

CONNECTED



**Drive for
excellence**

The Range at Cold Springs

**DISC GOLF
DOMINANCE**

**CUTTING-EDGE
TOOLS**

By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
 NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Agriculture thrives with broadband

Every day I hear examples of how the fast, reliable internet service provided by NTCA members brings telemedicine, rich entertainment resources, educational opportunities, jobs and far more to rural communities like yours.

But that’s just the beginning. These internet networks also create a vital foundation needed by a range of industries critical to the nation’s economy. While agriculture might not immediately come to mind when considering the internet, the \$4.4 billion ag tech market is a showcase for how broadband can bring farms and ranches the internet-connected tools that make agriculture more efficient, productive and sustainable.

Smart irrigation systems, farm management and automation software, drones and sensors that can remotely monitor factors such as soil moisture are just a few of the innovations used in modern agriculture. They make a real difference, too.

For example, consider just one part of the agricultural equation — water. Leveraging these high-tech tools can reduce water use by 4%. When considering the scope of the industry, that’s a tangible difference, the equivalent of filling 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Without reliable internet access, these tools wouldn’t be possible, nor would the benefits to consumers. When agricultural production is less expensive and yields are higher, we can all enjoy more favorable prices.

So, when you think about all your internet service provider does for you personally, take a moment to appreciate they’re making a difference for all of us, nationwide. 📶



The ag tech advantage

CONNECTED TOOLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Internet-connected technology makes a bottom-line difference in agriculture, responsible for as much as an **8% increase** in the value of corn crops alone. That’s an attention-getting result, and it makes it worth a closer look at ag tech.

THE DETAILS:



Ag tech includes smart irrigation farm management software, drones, remote sensing, biotech, automation and more. Many of these tools rely on the internet to share access and store and share data.

Value of the U.S. ag tech market:
\$4.4 billion

Value of agriculture, food and food-related industries:
\$1.26 trillion

Agriculture supports **43 million jobs**, **\$2 trillion** in wages and generates **\$718 billion** in taxes.

CURRENT AG TECH OFFERS:



9% reduction in chemical use



6% reduction in fossil fuel consumption



4% reduction in water use — enough to fill 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools



30-million-pound decrease in herbicide use

THE BOTTOM LINE: Ag tech enables farmers to lower costs while increasing yield and productivity.

Truly personal fitness

Online fitness offerings bring workouts to wherever you are

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

After an exhausting workday, heading to that boring fitness class that's way too expensive to skip sounds like about as much fun as a root canal. What if you could just click an app or website and join a class from home? Think of the time, energy and frustration you could save.

With live and prerecorded classes and a fast and reliable internet connection, it's easy to turn any space into a gym. Thanks to apps and an array of online workout programs, you have the ability to exercise whenever, wherever and with whomever you want.

Some apps create personalized daily workout programs, while others provide a library of on-demand classes. Take a live class and become part of a community where everyone feels the burn.

PICKING THE PERFECT PLAN

As the popularity of online exercise programs continues to grow, so does the number of available options. Before choosing one, here are some factors worth considering.

Cost: Pricing can vary widely, but many apps and programs offer a free trial before requiring a subscription or financial commitment.

Instructors: Check their credentials to make sure they're certified in whatever they're teaching.

Variety: You'll maximize your results by

finding a program that keeps you interested while increasing the difficulty over time.

Devices: Make sure the program you choose works across all your devices. Compatibility is important since one of the biggest benefits of online fitness is the ability to take it with you anywhere.

FITNESS TO GO

While the at-home workout might seem isolating, it's actually a gateway to a digital community of like-minded fitness enthusiasts. The classes can provide a connection to a new whole world.

Onepeloton.com: Most famous for its much-advertised, in-home bike revolution, the Peloton digital app features on-demand and live classes of all kinds — no equipment needed.

Nike.com/ntc-app: This free app provides a variety of classes and styles for folks with busy schedules.

Apple.com/apple-fitness-plus: These classes, including yoga and Pilates, are personalized and perfected for Apple Watch users.

DailyBurn.com: This site offers the opportunity for one-on-one instruction. You can discover a favorite series or search for a specific workout depending on your mood.

Beachbody.com or BODi: This platform features '80s-style bootcamp classes, progress-tracking and nutrition hacks. 

Moving and grooving

Some mobile fitness fans are turning to more creative ways to work out at home. Harkening back to the days of Richard Simmons and Jazzercise, online dancing is fast becoming a personal fitness staple.

Online dance classes can be less expensive than in-person sessions and offer more style options. And, many people feel more comfortable staging a dance party in their own living rooms rather than in a studio full of strangers.

Zumba.com: The Latin-inspired cardio workout has motivated millions around the world to get moving since dancing into the spotlight in 2001.

Obefitness.com: With more than 8,000 classes and 20 different class types to choose from, there's something for everyone. Up to 22 live classes are available, seven days a week, starting at 6 a.m. Eastern time.

Dancio.com: Here you'll find hundreds of recorded classes covering various dance styles.

