolly's efforts with the Imagination Library. “I got him involved helping me with [the Imagination Library], and he felt so great about that,” she wrote. “I told him, ‘Daddy, there are probably millions of people in this world who don't know how to read and write, who didn't get the opportunity. Don't be ashamed of that. Let's do something special.’”

Bright future

Main Street United Methodist Church shines in Abbeville

Story by ANNE BRALY

Thanks to a choir of hammers, saws, paint buckets and brushes, Main Street United Methodist Church has a fresh new look after undergoing a transformation that took almost nine months to complete.

“The building wasn’t falling in on us or anything,” says Pastor Brandon Fulmer. “But it had been 25 to 30 years since any major work had been done, and we were confident that if it wasn’t done now, then in the next 10 years it might have moved from a heavy maintenance project to restoration.”

Rooms throughout the church were repainted, and flooring in the Greene Center, which houses church offices, and the Education Building was replaced. The exterior doors to the sanctuary are new, as are those in the Education Building. The choir loft was given a light renovation, too, enlarging it just a little to accommodate a new baby grand piano. In addition, the Fellowship Hall has new windows, and the kitchen cabinets have a fresh coat of paint.

The bell tower was the only area in the church in need of repair after termite damage was found during an inspection. “It proved to us that the timing for the project was right,” Brandon

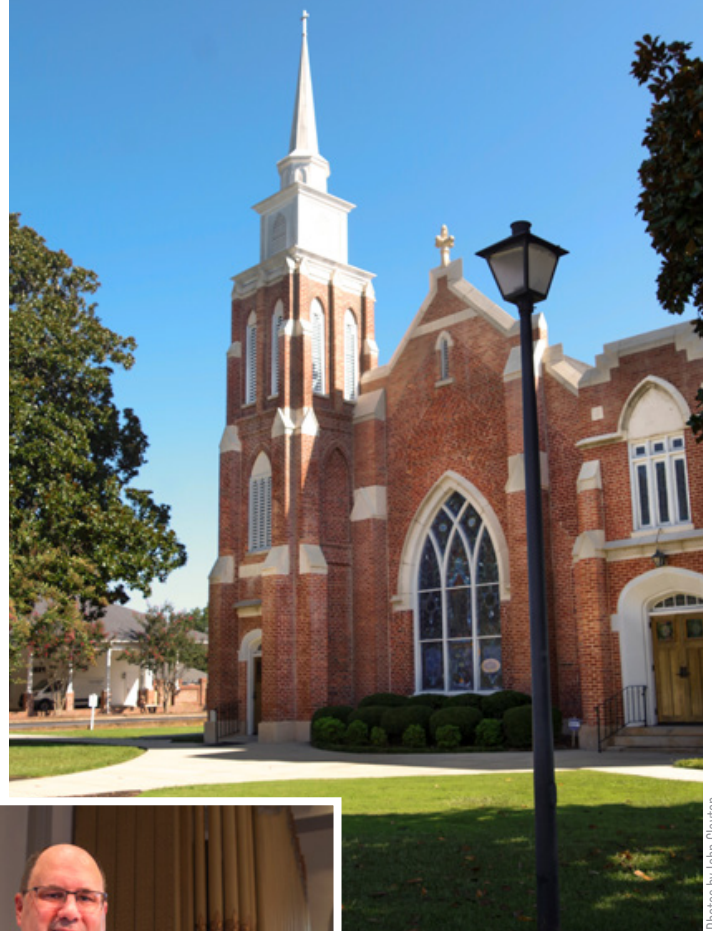
says. “That was the sort of thing we’d hope to find along the way so that it didn’t turn into something worse.”

Main Street United Methodist Church has a membership of 337, many of whom had a hand in the maintenance. A volunteer from WCTEL also offered advice for improvements to the church’s WiFi coverage. Now the church can stream its services on its social media sites and send recordings of the services to WCTEL to be broadcast on Thursday nights.

“WCTEL was very helpful,” says Shari Fulmer, the church’s discipleship coordinator and the pastor’s wife. “We stream our church services so that folks can join in. We are grateful that their advice helped make our streaming smoother and faster.”

REACHING OUT

Community outreach is an important part of the church’s mission, and it has a dedicated team of volunteers who help with needs of the Abbeville community.



Photos by John Clayton

ABOVE: A view of Main Street United Methodist Church in Abbeville. The base of the church’s bell tower underwent repairs to strengthen it.

LEFT: Brandon Fulmer is pastor of Main Street United Methodist Church.

BELOW: Boxes of food are lined up at the Main Street United Methodist Church Food Pantry, part of United Christian Ministries of Abbeville County.



Main Street United Methodist was one of the founding churches of the Abbeville Food Pantry and offers its Education Building for food pickups every Friday. The congregation also has a team of volunteers to help those in need with health care, housing and utility assistance as part of the United Christian Ministries of Abbeville County. And to ensure children are well fed, the General Instruction for Tomorrow program provides food when school isn’t in session, and the church’s Angel Tree makes sure they have gifts under the tree at Christmas.



“These are folks who work year-round to spread the love of Christ to the people of Abbeville,” Brandon says. 🗨️

Stop the SURGE

FIVE TIPS TO PROTECTING YOUR ELECTRONICS

Look around your home and consider the TV, computer or other devices plugged into an electrical outlet. A power surge is all it takes to turn one of those investments into a painful loss.

Fortunately, adding a layer of protection is relatively straightforward and affordable.

1 POWER STRIPS — KNOW THEIR LIMITS

Basic power strips only offer minimal protection against a power surge. In fact, think of them as little more than robust extension cords with multiple outlets. Some may have a circuit breaker that trips and shuts off power to devices if there's trouble. But there are better options.

