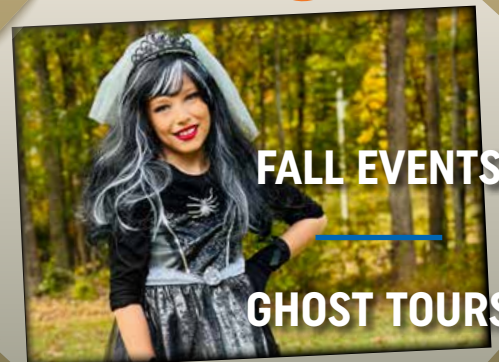


CONNECTED

Finding Characters

Halloween spirit at West Carolina



FALL EVENTS

GHOST TOURS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

The Most Important Rural Broadband Program You Probably Don't Know

In Washington, D.C., we often talk about the new grant programs that are going to help bridge the digital divide in our country. But I want to highlight what I believe has been the most successful rural broadband initiative, the federal Universal Service Fund.

So, what is the Universal Service Fund? The Communications Act of 1934 included language that said all Americans should have access to “rapid, efficient, nationwide communications service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges.” Today, the USF is the main federal program helping rural consumers connect to services comparable in price and quality to those in urban areas. This makes services more affordable for low-income families and supports critical connections for schools, libraries and health care facilities in rural communities by offsetting the high cost of building and managing rural communications networks.

There is one big difference that sets the USF apart from many of the new grant programs: The USF not only supports the construction and deployment of networks but also the maintenance of those networks. It helps ensure that these networks are maintained and sustained so Americans continue to make use of broadband long after the last shovel is put down.

An NTCA survey found that without the High-Cost USF program all rural consumers will pay at least \$100 more per month for their broadband service. And the viability of some rural broadband networks would be at risk, as the operations costs and repayment of the loans needed to build them cannot be covered.

NTCA is committed to efforts to preserve the USF so that the mission of universal service for all Americans can be fulfilled.

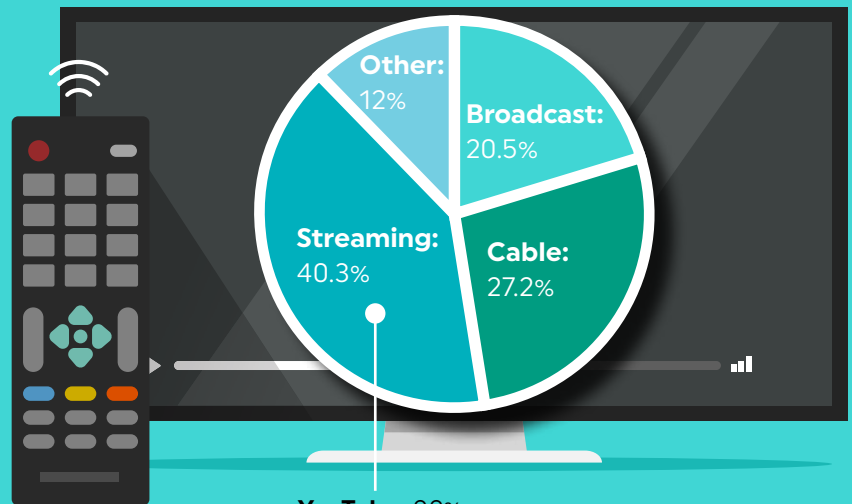
Streaming Remains Strong

Each month Nielsen, a company that has long tracked viewership habits across a range of media, updates The Gauge. The report offers a snapshot of how various forms of media are consumed to create a picture of the media landscape.

Several key trends shaped the streaming results, such as June marking the end of the school year and start of school breaks, which led viewers 17 and younger to drive the largest upticks in TV usage across all ages.

As a result, this June streaming topped the earlier viewership record set by cable for that month in 2021.