Steezy.co: Work out while learning a variety of urban dance moves.

We've got the speed you need

Our next goal is offering an unmatched customer experience

Our days are getting longer. Spring is around the corner, but we're not there yet. I am still cherishing this season of darkness. There is a stillness that comes with the winter, and it's in those moments of quiet when I take a moment to reflect on your service and the importance we place on delivering a superior customer experience.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

We are now in year two of a two-year companywide customer experience initiative. We've conducted surveys, interviews, customer journey mapping, and we've pinpointed areas where we can improve on our promise to you.

We offer so much more than fast internet, and that is our promise to you.

Our commitment begins at the heart of your homes, where your internet service transforms into an experience. We understand that your internet connection is more than just fiber and routers. It's your gateway to your world and to each other.

That's why we are so excited about our managed WiFi service, WiFi X. This service not only puts the control of your home WiFi network at your fingertips, but it also acts as a guardian, blocking cyberthreats before they can breach your

home. Your security is our top priority. Just in the past two months, WiFi X has blocked more than 343,936 threats from entering your homes.

What else sets us apart? We value simplicity and honesty. We don't have internet contracts, binding you to our service, nor do we offer misleading pricing. We understand that your needs may evolve, and we want our services to adapt with those changes. While we may not always claim to offer the lowest price, we are committed to providing the best service.

We care. Whether we are taking off our shoes and entering your homes or working with you through a service issue, we take your concerns seriously. And, while we may not always get it right on the first try, we learn from every interaction and adjust course if necessary.

We live here. We're deeply rooted in our communities. Through the Freshwater Coast Community Foundation, employee contributions and volunteerism, we actively participate in initiatives that uplift and support our communities. Our employees have the option to donate to area causes through payroll deductions and have Volunteer Time-Off, when they are encouraged to go and serve our communities.

Our employees understand our community because they are an integral part of it. When you reach out to us, you're not just talking to a faceless entity, you're talking to someone who understands your community, your needs and your perspective.

Thank you for choosing us as your internet provider. We may be more than 70 years old, but we are only just beginning. 



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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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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



Trent Willey manages day-to-day operations and keeps guests' experiences well above par at The Range at Cold Springs.
See story Page 9

Ready to serve

WCTEL is growing at an amazing rate, both in residential and commercial broadband clients. As a result, our team is also expanding so we can continue to provide the best experience for our customers.

Please help us welcome these new employees!



CASSIE CROWE is an account service representative who lives in Iva. She and her husband, Matthew, have two sons, Kaden and Grady.

She enjoys spending time with family and taking shopping trips.



PRESTON EVANS, a native of the Abbeville and Greenwood area, is a customer service representative. His hobbies include hunting, fishing

and golf.

Fun fact: Preston has played baseball his whole life, and he's a huge South Carolina Gamecocks, Atlanta Braves and Tennessee Titans fan.



RANDY EVITT is a network operations center tech 2. He lives in Easley with his wife, Tonya. The couple has two sons, Johnathan and Justin.

Randy enjoys outdoor projects and using online tutorials to repair things on his own.

Fun fact: Randy jokes about realizing how much energy he no longer has when his two grandsons come over for a visit.



TAYLOR GRIFFIN is a network operations field tech. He is originally from Abbeville but now lives in Clemson. He enjoys golf and snow skiing.

Fun fact: Taylor was a member of the fifth-oldest fraternity in the country, Psi Upsilon, and now serves as president of the Clemson University chapter's alumni board.



GRANT GRIFFIN, an installation and repair tech, lives in Abbeville. He likes to go fishing on his boat.



COREY JACKSON, from Westminster, is a construction tech 1. He has two dogs, a German shepherd named Grizz and a Labradoodle

named Ace. Corey enjoys running heavy equipment, hunting, playing baseball and football. He also likes the challenge of any DIY project.



CJ MCGAHA is a network operations center tech 1 who lives in Greenwood. He and his wife, Meaghan, have a son, Kason, a baby

daughter, Olivia, and a goldendoodle named Charlie. CJ's hobbies include collecting baseball cards, cooking and various sports.

Fun fact: CJ was once a co-host of a sports radio show.



ANDREW PRICE is a construction tech 1 who lives in Abbeville. He and his wife, Caroline, have a daughter, Maggie, and a second baby on the way.

Andrew's hobbies include woodworking and hunting.



COURTNI ROCHELLE is an account service representative who lives in Calhoun Falls. She and her husband, Matthew, have a son, Langston, a

daughter, Langleigh, and two dogs, Buck and Rooster. Courtni enjoys spending free time with family, riding side-by-sides and checking on their cows.

Fun fact: Courtni loves to bake.



HANNAH STEPHENSON is a marketing communications specialist. She is originally from Lexington and now lives in

Abbeville. She is engaged to Connor Patterson. Hannah likes crafting and golf.

Fun fact: Hannah played on the golf team at Lander University for five years while earning her bachelor's and master's degrees.



