

CONNECTED

SPIRITED STORIES

Spooky tales
from author
Marjorie LaNelle



SAVOR THE FLAVOR

Mike Minto pays tribute to family with pizza

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

Online connections inspire photographers



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Building a connected future

As the nation’s leaders work to improve the infrastructure that supports our economy and our communities, there is a growing understanding of just how vital broadband service is to rural areas.

It’s important rural providers have the resources and regulatory stability they need to connect areas that often have no other options for service. The challenges those providers face go beyond simply building an internet network that must keep pace as the demands of users grow from decade to decade.

Recently, representatives of several cooperatives — among them, Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative, South Dakota; the Yelcot Telephone Company, Mountain Home, Arkansas; and Totelcom Communications, De Leon, Texas — made sure members of Congress heard this message.

Similarly, months of coping with a global pandemic proved the success of rural broadband. Countless households, businesses, schools and others leaned on their local internet providers during these challenging times. However, there is still work to do in deploying networks and delivering robust and affordable services.

This is where public policy can continue to play an important role, setting standards for broadband infrastructure and leveraging the know-how of community-based experts, like the company providing your internet service today.

I’ve been delighted at the bipartisan nature of these discussions and the understanding that broadband kept the American economy humming during the pandemic. Now, we just need to ensure the lasting investment needed to future-proof this powerful system. 📡

'SIX PILLARS' OF RURAL BROADBAND

Fast internet builds successful communities

Rural broadband's influence extends throughout every community where fast internet networks are available. How many of these "six pillars" of rural broadband play a role in your daily life?



1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Housing values increase and businesses move more product when rural communities have broadband.



2. PUBLIC HEALTH

Instead of driving 50 miles to a health center, a telemedicine visit can bring care into the home.



3. TELEWORKING

Remote work creates fresh opportunities.

4. EDUCATION

Educators from grade school to colleges and universities are reaching students remotely.



5. PUBLIC SAFETY

Broadband networks can improve the communications systems used by emergency responders.

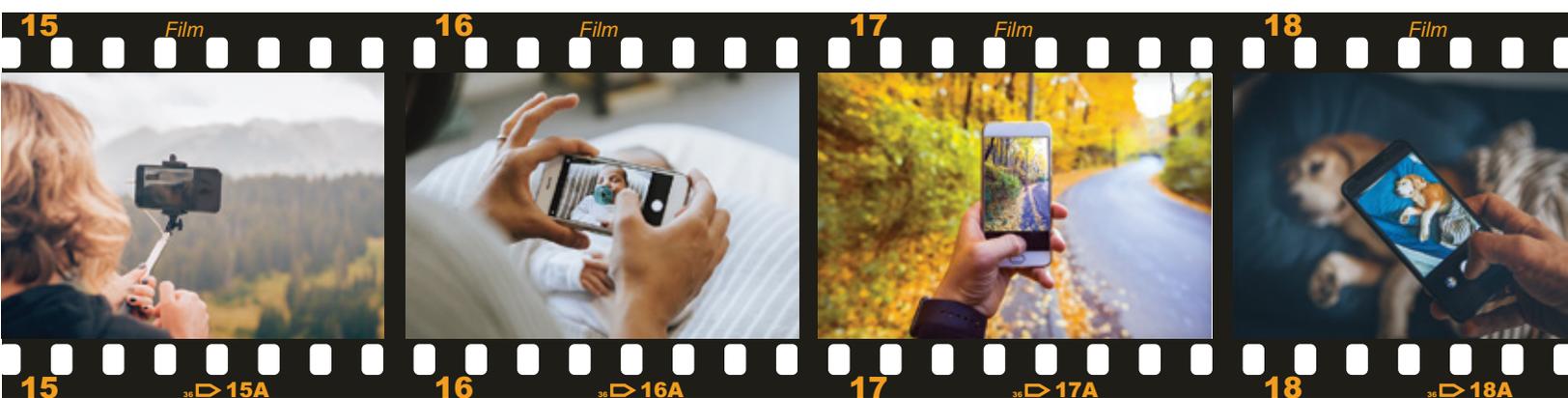
6. QUALITY OF LIFE

Thanks to broadband, young people find rural communities more appealing.



These pillars of rural broadband are based on the work of Christopher Ali, an associate professor in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Virginia. He is also the author of "Farm Fresh Broadband: The Politics of Rural Connectivity." 📖

CORRECTION: In the July-August issue of your magazine, the final word of a travel story on Page 7 about the Red River Gorge was omitted. This is the complete sentence: As the Red River continues through the heart of the gorge, it levels out and provides gentle Class I paddling ideal for beginners.

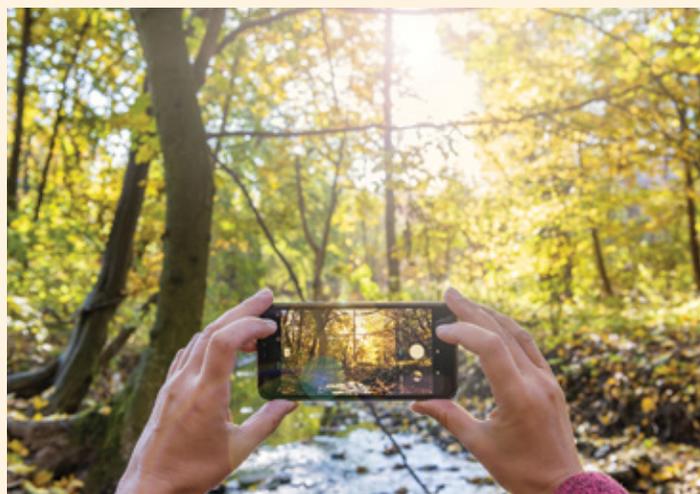


Better-looking videos are just a few steps away

Thanks to smartphones, recording and sharing videos has never been easier. Whether you're capturing precious moments to share with friends and family, showcasing your talents or documenting a moment the rest of the world needs to see, a high-quality video helps get your message across loud and clear.