A SUMMER STREAMING SNAPSHOT



- YouTube:** 9.9%
- Netflix:** 8.4%
- Other streaming:** 6%
- Prime Video:** 3.1%
- Hulu:** 3%
- Disney+:** 2%
- Tubi:** 2%
- Roku Channel:** 1.5%
- Max:** 1.4%
- Peacock:** 1.2%
- Paramount+:** 1.1%
- Pluto TV:** 0.8%

Source: Nielsen The Gauge



A Web for All

Technology assists those with diminished sight

About two-thirds of Americans rely on some form of contact lenses or glasses to correct nearsightedness, farsightedness and more. Then there are eye injuries and diseases like glaucoma that can diminish sight, and the inevitable process of aging can also cause a slow decline in eyesight.

In an increasingly online world—where vital information is often communicated using text on screens—people with diminished vision can struggle. However, there are resources available to help those with impaired sight, and even blindness, interact online.

For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires all websites to be accessible to everyone. While not every website is ADA compliant, sites for government agencies, banks and larger organizations are. The basic tools you need are free and as handy as web browsers like Chrome, Edge, Firefox and Safari.

BROWSER BY BROWSER

Microsoft's Edge browser scores well for assistive technologies. It lets users

increase the size of text and get image descriptions for screen readers. Also, a simple keyboard command—Ctrl+Shift+U on PCs and Shift+Command+U on Macs—signals the browser to read the current webpage aloud. Most other browsers require users to go into system preferences or use an extension for screen readers.


Meanwhile, Chrome's TalkBack screen reader adds spoken, audible or vibration feedback to your device. While the browser does not have a way to change the look of text, it does have extensions that allow users to customize their browsers to control visual clutter.

Google, the maker of Chrome and a popular search engine, has an award-winning disability employee resource group and says it is committed to hiring employees with disabilities. That commitment also helps it find ways to make its site more accessible.

Like Chrome, Apple's Safari comes with its own screen reader, VoiceOver. Users can choose the voice they find most pleasing and set the speech speed. It also lets users increase contrast, zoom in and

remove ads and distractions.

Firefox allows users to adjust the settings so every site has the same font, type size and color to enhance the ease of reading. It also has extensions for changing text to speech and making bookmarks larger, among other things.

While users may need a sighted person to set up the assistive features, modern technologies unlock the world to more people than ever. 



Tips for Choosing the Right Provider

The West Carolina difference

Your trust in us is extremely important. That's why transparency is key to everything we do.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

We know you are bombarded by ads from companies vying for your business, including other broadband providers. We encourage you to look closely at their offers. We understand that price matters, and you need value for your investment. Before switching providers, make sure you are fully informed.

Here are six questions to ask your potential new provider: 1) Do you offer matching upload and download speeds, also known as symmetrical speeds?

2) How long is this price offer in effect? 3) What will my monthly bill be

after this offer expires, including all fees and taxes? 4) Do you have data caps? If so, what do you charge if I exceed my data cap? 5) If I terminate service before my contract is up, what is the penalty? 6) Will you dispatch a technician on nights, weekends or holidays if I lose service?

Large providers must now post broadband labels on their websites. These are designed to ensure you fully understand the service you are buying. Read these carefully and pay attention to all the details. West Carolina is proud to be 100% fiber. Why does that matter?

UNMATCHED SPEED AND PERFORMANCE

Consistent high speeds: Our fiber optic network ensures you enjoy consistent high speeds 24/7. Whether streaming 4K videos, gaming online or running a home office, our fiber service delivers the performance you need without interruption.

Symmetrical speeds: Enjoy the same high-speed connection for both uploading and downloading.

FUTURE-PROOF TECHNOLOGY

Scalability: Our fiber network is designed to handle future technological advancements, ensuring your internet connection stays ahead of the curve.

RELIABILITY

Minimal downtime: Fiber optic cables are less susceptible to weather conditions and electromagnetic interference, leading to fewer outages and more stable connections.

Lower latency: Experience lower latency with fiber, which means quicker response times for online gaming, videoconferencing and any activity that requires real-time interaction.


HOW WE DO BUSINESS

No misleading introductory rates: With our service, what you see is what you get. We have no data caps and offer straightforward, competitive pricing with no sudden rate hikes after an introductory period.