TRAVIS TAYLOR is a network operations field tech. He is originally from Greenwood and now lives in Donalds. He and his wife, Tiffani, have

a son, Weston, and a daughter, Sadie Mae. Travis enjoys hunting, fishing, traveling with the family and the occasional construction project.



BRADY WAITS is a business solutions tech 1. He's originally from Lexington, but he moved to Abbeville after graduating high school. His

hobbies include hunting, fishing and golf. Fun fact: Brady fished on the Clemson University Bass Fishing Team when he was a student there.



KAYLA WHITE is an account service representative. Originally from Greenwood, she and her family moved to Abbeville last spring.

Kayla and her husband, Matthew, have two children, Hampton, and, Matty Kay. Kayla enjoys spending time with her family and watching Hampton play sports.

Fun fact: For their fifth wedding anniversary, Kayla and Matt went to Disney World.

TOTALLY AWESOME

APRIL ECLIPSE WILL WOW!

Story by KATHY DENES

The Southeast boasts plenty of beautiful scenery, but the heavens get credit for two of the region's most spectacular sights in a span of less than six months. For three hours on Oct. 14, an annular eclipse created a "ring of fire" visible along its path from Oregon down through Texas. April 8 will bring yet another eclipse, this time plunging all beneath its route from Texas up to Maine and beyond into total darkness.

Except for Southwest Kentucky, very little of the Southeastern U.S. will be in the path of totality. The shadow will barely hit the northwest corner of Tennessee as it cuts through the Kentucky Band region, skims Mayfield and then darkens Paducah and Henderson around 2 p.m. EDT.

For those not in the path of totality, even the partial eclipse will be awesome to behold. Starting around 1:55 p.m. in areas east of totality, the orbiting moon will obscure the sun's bottom-right section and make it look like a crescent by around 3 p.m. By about 4:20 p.m., the sun will again be a complete ball of fire.



Photo by Aditi/Adobe Stock

*“And the moon
in haste eclipsed
her, and the sun in
anger swore.”*

— Aristophanes, Greek writer, 450-385 B.C.,
after observing an eclipse

ECLIPSE 101

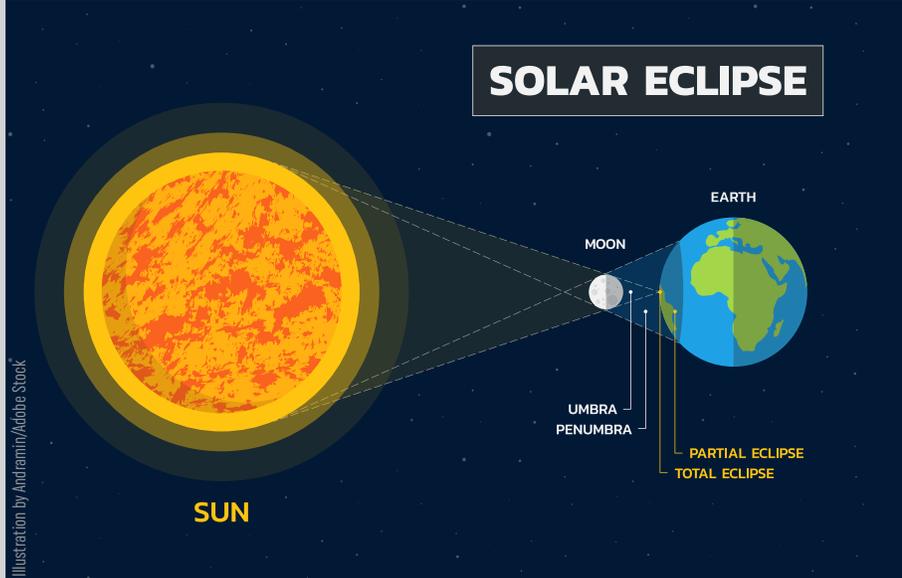
TOTAL ECLIPSE: When the moon passes between the Earth and the sun and briefly covers the sun’s disk completely, areas within the narrow path of the moon’s shadow will experience total darkness. Those outside the path of totality will see a partial eclipse. Go to greatamericaneclipse.com or eclipse2024.org to see how the eclipse will look in your area and to find loads of other information.

VIEWING AN ECLIPSE: The only time it is safe to look at the sun with the naked eye is during the brief totality phase of a total solar eclipse, so that only applies to those directly in its path. At all other times, eclipse phases and locations, direct viewing of the sun is only safe through special solar filters and viewers. Look for the ISO 12312-2 standard, and make sure they are free of scratches or flaws. No. 13 or 14 welder’s glass also provides protection.