Here are some tips to help make sure your next video is your best one yet.

- **Clean the lens** — Sometimes it's easy to overlook the obvious. We're touching our phones constantly. We're taking them out of our pockets and purses multiple times a day, so they're bound to pick up a few fingerprints and smudges along the way. Take a second and give the lens a couple of swipes with a moistened cleaning wipe. No wipes? No worries — a quick breath and a swab with your shirttail can get the job done, too.
- **Orientation** — Make sure to turn your phone horizontally when shooting videos. Shooting horizontally, also called landscape orientation, results in a more aesthetically pleasing experience for viewers, and it looks great across multiple platforms, especially on wide screens. Shooting this way also allows you to capture more of the surroundings in the video.
- **Stabilization** — Nothing is harder to watch than a shaky video. A simple way to make your video better is by using two hands to hold the phone steady. Instead of extending your arms, tuck your elbows in close to your sides and hold the phone closer to your chest. If a professional-quality video is what you're after, consider investing in a tripod or a gimbal to give your arms a rest. Also, many newer phones now include image stabilization features that can correct for inadvertent movements during shooting.
- **Composition** — Take a moment to compose your shot before pressing the record button. For example, if you are making a video in a controlled environment, perhaps filming a tutorial in your home, look around and make sure the background is clear of anything you wouldn't want people to see.
- **Lighting** — When recording indoors have the subject face a window if possible. If there is no natural light, consider purchasing an LED light ring. Light rings have become very popular and are an inexpensive way to make your video look professional. Avoid backlit settings, which can erase a person's features on video and replace them with a dark figure instead.
- **Zoom cautiously** — While the digital zoom option is a nice feature to have, using it while recording can result in an awkward-looking video. Instead, to keep the image crisp, take the time to frame the shot before recording and avoid using the zoom. Unless you're planning to use the zoom distortion as an effect, get as close to the subject as you safely can to preserve the image quality.



Competing for jobs

Fast internet service puts us in the game

Our world is a competitive place, and not just when it comes to sports. The leaders of every town and county understand they're in a fight for one of the most desired assets anywhere — jobs. The opposition isn't just the next county over, either. Every community in the nation is in the game.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

Success means bringing any possible advantages onto the playing field, and fast internet service is more than critical. It's essential because it's important to businesses of all types and sizes.

Small manufacturers benefit from speedy internet service because resources from accounting to customer support often flow through the internet. Similarly, video calls are now just a normal part of business life. For communities hoping to recruit these types of employers, fast internet access is mandatory.

Then, think about all the changes we've seen in remote work, which was on the rise even before the pandemic. Remote work is more common than ever, and if you can work from home, our

community is highly attractive. After all, the big-city pace isn't for everyone.

So, why not bring those jobs to rural America? We live in a friendly, affordable and beautiful place. And we have the fast, reliable fiber internet network required to make remote work more than just a possibility. The speed and affordability of our internet service is comparable to — and often greatly exceeds — service in major cities. In many ways, we're a better place for remote work than metropolitan areas.

But it's about more than just jobs. We're also building for the future. Our students can learn the skills they need to be competitive, not only for today, but also for tomorrow. A growing number of colleges and universities offer online courses. Students about to enter the workforce can broaden their horizons without ever leaving home.

But students aren't alone in benefiting from classes accessed via the internet. People looking to grow professionally now have similar resources available that allow them to continue their education and open new doors to either advancement or entirely fresh careers. Many of those classes and other resources are best experienced through live video, which needs a high-speed internet connection.

While our friends in economic development always keep a watchful eye out for opportunities to attract the attention of large employers, one of the things that excites me most is the entrepreneurs: industrious people putting in the hard work needed to kick-start a business.

Our affordable living costs can give young businesses an edge, allowing them to keep overhead lower than their competitors. They can move large amounts of data, share information, hold online meetings and more. Thanks to fast internet access, even home-based startups can link to a worldwide market that was once only accessible to businesses with large staffs in big-city offices.

Throughout the nation, there are signs of vitality in rural economies. For all the reasons I've described, fast internet service is part of the foundation making it all possible. We're in the game, and I firmly believe our services put us in a position to win. 📧

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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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WORDSOUTH
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On the Cover:



Margie Chrisley-Blalock shares regional ghost stories from Greenwood and Abbeville, the first two books in an eight-volume set. See story Page 9.

Congratulations to the 2021 WCTEL Scholarship winners Caroline Scott and Matthew Weyer

Caroline Scott attended Abbeville High School. She plans to study electrical engineering at Clemson University. She was awarded two scholarships as a result of her application.

\$8,000 WCTEL Scholarship — \$2,000 per year for four consecutive years.