2 KNOW YOUR JOULES

When considering a surge protector, look for a joules rating, which shows how

much energy the protector can absorb before failing. A higher joules rating typically indicates more protection. Look for a joules rating of 2,000 if you're protecting pricey or sensitive equipment.

3 CUSTOMIZE

Surge protectors don't all look the same. Some are big and bulky. Others are thin. Some have room for dozens of connections. Others are travel-size with a single outlet. So, consider exactly what you need, including the number of devices you wish to connect or specific connections for items such as network cables — it's not just power lines that are vulnerable to surges.

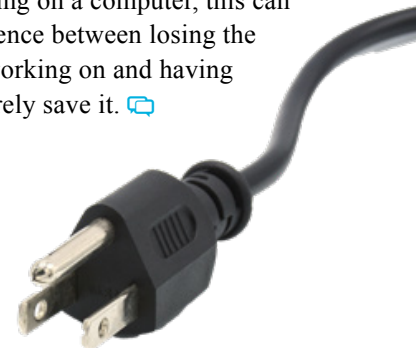
4 REPLACE AS NEEDED

The main job of a surge protector is to absorb excess voltage. Those power spikes take a toll, so protection degrades over time. Eventually, the protector may fail entirely. Lights on some devices

indicate when they can no longer do the job. But if the protector is hidden in a corner or beneath furniture, it's easy to miss that light. When possible, select a surge protector with an automatic shut-off feature.

5 TAKE THE UNINTERRUPTIBLE ROUTE

Generally known as UPS, uninterruptible power supplies do double duty. They not only offer surge protection, but they also provide enough battery power to keep your equipment running for a few minutes when the power goes out. If you're working on a computer, this can be the difference between losing the file you're working on and having time to securely save it. [🔗](#)



A tasty tradition

Whether in your PJs or your Sunday best, holiday brunch hits the sweet spot

A holiday brunch has two musts: The time served — just a bit later than the usual morning rush hour. Then, there's the menu with dishes that put a little flair into the typical breakfast fare.

A brunch can be quiet and cozy or a grand seated affair that shows off all your culinary talents and best china. You can make it whatever you want it to be. After all, there's a special connection between brunch and the holidays — a wonderful combination that satisfies the stomach and the soul. Whether you're hosting or joining friends for brunch, the magic of this midmorning meal will weave its spell.



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Photography by **Mark Gilliland**
Food Styling by **Rhonda Gilliland**

STUFFED FRENCH TOAST

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1 tablespoon plus 1/2 teaspoon vanilla, divided
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans or walnuts
- 1 (16-ounce) loaf French bread
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- Butter for frying
- 1 (12-ounce) jar apricot preserves
- 1/2 cup orange juice

Beat together cream cheese and 1 tablespoon vanilla until fluffy. Stir in nuts. Cut bread into thick, 1 1/2-inch slices. You should get 10-12 slices per loaf. Cut a pocket in the top of each slice and fill with 1 1/2 teaspoons of cream cheese mixture.

Beat together eggs, heavy cream, 1/2 teaspoon vanilla and nutmeg. Dip stuffed slices into egg mixture.

Melt butter in frying pan and fry slices until golden brown on both sides.

Heat together preserves and orange juice and serve alongside the hot toast. Makes 5-6 servings.



EGG BRUNCH

- 4 slices bacon, diced
- 2 packages (4 1/2 ounces each) sliced dried beef, cut into thin strips
- 2 small cans sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1/2 cup butter, divided
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 4 cups whole milk
- 16 large eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

In a large skillet, cook bacon until almost done, then add dried beef, mushrooms and 1/4 cup butter. While hot, add flour, then stir in milk. Simmer sauce, stirring constantly, until thick and smooth.



In a large bowl, whisk eggs, evaporated milk and salt. In another large skillet, heat remaining butter until melted. Add egg mixture. Cook and stir over medium heat until eggs are completely set, but not dry.

Add all ingredients to a casserole dish and bake, covered, at 275 F for 1 hour.

Note: May be made a day ahead and refrigerated, covered, then baked as directed. Very good served with baked curried fruit.

MAMA'S CINNAMON ROLLS

Easy and delicious, these cinnamon rolls make a mouthwatering addition to your holiday table and are perfect for brunch or any meal.

- 5 tablespoons butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 2 (8-ounce) cans crescent rolls
- 3 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon

Heat oven to 375 F. In a 9-by-13-inch baking pan, melt the 5 tablespoons of butter. Stir in brown sugar, water and pecans.

Separate each can of crescent roll dough into four rectangles; seal perforations. Spread the rectangles with the 3 tablespoons of softened butter. Combine granulated sugar and cinnamon; sprinkle over butter dough rectangles. Roll up each rectangle from the short side. Cut each roll in four slices and place in prepared pan over butter-pecan mixture cut side down.

Bake for 20-25 minutes. Invert immediately onto rectangular serving platter or sheet of aluminum foil. Spoon any remaining sauce on top of rolls. Makes 32 small cinnamon rolls.



CURRIED FRUIT

Rich, buttery, sweet and savory, this baked fruit dish is a delicious change of pace as a side dish for brunch.

Maraschino cherries in green and red add a holiday touch.

- 1 can peach halves (see tip)
- 1 can apricot halves
- 1 can pear halves
- 1 can pineapple chunks
- 10-12 maraschino cherries (red or green or a combination of both)
- 1/2 cup pecan halves
- 1/3 cup butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons curry powder

Drain fruits and arrange in baking dish. Add nuts. Melt butter and stir in brown sugar and curry powder. Bake, uncovered, at 325 F for 1 hour, basting every so often with drippings in dish. Makes 8-10 servings.

Tip: Whole fruit makes a lovely presentation, but cutting the fruit into bite-sized pieces makes it easier to serve and eat. 🍴



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