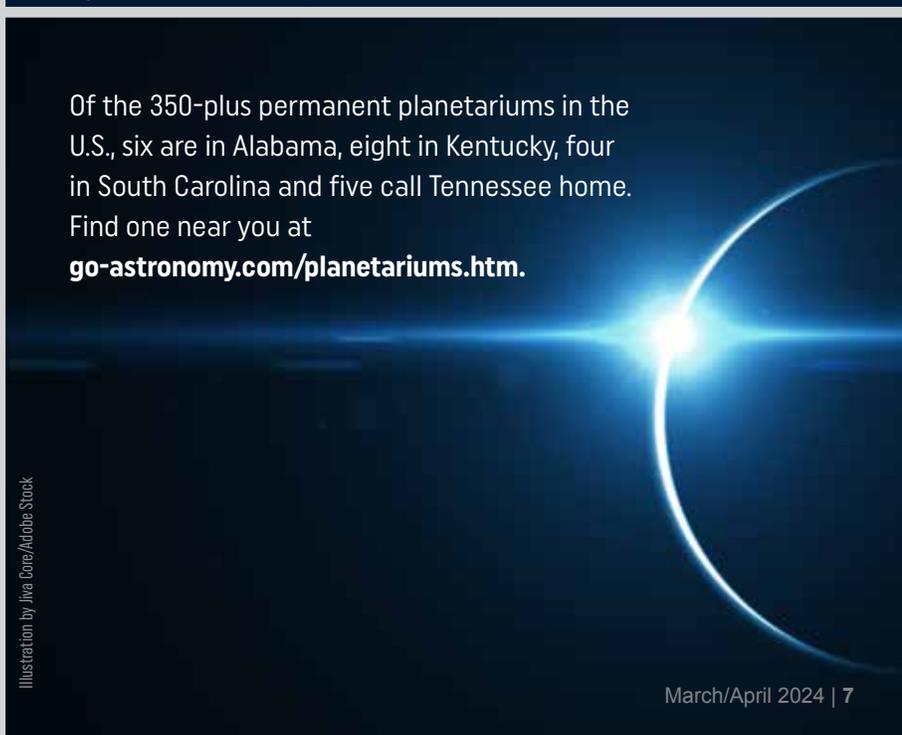
EVENTFUL OPTIONS

Events for seeing and celebrating the eclipse include Paducah’s two-day downtown street fair and a viewing party at its National Quilt Museum. Louisville’s Kentucky Science Center is chartering buses to take eclipse fans to Evansville for a riverfront view of totality.

U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, home to the INTUITIVE planetarium, is setting up solar telescopes. Many educational activities are planned, including NASA’s livestream of the eclipse which will be shown throughout the center.



Of the 350-plus permanent planetariums in the U.S., six are in Alabama, eight in Kentucky, four in South Carolina and five call Tennessee home. Find one near you at go-astronomy.com/planetariums.htm.



Taking flight

Down South Discs leads disc golf's surge in Upstate

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Ryan Ulmer's passion for disc golf became a full-time business that's taken off since the sport exploded about four years ago.

Ryan competed in local tournaments around South Carolina and saw an opportunity to begin directing competitions and offering better discs at tournaments. He started Down South Discs in 2013 to serve the sport that's free to play at many courses.

But that was just the beginning. He quit his regular job right before the pandemic to work on Down South Discs full time, and his vision meshed with a growth spurt in the popularity of disc golf, driven by people looking for new activities during the pandemic. "Participation tripled two years in a row, right as I was fully invested," Ryan says.

Professional tournaments streaming on YouTube also have drawn in new players and exposed large audiences to skilled pros, including Paul McBeth, Ricky Wysocki, Catrina Allen and Paige Pierce.

ON PAR AND ONLINE

"Social media has helped us grow," Ryan says. As the vice president of the board for the Upstate Disc Golf Club, he manages a Facebook page with more than 3,500 followers. "Some of the top tour pros have tons of followers on social media," he says. "They're constantly doing videos and interviews, the kinds of stuff where everybody's sharing it on different platforms as soon as it comes out."



Ryan Ulmer tees off using a forehand drive on a short hole.

Photo by Matt Ledger

Based in the Starr-Iva area, Ryan has used WCTEL's high-speed internet service to keep his home-based business spinning. In addition to setting up shop with new discs at tournament venues, Ryan organizes and directs nearly 80 tournaments across the Carolinas and Georgia. Down South Discs also sponsors several competitive amateur and professional players, as well as junior players.

"It's a way for me to help them and for them to positively represent me throughout the year," Ryan says of his 30 team members.

While Down South Discs has grown exponentially over the past few years, Ryan is taking another big step in the coming months with the addition of a pro shop that will be the company's first permanent location. It's part of a new development called Oconee National in the Friendship community near Clemson. The 90-acre recreational development, designed by local Bryan Schaupp, will include three championship-level disc golf courses.