\$500 Roger Alan Cox Scholarship through the Foundation for Rural Service Scholarship Program.

Roger dedicated his life to improving the lives of those living in rural America. This scholarship honors Roger's passion and endless drive to help ensure that rural Americans have access to the same technology and education as every other American.

Matthew Weyer was homeschooled in Greenwood, South Carolina. He plans to study business management/marketing at Lander University. Matthew was awarded the \$5,000 Staurulakis Family Scholarship through the Foundation for Rural Service Scholarship Program. This scholarship is awarded to students who demonstrate interest in science, technology, engineering and math, known as STEM.



OCTOBER IS CYBER SECURITY MONTH

Top five tips to be cyber aware

1. Keep all software up to date.
2. Use strong passwords or a password management tool.
3. Use two- or multi-factor authentication.
4. Use anti-virus protection.
5. Regularly review activity from online accounts.

A large graphic for a Halloween costume contest. On the left, a young girl is dressed as a witch, wearing a black pointed hat with an orange band, black eye makeup, and a black dress with white stars. She is holding an orange pumpkin bucket. The background is light gray with black bat silhouettes and white spiderweb patterns. On the right, the words "Costume Contest" are written in a large, stylized, orange font.

Entries in the contest, open to kids ages 12 and younger, must be submitted by Nov. 2 at 4 p.m. by email to photocontest@wctel.net. The photos will be posted to WCTEL's Facebook page, and voting for the winners will be Nov. 2-9 via Facebook. The three photos with the most likes will win prizes. The winners will be announced on Nov. 9. For details, visit wctel.com/Halloween.

AS MOTHER NATURE INTENDED

Okefenokee Swamp
is a wildlife
watcher's dream

Story by ANNE BRALY

Nestled deep down in Georgia and stretching into Florida, the Okefenokee Swamp is eerie in places, and just plain spooky in others. It's a mosaic of vast pine islands, cypress forests and water as black as night — all elements that make up this national treasure.

The swamp, one of the world's healthiest water ecosystems, is protected from human encroachment by the National Wildlife Refuge System, an organization established to oversee a network of lands and waters for conservation, says Susan Heisey, supervisory refuge ranger of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge has 80% of the Okefenokee Swamp under its jurisdiction, as well as close to 40,000 acres of uplands immediately surrounding the swamp. At 407,000 acres it's the largest national wildlife refuge in the East.

Where there is swampland, there are gators. And alligators love this swamp because they're protected here. The refuge provides them a safe haven — a wealth of food and shelter to sustain a thriving population of the reptiles.

"There are generally no problems between man and alligators due to the amount of habitat the refuge provides," Heisey says. "Generally, when an alligator sees a person, it moves in the opposite direction."

The only times that alligators can be confrontational or dangerous is if they identify people with food, Heisey explains. "So, we try to educate our visitors about the dangers of feeding and approaching wildlife so there are no issues with nuisance alligators."

Alligators can basically be found in any portion of the swamp and most adjacent ponds, ditches or other bodies of water. Alligators do live in the water, but they can also be found on land at times. The females will build up their nests adjacent to

the water where they live. Interesting trivia: Female alligators protect their nests and their young for several years, and they are the only reptiles that do this.

And their numbers remain pretty stable, although there has been no recent official count. It's a matter of water level fluctuation, a limited amount of food sources and competition between males for territorial rights.

The largest alligator ever documented was in Louisiana in the early 1900s and was more than 19 feet long. "We do not have a record of the largest alligator in the Okefenokee Swamp, but occasionally there can be individuals at around 14 feet or so," Heisey notes.

Gators aren't the only creatures found among the swamp's wetlands and woodlands. The refuge is home to 39 fish species, 37 amphibian species, 63 other reptiles, 234 birds and 50 mammals.

Most notable among the animals are wood storks, indigo snakes, gopher tortoises, black bears, endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers and sandhill cranes.

The refuge is home to both migratory and resident sandhill cranes, and most recent observation found that there are about 100 nesting pairs in residence. The migratory sandhill cranes are usually present from November through February, at which time they'll migrate up the Atlantic Flyway to their breeding grounds.

Wildlife observation is one of the most common types of recreation for visitors to enjoy while on the refuge. Walking the Chesser Island Boardwalk to the 40-foot observation tower at its end and boating the water trails on a prearranged or self-guided tour are the best ways to see the animals.

Finding the cranes is easy. Just listen for their loud bugling calls and look among the refuge prairies where the water is relatively shallow — good hunting grounds for the big, long-legged birds. Look down, not up. Sandhills nest on the ground, not in the trees.

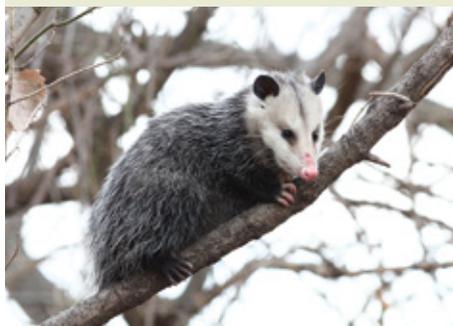
"Visitors love seeing those cranes," Heisey says. 🗨️



THE 'POGO' CONNECTION

Some baby boomers may remember "Pogo," one of the most popular comic strips of their youth. Pogo was a possum that lived in a tree in the Okefenokee Swamp and came to life weekly in newspapers across America, born from the mind of cartoonist Walt Kelly.