"We want to make eight to 10 really big tournaments at this new complex, and we're making deals with some really big names in disc golf right now, so it's pointing in that direction," Ryan says. 📞

Nearby disc golf courses are just a short drive away

- Anderson University Disc Golf Course, nine holes, Anderson
- City Beach at Darwin Wright Park, 18 holes, Anderson
- Fleet Links, nine holes, Erskine College, Due West
- Golden Grove Farm & Brew, 18 holes, Pelzer
- Greenwood Parks & Recreation Disc Golf, 18 holes, Greenwood
- Hunter Park, 12 holes, Newberry
- Lake Russell State Park, 18 holes, Elberton, Georgia
- Lander University Disc Golf Course, 18 holes, Greenwood
- Little River Disc Golf Course, 18 holes, McCormick
- Palmetto Middle School, nine holes, Williamston
- Sadlers Creek State Park, nine holes, Anderson
- The Trails, 18 holes, Anderson

Tee up for fun

Building community through golf

Story by KARON WARREN



The Range at Cold Springs Manager Trent Willey works on the rotation and speed of his swing.

Photo by Matt Ledger

When Abbeville's Will Brubaker begins a practice session to fine-tune his golf swing, he doesn't have to worry about making the drive to a course — and a food order is just moments away.

Will relies on The Range at Cold Springs, where Toptracer technology and virtual golf create a unique experience. "It has a relaxed and social vibe, so it's a chance to play without pressure," he says.

The location is convenient, particularly since there are few traditional courses nearby. The ability to play solo or with friends is a big draw. "I like the small-town feel, and that it's not overly commercial or crowded," Will says.

Golf enthusiasts and nongolfers alike will enjoy this Toptracer driving range and event facility. "You can crush a drive and order a meal in a matter of moments," manager Trent Willey says.

Open year-round, the facility features 10 covered bays where patrons can hit golf balls and play a variety of games. The space also includes a seven-hole putting green, cornhole, a bounce house, a clubhouse and cafe. The putting green, cornhole and bounce house are free to use on a first-come, first-served basis.

HIGH-TECH RECREATION

So how does The Range at Cold Springs supply a full golf outing while the golfer stays in one bay? That's where the Toptracer technology comes in. Each bay is fitted with a monitor and four-camera system that tracks the flight of each ball.

"It's a full driving range," Trent says. "You hit the ball, and you can actually see your ball's flight. But it also tracks that ball on the camera and correlates that to your screen. Because it's tracing the ball, you're able to implement that into a lot

of different game modes, which is pretty neat. With the camera system, you can play 18 holes of virtual golf."

A HANDY APP

How can your smartphone help your game?

Download the Toptracer app before grabbing that long driver. The WiFi at The Range at Cold Springs allows golfers to view the data they need to improve their swing.

Nongolfers can just hang out and enjoy some friendly competition, and everyone also can try their skills at virtual golf tracks inspired by real courses like Kiawah, Pinehurst and Pebble Beach.

The goal of The Range at Cold Springs is to create and experience everyone can enjoy, regardless of age or skill level. The most popular item on the menu is the pulled pork nachos. After a recent kitchen expansion, other new dishes will be available in the months to come. Essentially, anyone who can swing a golf club can take part, Trent says. "We're here primarily around the game of golf, but we want to build relationships whether you're a golfer or not and create a space where you feel welcome and have a good time," he says. "I think we can accommodate a wide diversity of people and keep them engaged to where everybody is enjoying it and having fun." 📱

Events for all

The Range at Cold Springs hosts a variety of events, including:

- Corporate events
- Bachelor parties
- Birthday parties
- Church groups
- Alumni gatherings

The Range at Cold Springs

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therangeatcoldsprings.com

Facebook.com/rangeatcoldsprings
Instagram.com/range_at_coldsprings

FUNKY CHICKENS

Ornamental poultry are not your basic backyard birds



Light Brahma bantams are Turner's favorite chickens to breed and show.

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON



Joe, Meagan, Turner and Kaiser Holland have found a home in the world of exhibition poultry.

Seven-year-old Turner Holland wanted to keep busy outside of school, but he knew he wasn't athletic and couldn't stand sports. That's when his dad, Joe, brought home a half-dozen baby chickens from Tractor Supply.

Those first six chicks led to hundreds more as Turner and his family jumped into the world of backyard poultry at their home in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Now known as Chicken Hill Farm, they are a go-to source of the rare blue Araucana, as well as several other breeds of ornamental chickens.

Their clientele is a growing group that finds joy in raising chickens. More than 12 million people — about twice the population of Arizona — share their yards with a flock, according to The American Pet Products Association's most recent national pet owner survey. The number of households with chickens rose from 8% in 2008 to 13% in 2020.

Many people choose to keep them as pets or as a steady source of fresh eggs.

But exhibition chickens like the Hollands' are often inconsistent layers. Instead, these flashy fowls have a different job — strutting their stuff.

The Hollands' signature Araucana chickens are recognizable by their poof of feathers — known as tufts — that grow at their ears instead of at their “rumpless” tail ends. While the “hilarious, friendly girls,” known for their pastel blue eggs, are Chicken Hill Farm's stars, they share the spotlight with many other funky chickens. There's the Muppet-like jet black Polish with their explosion of fluffy, white head feathers that often obscure their eyes. The Brahmas have abundant, soft feathers that cover their legs and feet. And then there are the small silkies, the most unique of all. Lacking the barbicels that hold a feather's shape, they look — and feel — like they're covered with fur rather than feathers.

Maintaining the chickens' genetics is fascinating, says Turner's mom, Meagan.

At first, she and Turner focused on breeding, but then they discovered the exhibition part of fancy poultry. They took a few of their favorites to a local county show in June 2022 and then to another one a week later. Turner is now 11 and a rising star on the exhibition poultry circuit.

“After that, it just snowballed, and he’s all in,” Meagan says. “He just fell into it and is obsessed. This is such a great activity for him and for us to do as a family.”

The family now spends most weekends in the summer and fall traveling to exhibitions where Turner is making a name for himself. Meagan handles the birds. Joe, an Army veteran, drives. And younger son, Kaiser, is beginning to join his brother in the show ring.

“I don’t know if my husband was as excited about our new lifestyle,” Meagan says with a laugh. “He’s not into the breeding like Turner and I are. But he enjoys the birds and the time we spend together as a family.”



ABOVE: Turner’s light Brahma bantam cockerel won champion of the Feather Legged Class in the junior show at the Ohio National Poultry Show.

LEFT: As more people become involved with raising fancy chickens at home, the number of exhibition poultry shows and entrants continues to grow.



Photo by Sara D. Patterson

Are you ready for backyard chickens?

Saving money and healthier eggs are the intent of many people who raise chickens, but those goals are often difficult to reach, says Gregory Archer, associate professor and extension specialist for Texas A&M Department of Poultry Science.

“I tell people it should be more about self-satisfaction and the desire to know exactly how and where your eggs came from. Chickens are also fun, and kids love them.”

Possible challenges include bird medical care, waste management or strategies for excess eggs. Similarly, predators can quickly be an issue.

Also, there are geographic-specific considerations. “Often, people don’t manage heat or get the correct breeds for Texas heat,” he says. “You need to make sure you have fresh water, shade and maybe some fans.”

A little research will help identify birds suitable for heat, cold or any environment.

CHICKEN CONSIDERATIONS



If you’re contemplating backyard chickens, consider these points before adopting the chicken lifestyle.

LOCAL LAWS AND NEIGHBORHOOD REGULATIONS

- Check for the latest rules on chicken ownership in your town and county. Many cities limit the number of chickens allowed per household and prohibit roosters entirely.
- Often, cities require chickens to be kept enclosed and that the coop is well maintained and cleaned frequently.
- If you decide to sell your eggs, ensure it’s legal where you live.

EXPENSES

Even small-scale chicken farming requires ongoing expenses after buying or building a coop and fencing.

- A 40-pound bag of feed can cost \$25 or more, depending on the brand, nutritional value and other factors.
- Dietary supplements are typically needed, so budget for extra proteins and treats, like dried insects — a 5-pound bag can cost at least \$50.
- Chickens require fresh bedding, like pine shavings or chopped straw, every time the coop is cleaned.

CARE

While caring for chickens isn’t a full-time job, do expect to invest time.

- Most people adopt a daily or twice-daily routine for feeding and watering.
- Many times, chickens need to be let out of a small coop in the morning and herded back in at night for safety.
- Remember, chickens can fly. Some people prefer to clip their wings regularly, while others choose a run with fencing or netting overhead.

Source: Osceola County Extension Agent Jessica Sullivan



Photos by Matt Ledger

ABOVE: Sales Manager Eric Banks searches for equipment on an online inventory database.

LEFT: Carolina Power Equipment carries machinery for small farms and landscaping professionals.

Truly a family affair

Carolina Power Equipment driven by customer satisfaction

Story by LAZ DENES

Spring is upon us once again. It's time to hit the ground running with the outdoor power equipment in your garage prepped to last all the way through summer and fall.

Since 2019, Carolina Power Equipment has been one of the area's leading sources of products, services, parts and accessories. Offering quality brands like Kubota, Land Pride, Bush Hog and Echo, the business is ready to help everyone from casual landscapers to seasoned professionals work smarter, not harder.

The family-owned and operated company has grown from a modest lawnmower shop on the outskirts of Columbia into a pair of 10,000-plus-square-foot locations — one in Cayce, the other in Greenwood.

Eric Banks, sales manager at the Greenwood location, says the recent influx of residents from population centers buying acreage in surrounding rural areas created a surge of first-time tractor and heavier equipment buyers. "This is where the company's huge emphasis on

customer service is important," says Eric, who started with the company in 2010. "Anybody can sell you new equipment, but it's how you're treated after the fact and how you're taken care of that will keep you coming back," he says.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

Aaron Twitty, who started with Carolina Power Equipment in 2009 and took over as part owner and general manager in 2018, credits its continued success to the family atmosphere that began when father-and-son duo of Jack and Mark Horne founded the company in 1999.

Aaron married into the business, literally. He and Mark's daughter, April, a company accountant, wed in 2014. Arriving at the company with little to no power equipment experience, Aaron worked under his father-in-law's tutelage to learn every aspect of the business before taking over the reins.