At its peak, "Pogo" appeared in nearly 500 papers in 14 countries, and close to 300 million copies of books about Pogo and his friends were sold. Kelly died in 1973, and his widow, Selby, continued the internationally syndicated comic strip until July 1975. After 26 years of syndication, "Pogo" the comic was completely discontinued, but the character lives on today in the welcome center at the Okefenokee Swamp Park in Waycross, Georgia. There, a large room has been turned into Kelly's studio, complete with a likeness of the man himself and his alter ego, Pogo.



SWAMP TRIVIA

The Okefenokee is OK, for now, but its future is directly tied to maintaining the integrity of the ecosystem's complex processes. The future of people and communities surrounding the swamp also is dependent on conserving the swamp.

- The swamp is the largest intact black-water swamp in North America and is more than 7,000 years old.
- The swamp is a massive, peat-filled bog inside a huge, saucer-shaped depression that was once part of the ocean floor.
- Fire is an important part of the Okefenokee ecosystem, and the refuge has a prescribed burn program in place to accomplish what wildfires once did. The fire staff burns an average of 6,000 to 10,000 acres per year.
- Most area residents have ancestors who once lived or worked in the swamp as a part of their heritage.
- The Okefenokee Swamp, as the headwaters of both the Suwannee and St. Marys rivers, provides clean water to the most pristine rivers in the Southeast.
- A National Geographic publication included the Okefenokee Swamp as among the top 100 most beautiful places on Earth.

A passion for pizza

Family traditions live on

Story by ANNE BRALY

Photography by MATT LEDGER

Michael Minto brought a taste of New York to Iva when he opened Mama Minto's Pizzeria along East Broad Street in January 2018. "All of our pizzas are New York-style and hand-tossed to order," he says.

What defines New York-style pizza? The slices are huge. To eat them as a New Yorker does, you pick up a slice, fold it over and take a big bite.

The foundation of any pizza is the dough. At Mama Minto's, it's a three-day process to reach perfection. Once the dough is mixed, cut and rolled, it's placed in the cooler, where it rests for three days. When it's needed for a pizza, Minto tosses it in the air, stretching it to size before topping it with homemade marinara sauce packed with fresh vegetables. "We love to say that when you order our pizza, you're getting a full serving of veggies with that sauce," Minto says. "We strive to bring our customers the highest quality of food, at the lowest possible price."



Owner Mike Minto, left, works with an employee, Brandon Strickland.



Mike Minto built his business strategically and with the blessings of his family. He and his wife, Amanda, even teach their two girls, Lauren and Lilly, about the daily aspects of the pizzeria.

Travis Montgomery is one of those customers. He's been a regular since Mama Minto's opened. "Everything is so fresh," he says. "You can tell nothing is frozen."

A CURIOUS MIND

Minto is a man of many interests. Before opening Mama Minto's, he spent six years in law enforcement in South Carolina. This past year, he completed his doctoral studies in educational leadership. "Food is ultimately my passion," he says. "I often apply everything that I have learned about servant leadership and transformational leadership into our business, though."

His business model includes an active Facebook page via internet service through WCTEL. "Facebook and Google allow for customer reviews, which we value," he says. "We let our reviews and customers speak for our product."

Growing up in Schenectady, New York, Minto spent many days under the tutelage of his grandmother, Vera Minto — or Mama Minto, as her grandson called her — learning the foodways of their forebears. She'd always wanted to open a pizza restaurant, Minto says, but never had

the opportunity. Though she passed away in 2020, Mama Minto lived long enough to see her dream realized through her grandson. Her face is now the restaurant's logo, and some of the recipes come from her, too.

On opening day, Minto says, he and his father had less than a few hundred dollars to their names. "We poured our heart and soul into our location and building," he says. "The old saying of 'You have to spend some to earn some' turned out to be very accurate. We have been immensely blessed."

Besides pizza, the menu at Mama Minto's features subs, salads, wings and pastas on Thursdays and Fridays. There's also an ice cream shop, Vera's Delights, in the same brick building. At its walk-up window, you can order one of 16 different flavors. "We put a lot of hard work into our recipes," Minto says. ☺

Mama Minto's Pizzeria: 109 E. Broad St., Iva 4-10 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Thursday-Saturday. Vera's Delights Ice Cream Shop hours are Saturdays only, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. 864-245-3260 | Facebook

Of perseverance & paranormal

Ninety Six native writes of unusual occurrences

Story and photography by MATT LEDGER

Instead of going to high school study hall, Margie Chrisley-Blalock worked as a library assistant at Ninety Six High School in the early '80s. "I would dream about people coming in wanting to read a book that I had written," she recalls. "I was just bitten by the writing bug, and the rest is history — literally."

Blalock credits her parents and her English teachers, Audrey Henry, Dana Gravely and Patsy Manley, for motivating her as a young writer. "They didn't just encourage me as a writer. They told me to never stop writing," Blalock says. She heeded their advice and was 51 when she made her dream of being a published author come true.

GHOSTLY GREENWOOD

Blalock has worked in several communications roles, including tourism director for Ninety Six, South Carolina.

In 2016, Blalock planned a brochure promoting a self-guided ghost tour. At the same time, she was also involved with the Greenwood Community Theatre performance of "The Wizard of Oz." Cast members and locals shared numerous stories of props randomly moving and strange noises being heard after performances.



The magnitude of mysteries led Blalock to write her first self-published book, "Ghost Stories of Uptown Greenwood," under her birth name, Marjorie LaNelle. That book is part of an eight-book series she planned titled "The History & Mystery of the South Carolina Lakelands." When completed it will span the seven-county G.L.E.A.M.N.S. area of Greenwood, Laurens, Edgefield, Abbeville, McCormick, Newberry and Saluda.

The Greenwood book gave way to an annual ghost tour, which will return in October 2021. Local actors and actresses wear period clothes and portray the ghosts along two blocks at more than a dozen sites.

'APPARITIONS OF ABBEVILLE'

For her second volume, "The Apparitions of Abbeville," Blalock visited Abbeville several times to interview locals. "I found out that the Belmont Inn is one of, if not the most, haunted places in South Carolina," she says. Susan Botts and her husband, Jim Petty, bought the Belmont in March 2020, and they have embraced its haunted history, frequently selling copies of Blalock's book to guests. "People are intrigued, and it's sparked a new reason to visit the Belmont," Blalock says.

The most popular ghost story for Abbeville tells of an unidentified actress from a 1914 production of "Ben-Hur." The woman fell ill before a performance at the Abbeville Opera House but later returned to watch from the balcony. After leading the audience in a standing ovation for the cast, she retired to her room next door at the Belmont Inn and passed away that evening. "People who have since performed there claim to have seen her apparition in the balcony," Blalock says.

Another spirit reportedly residing at the

Written under her pen name, Marjorie LaNelle's book "Apparitions of Abbeville" explores local legends of ghost encounters, including "Abraham," who once worked at the inn as a doorman.



Belmont Inn is named "Abraham." The tales recall an African American man who worked there as a doorman for several decades. "If you stay there and happen to hear your doorknob mysteriously twitch, it's possibly Abraham checking that you're safely inside your room for the night," Blalock says.

If you'd like to share your ghost encounter, email details to Blalock at marjorielanelle@yahoo.com.

- ▶ **The History & Mystery Ghost Walk of Uptown Greenwood:** Oct. 15 and 16 at 7 p.m. Check out History, Mystery, & Sweet Tea on Facebook or text/call 864-321-2695 for details on tickets.
- ▶ **Abbeville Ghost Tour:** Oct. 22 and 23 at 7 p.m. Tickets are available at Greater Abbeville Chamber of Commerce. Call 864-366-4600.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

Jason Stitt sees rural Texas through a different lens

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Jason Stitt has always seen the world a little differently. Through the lens of his camera, he likes to find new views of the places other people might pass every day without a second thought.

“Photography helps me to view the world in ways most people don’t get to. To look at things from different angles, different perspectives and to see things in a way that others may not,” he says. “Mostly, it’s an outlet for me to be creative and to show the world the beauty of God’s creation, whether that be people or nature.”

Now, with the help of the internet, he can encourage others in his community to find their own individual perspectives. Social media has been a place for Stitt to grow as a photographer by sharing his work, asking questions and engaging in critiques with other professionals. He even runs his own Facebook group, Tyler Area Photography, with more than 600 members dedicated to growing the

photography community in Tyler, Texas. “I’m still learning and growing and will never stop,” Stitt says. “We don’t have lots of photography shops like you might find in bigger cities. So almost all of my continuing education and growing the craft relies on the internet.”

Stitt caught the photography bug 18 years ago while living in California. Working as a graphic designer, he started submitting his shots to a stock photo website before becoming a full-time photographer two years later. After moving back home to New Zealand with his family, Stitt discovered his passion for landscape photography. But it was only a few years before the cost of living caught up with them. They didn’t want to give up the opportunity to have his wife, Ruth, home-school their children. So, Stitt took his newfound talent for capturing natural beauty to Tyler, where he could continue pursuing his career while supporting his family.

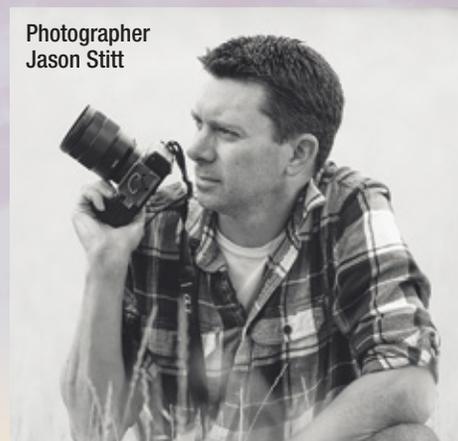
“I am an introvert by nature,” he says. “So I really enjoy the quiet solitude of being out in nature with just my camera gear.”

IN FOCUS

When Stitt and his family were deciding where to relocate on their move back to the States, there was one must-have for his business: a strong internet connection.

“That was one of the most important factors in choosing a place. It had to have a reliable and fast internet connection,” Stitt says. “Ninety-nine percent of my business I get through either my site or social media. So without the internet, I lose all of that.”

Photographer
Jason Stitt



He isn't exaggerating. About a year and a half after moving to Tyler and gradually building momentum as a professional photographer, Stitt and his family visited New Zealand for five weeks to see his parents. Stitt stayed away from social media during the trip and returned to find business had ground to a halt.