"Kubota has an online database that we're constantly using to look up parts

and services, find bulletins and flat-rate codes for shop jobs, put in credit applications for sales," Aaron says. "Really, almost every part of our business is somehow tied into the web-based side. We try to be as active as we can be on our website and social media accounts."

Aaron also credits WCTEL's high-speed internet with keeping Carolina Power Equipment's operations running smoothly and efficiently.

"WCTEL internet is an integral part of our day-to-day life," Aaron says. "The speed is where we need it to be with what we need to do, and we are very pleased." 📞

Carolina Power Equipment

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carolinapowerequ.com

Facebook: @carolinapowerequipment

Instagram: @carolinapower

Meet KERRI HALL

Kerri Hall, the customer service manager for WCTEL began her career in 1999. She primarily works from the Abbeville office but enjoys traveling throughout the area.

As customer service manager, she leads the team of account service representatives. “We have ongoing training which focuses on customer education and meeting the customers’ needs,” she says. “Using discovery questions of how large a family is or how many devices they have helps us determine the package and services that will best meet their needs.”

APPS-OLUTE ADVANTAGES

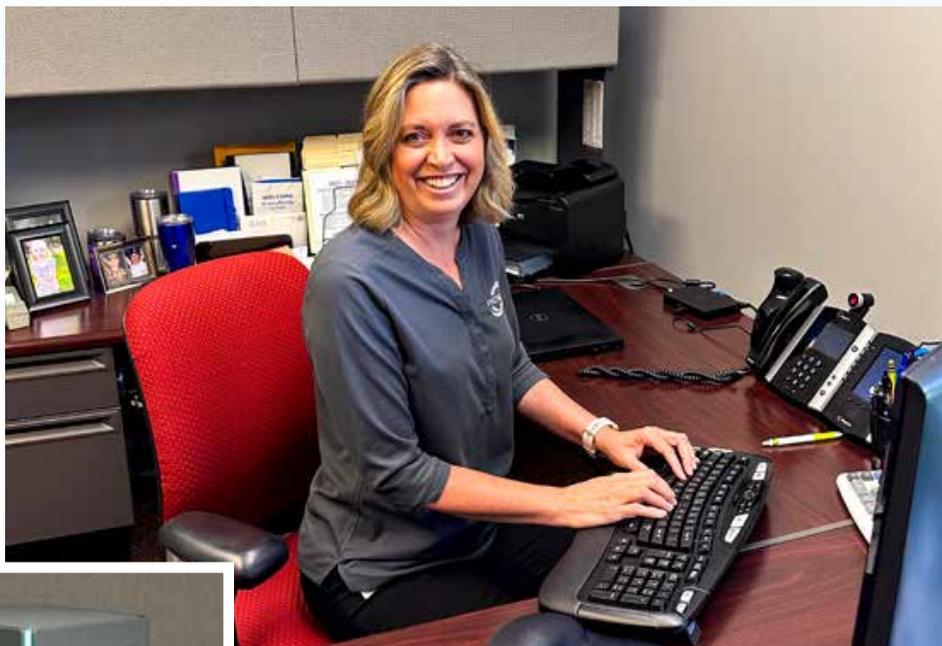
“I have used the WiFi X app at home and enjoy several of the features,” Kerri says. “I like knowing that my home network is protected from intrusions.”

She also likes monitoring the notifications when a new device connects to her home network. “We live in a rural home without close neighbors, so I am not too concerned about others accessing my network,” she says. “I do occasionally need to work from home, and I like being able to prioritize bandwidth for my home office.”

I regularly use apps in my daily routine, from paying monthly bills to checking bank account balances.”

She uses:

- Southern Saver app for online and store deals
- Ibotta and Fetch to earn cash back on purchases
- Digital photo storage apps Shutterfly and Amazon Photos to save images and order prints



ABOVE: WCTEL Customer Service Manager Kerri Hall uses WiFi X to help keep her home network secure.

LEFT: Manage household profiles and set parental controls with WiFi X.



A FAMILY WHO SERVES OTHERS

Thirty-six years ago, Kerri married Michael Hall. An engineer with Little River Electric

Cooperative in Abbeville, Michael spent his childhood years in Westminster. Their eldest, Clayton, 30, recently completed six years of active service with the South Carolina National Guard, including a 15-month overseas deployment. He is now using the GI Bill to complete his college education. Their middle son, Brandon, 27, followed in his father’s footsteps into power and is a lineman with Duke Energy.

Youngest son, Matthew, 20, is a junior at Lander University. The Halls have a 5-year-old granddaughter, Zoey Hall, and five Jack Russell terriers.

Kerri, who has a bachelor’s degree in marketing and management from Lander University with a minor in music, spends her spare time with music-related activities, including clogging. In 1991, she started as organist and pianist at Main Street Methodist Church in Abbeville and now serves as director of music ministries, which includes planning music and directing choirs of all ages.

At home, the Hall family streams the majority of their entertainment. “My sons are football fans and regularly stream games across multiple platforms,” Kerri says. “I also enjoy streaming classic kids shows and movies with my granddaughter, Zoey. When my children were small, I would buy VHS tapes of classic Disney movies so that we could rewatch them over and over. Today, those same movies are available at the click of a button through streaming.” 



Regional Accents

Local favorites are
key ingredient of
America's melting pot

Every local dish has a story behind it, history heaped with flavor. One of the best ways to discover these is by stirring the nation's culinary pot to see what's cooking.

Certain dishes are common to us Americans across the board. We'll fry just about anything. From Twinkies to turkeys, they all go in the deep fryer. But, when it comes to comfort-food classics, states and regions have their own distinct accents. U.S. culinary traditions form a giant melting pot with regional flavors blended in for extra deliciousness.

Regional foods are some of the most fascinating bites one can experience. Here's a look at some of the ones that are favorites across our nation.



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

SMOKED GOUDA MAC AND CHEESE

You'd be hard-pressed to walk into a diner around the South and not see mac and cheese on the menu. This recipe just takes it up a notch.

- 1 pound short pasta, such as elbow macaroni or shells
- 1 pound smoked gouda cheese, grated
- 8 ounces extra-sharp white cheddar cheese, grated
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mustard
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- Salt, to taste
- 4 slices of bacon, crumbled (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Cook pasta according to package directions to al dente stage, then set aside.

In a large Dutch oven or other deep pot, heat butter over medium-low heat. Once butter has melted, add in flour and whisk until all flour disappears, then slowly add in heavy cream and whole milk. Stir and let mixture come to a slight boil. Add in all spices and stir again. Lastly, add in 8 ounces of smoked gouda cheese and white cheddar cheese. Whisk until all cheese has melted.

Add in pasta and mix everything together to fully incorporate, making sure all pasta is coated with sauce. Add salt, to taste.

Transfer mixture to a large, lightly greased baking dish, then top dish with remaining smoked gouda. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until mixture is golden and bubbly.

Let cool for 15 minutes and serve warm topped with crumbled bacon, if desired. Makes 8 servings.



WILD RICE CHICKEN CASSEROLE

Wild rice is found throughout the Midwest, where this recipe originates.

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) chicken broth
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 4 cups cubed, cooked chicken
- 4 cups cooked wild rice
- 2 jars (4 1/2 ounces each) sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1 jar (4 ounces) diced pimentos, drained
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
- 1/3 cup slivered almonds

In a large saucepan, saute onion in butter until tender. Stir in the flour, salt and pepper until blended. Gradually stir in broth. Bring to a boil. Boil and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Stir in the half-and-half, chicken, rice, mushrooms, pimentos and parsley. Heat through.

Transfer mixture to a greased 2 1/2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with almonds. Bake, uncovered, at 350 F for 30-35 minutes or until bubbly. Makes 6-8 servings.

SALMON PICCATA

This is a popular recipe in the Northwest where fresh salmon is easy to find. In other states, try to get your hands on the freshest fish possible to bring out the flavors in this dish.

- 4 salmon steaks, 1 inch thick
- All-purpose flour (for dredging)
- 1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 3 tablespoons onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 heaping tablespoon capers, drained
- 1/8 teaspoon dried Italian seasonings, crushed
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons beef broth

Preheat oven to 400 F. Rinse salmon steaks under cool water, pat dry and roll in flour.

In a large ovenproof frying pan or saute pan, heat 1/4 cup butter until it melts. Briefly saute the salmon steaks, browning them lightly on both sides.

Bake, covered, 10 to 15 minutes until a meat thermometer registers an internal temperature of 140 F, or until salmon is slightly opaque in the thickest part. You may need to cut to test. During this time the meat continues to cook because the meat temperature will rise 5 to 10 degrees after it is removed from the oven and the juices will redistribute. Remove from oven. Reserve liquid in the pan, and transfer salmon onto a warm serving platter.

Using the same pan over medium heat, stir into the reserved liquid the onion, garlic, capers and Italian seasonings. Simmer for 5 minutes. Add white wine, lemon juice and beef broth. Stir until well blended. Turn off the heat, whisk in the remaining 3 tablespoons butter until blended. Remove from heat, pour sauce over salmon and serve immediately. Makes 4 servings. 🍴

SALSA ROJAS

Salsa is the condiment of choice throughout Texas and many of the Western states.

- 1 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes with garlic and onion, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) stewed tomatoes (with Mexican seasonings, if you can find them), drained
- 1 can (10 ounces) diced tomatoes and green chilies, drained
- 1 medium onion, quartered
- 2 banana peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 cup minced fresh cilantro
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 2 ripe avocados, peeled and cubed
- Tortilla chips



Place the first 10 ingredients in a food processor; cover and process until chopped. Add cilantro and lime juice; cover and pulse until combined.

Transfer to a bowl; stir in avocados. Serve with tortilla chips or use as a condiment for your favorite Tex-Mex dishes.



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