"I felt like I had just lost all the momentum I had built while we were gone and had to start all over again," he says. "Now, ideally, I try to post something every weekday to keep business relatively steady and keep getting inquiries. If I'm not posting regularly, those inquiries just stop happening." 📱



Getting the shot

Whether you're just starting out or a seasoned pro, Stitt offers some pointers to make your photos stand out.

- **Shoot, shoot, shoot** — As with any learned skill, the best way to hone it is to do it. Get out and take as many photos as you can to develop a better idea of your interests and style.
- **Be intentional** — Ansel Adams said, "You don't take a photograph, you make it." Photography is art, and good art requires forethought and planning. Think about what you want to capture and how you want to photograph it.
- **Study the greats** — Look closely at the work of photographers you admire. Figure out what it is about their work that appeals to you and then try to emulate it.
- **Master the light** — Light is the single most important factor in photography. More than determining how bright or dark your photos are, controlling light also decides the tone, mood and atmosphere of your images.
- **Learn to edit** — Don't neglect learning how to use your editing software. In today's world, the ability to edit well is one of the elements that makes for a great photographer.
- **Find your community** — Locate a local camera club or Facebook photography group to join. These can be great places to meet like-minded people from whom you can learn and grow.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The internet is full of resources for aspiring photographers and professionals alike. Whether you're looking to manage your shots or learn a new skill, there's something for everyone.



- **Education** — Even the best photographers have something to learn. For professional courses, Stitt turns to sites like CreativeLive and Improve Photography. If you're looking for something to peruse at your leisure for education and inspiration, he recommends Scott Kelby's blog.
- **Editing** — With Adobe's Photography package, anyone can get access to professional-grade software like Photoshop and Lightroom to edit and organize your photos on any device — all for little more than some streaming subscriptions.
- **Website builders** — Every photographer needs a place to share their work with the world. Popular website builders like Squarespace and Portfoliobox make it easy to show off your best shots and even to sell your work.
- **Storage** — As all those photos pile up, you'll need somewhere to keep them. Flickr offers a substantial 1 TB of free storage, while services like Dropbox and Google can provide up to 16 TB of space as your portfolio grows.



HI! I'M AMANDA CLARK

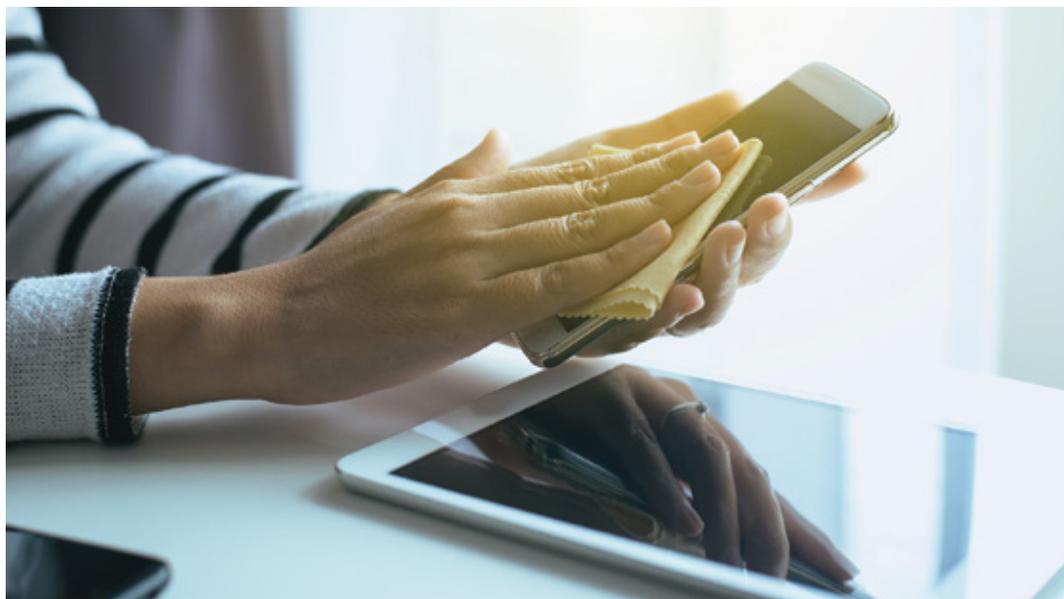
In this column, you'll learn about technology and read simple tips to get the most out of your electronics. For more tips or help with your devices, be sure to read this column in future publications. I'm always happy to help!

DEVICE OF THE MONTH



Surge protector safeguards your devices

Inspiration can strike like lightning. Be sure your desktop and other devices are ready for your creativity and protected from storms and electrical surges. The APC SurgeArrest Essential PE6U21 features a cleverly designed mounting bracket that makes it ideal for desktops or remote workers on the go. It features six outlets, three USB ports and a \$50,000 lifetime equipment guarantee from Schneider Electric. Available with prices starting at about \$32.



Clean up your devices!

Grubby, dusty, dirty, nasty. Even the most conscientious users will sometimes find themselves looking at a high-tech device and realize there's been some neglect. But what's the right way to clean your expensive electronics? Let's take a look at some dos and don'ts.

TELEVISION

The advice on how to clean your TV applies to most screens, including the one on your laptop or your desktop monitor. Unless you're still using an older glass-tube TV, you want to keep harsh chemicals like Windex away from your screen. Whether you have a plasma, LCD or OLED TV, the advice is the same: Use a soft, dry cloth to avoid scratches. Think of the same kind of microfiber cloth you can use to clean eyeglasses or camera lenses.

You want to clean in a circular motion and not press too hard. If a dry cloth is not enough to tackle fingerprints or other smudges, you can dampen the cloth with a little water. If that's still not enough, a solution made up of a mild dish soap and water — mostly water — should do the trick.

Remember, always apply the water or any other liquid to the cloth, never to the screen.

SMARTPHONE

Befitting a device that will undoubtedly get dropped repeatedly during its lifetime, your phone's screen is a little tougher — and can get a lot dirtier — than other gadgets. Your best bet is still a damp microfiber cloth, but you can safely use a disinfectant wipe to easily eliminate

most germs. Other than wipes, you should keep your phone's screen away from harsh cleaners. Even vinegar could strip the screen's coating.

You can use tape to pull out any dust or other debris stuck inside your phone's crevices. Manufacturers such as Apple recommend avoiding the use of compressed air on your device, as it may damage the microphone.

COMPUTER

Whether it's your laptop or your desktop, the best way to clean a computer keyboard is to use gravity and compressed air. First, flip over your keyboard and gently tap it to release any dust or debris. You can then use compressed air to blow out anything that might remain.

Compressed air can also be used to deep clean your desktop computer, which, especially if you keep it on the floor, can be a magnet for gunk. You should at least clean out the fan on your power supply and case fans by holding the blades still with a pen or pencil while you apply compressed air. ☞

► **One last bit of advice:** Don't forget to turn off and unplug any device you are going to clean.



Fine tuning your WiFi

Tips and tricks to keep your system running at top speed

A strong connection between your router and all of your devices is vital. But unlike your vehicle, there's no handy "check engine" light to help you keep up with maintenance.

Following a few simple tips, though, can keep things humming along.

TIP 1:

The location of your router makes a significant difference in performance. You want as few obstacles as possible between the router and your devices. A central location in a large room will help provide better coverage throughout your home. Also, think about height. Consider putting the router on a shelf, and never leave it behind the TV or in a cabinet.

TIP 2:

Your router isn't the only device communicating on its particular wavelength(s). So, keep your router as far away as possible from common sources of interference

like wireless phones, microwaves, power cords and baby monitors.

TIP 3:

Creating the perfect home network can take some time and effort, not to mention some technical know-how. For a worry-free WiFi experience let us provide your router with the WCTEL WiFi Standard Plan. We will install your WiFi router, connect your devices, and password protect your WiFi network. You'll receive 24/7 assistance from our help desk, including technical support for setup and adding additional devices to your network.

TIP 4:

For additional WiFi coverage in your home, you can consider the WCTEL WiFi Extended plan, which includes WiFi Standard plus an extender for your home. For even larger homes, the WCTEL WiFi Premium plan is the better option with a mesh network to broaden your range. 📶



Palate pleasers

Pears make perfect sweet and savory dishes

Pears add a dose of seasonality to dishes this time of year with a sweetness that's nuanced and subtle yet plentiful. But understanding which type of pear is best for what use will help you choose wisely from the fruit you'll see in the produce section of your local market.

Any type of pear is good to eat as long as it's ripe enough to bring out its sweetness. But when it comes to using pears in cooking, the variety you choose matters. Do you want the pear to retain its shape when poached? Or do you want it to melt into a sauce? Just remember your pear ABCs — Anjou, Bosc and Comice.

Anjou is an all-purpose pear that can be grilled, roasted or eaten as a snack.

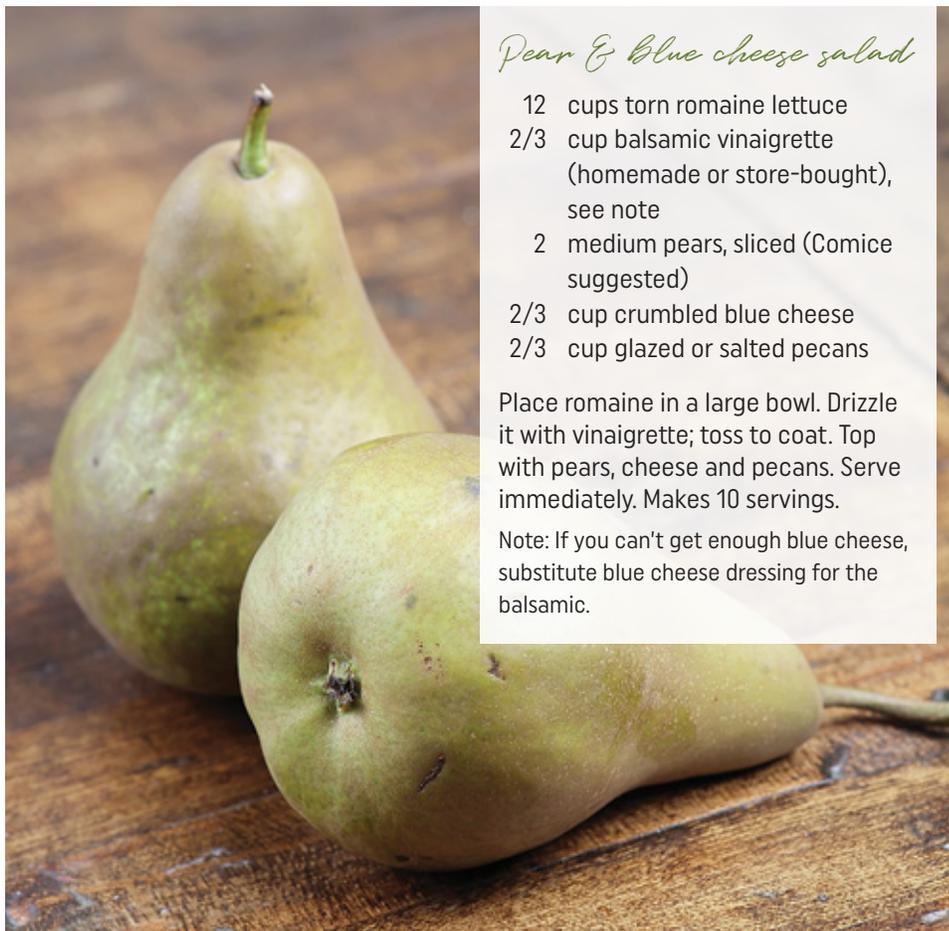
Bosc pears are best for poaching, as they maintain their shape well when cooked.

Comice pears are best used raw, as their tender flesh will not hold up well under heat. They are a sweet pear to pair with cheese.

The best way to ripen pears is on the counter at room temperature, a process that requires patience, since the fruit can take up to a week to reach its sweet peak. Once fully ripe, pears may be stored in the refrigerator for up to a week, if they stick around that long before being used in any of the following recipes.



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



Pear & blue cheese salad

- 12 cups torn romaine lettuce
- 2/3 cup balsamic vinaigrette (homemade or store-bought), see note
- 2 medium pears, sliced (Comice suggested)
- 2/3 cup crumbled blue cheese
- 2/3 cup glazed or salted pecans

Place romaine in a large bowl. Drizzle it with vinaigrette; toss to coat. Top with pears, cheese and pecans. Serve immediately. Makes 10 servings.

Note: If you can't get enough blue cheese, substitute blue cheese dressing for the balsamic.



PEAR & GORGONZOLA PIZZA

- 1 (16-ounce) package refrigerated pizza crust dough
- 4 ounces sliced provolone cheese
- 1 Bosc pear, thinly sliced
- 2 ounces chopped walnuts
- 2 1/2 ounces Gorgonzola or blue cheese, crumbled
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives

Preheat the oven to 450 F. Spread the pizza crust dough on a medium baking sheet. Layer provolone cheese on the crust and top the cheese with Bosc pear slices. Sprinkle walnuts and Gorgonzola cheese over the pears.

Bake for 8-10 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and the crust is lightly browned. Remove the pizza from the oven, top it with chives and slice to serve.

PEAR PANCAKES

- 1 1/2 cups baking mix (such as Bisquick)
 - 1 medium ripe pear, peeled and finely chopped
- 2/3 cup old-fashioned oats
 - 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
 - 1 cup milk
 - 2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted
 - 1 egg
- 1/2 cup butter or margarine, softened
 - 2 teaspoons powdered sugar
 - Maple syrup, if desired

Heat a griddle or skillet over medium heat. Grease it with butter or vegetable oil if necessary.

In a large bowl, stir the baking mix, chopped pear, oats, brown sugar and 1 teaspoon of the cinnamon until blended. In a medium bowl, beat the milk, melted butter and egg with a fork or wire whisk. Add the milk mixture to the dry ingredients, stirring just until moistened.

For each pancake, pour about 1/4 cup batter onto a hot griddle. Cook the pancakes until bubbles form on top and the edges are dry. Flip, then cook the other side until golden brown.

While the pancakes are cooking, make cinnamon butter: In a small bowl, mix 1/2 cup butter, the powdered sugar and the remaining 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon. Serve the pancakes with cinnamon butter and syrup.

BAKED PEARS WITH WALNUTS

- 2 large ripe Bosc pears
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup crushed walnuts
- 2 teaspoons honey
- Vanilla ice cream or whipped cream, optional

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Cut the pears in half and place them on a baking sheet. You may want to cut a sliver off the uncut side so that they sit upright.

Using a measuring spoon or melon baller, scoop out the seeds. Sprinkle the pear halves with cinnamon, top them with walnuts and drizzle 1/2 teaspoon honey over each one.

Bake for 30 minutes. Remove from the oven, let them cool slightly and serve the pears topped with ice cream or whipped cream, if desired.



PEAR CLAFOUTIS

Think pear cobbler, only easier.

- Salted butter for the dish
- 2 ripe but slightly firm Anjou pears (about 1 pound total)
 - 1 cup half-and-half
 - 3 eggs
 - 1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
 - 1 teaspoon orange zest
 - 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg
 - 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
 - 1/2 cup flour
 - Powdered sugar

Peel, core and slice the pears lengthwise about 1/3-inch thick. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Butter a shallow 3-quart baking dish and arrange the pears over the bottom — they will rise to the top as the batter bakes.

Put half-and-half, eggs, granulated sugar, vanilla, orange zest, nutmeg, salt and flour (in this order) in a blender and whirl until very smooth and frothy, 1 minute. Pour the batter over the pears.

Bake until the clafoutis is well browned and a little puffed, about 50 minutes. Let it cool on a rack about 15 minutes. Serve warm, sprinkled with powdered sugar.



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