Community commitment: As a locally owned company, we are deeply invested in our community. By choosing our service, you are supporting local jobs and contributing to the local economy.

Personalized customer service: Our local presence allows us to offer extraordinary customer support.

Tailored solutions: Our customized packages suit different needs and budgets, ensuring you get the best value without compromising quality.

The bottom line: Staying with us means opting for a faster, more reliable and future-proof internet connection. While other providers may lure you with lower prices, they often come with hidden costs, unreliable service, data caps and outdated technology. Our commitment to transparency, community and cutting-edge technology ensures you receive the best possible internet experience, today and in the future. 

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

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On the Cover:



A few of the creative costumes from adventurous trick-or-treaters who entered West Carolina's Halloween photo contest. [More info on page 5.](#)

CYBERSECURITY TIPS



October is National Cybersecurity Month, the perfect time to review ways to protect yourself against phishing attempts.

Phishing is the term for emails, messages and websites that may look authentic but are designed to steal your personal information or money. For example, a phishing message claiming to be from your bank or an imposter posing as West Carolina may ask for your Social Security number or request you click a link that downloads malware to your computer.

Some effective phishers even pose as an employer to convince employees to send client records or wire money to them.

How can you protect yourself? Look for warning signs and take the following action:

- **Check the email address**—Scammers often use email addresses that mimic legitimate ones, only spelled slightly differently or with .net instead of .com.
- **Look out for urgent language**—If the message says you must act immediately or your services will be canceled or you will be fired, that's a sign someone is trying to get you to panic and act without thinking.
- **Don't click on unsolicited attachments or links**—You could end up

infecting your computer with malware or a virus.

- **If the sender asks for personal or financial information, be wary**—Legitimate institutions won't ask for your password, Social Security number or financial details in an email.
- **Spelling and grammar errors are another sign of phishing**—Legitimate companies carefully craft their emails and edit them extensively.
- **Don't think scammers have given up on phone calls**—Be aware of anyone asking for financial or personal information over the phone or via text.

Our community. Your co-op.

Building a better future — together



WEST CAROLINA COSTUME CONTEST!

Enter our Halloween costume photo contest for a chance to win a \$50 Amazon gift card!

The contest is open to photos of kids ages 12 and under in our service area. To enter, email a photo to photocontest@wctel.net by 4 p.m. on Nov. 4.

- Submissions will be posted to West Carolina's Facebook page, and the community will vote for the winners from Nov. 4-8. The three photos with the most likes will win a \$50 Amazon gift card. Winners will be announced on Nov. 8. For full details, visit westcarolina.com/halloween.

SPIRITS OF THE SEASON

Ghost Tours Scare Up Connections to the Past

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS



Photo courtesy of American Ghost Walks

Allison Jornlin, depicted here in an illustration, researches and writes scripts for ghost tours.

For many, October isn't complete without spine-tingling ghost stories, and chances are your hometown has a few of its own. Allison Jornlin, co-founder and tour developer with American Ghost Walks, conducts research and writes ghost tour scripts in towns across the United States. Allison is also a paranormal investigator and speaker, and

she's been featured on the CW Network's "Mysteries Decoded."

Ghost tours are immensely popular, and Allison says they can be found in almost every large city and even in many small towns across the country. "I think people have lost their connection with history and with their ancestors, and this is a way to reconnect," she says.

Unlike haunted house attractions that have terrifying special effects, ghost tours offer authentic history in locations that give guests the chance to literally step into the paranormal. They allow people to connect to the haunted past through walking tours, bus/trolley tours, investigation-style tours and even pub crawls. Some guests report experiencing



Photo courtesy of Bulldog Tours

The Old Charleston Jail, which once held pirates, Civil War prisoners and the first known female serial killer, is an especially spooky spot.



Photo courtesy of Birmingham Historic Touring Company

A group pauses before entering the First Presbyterian Church during a ghost walk in Birmingham, Alabama.



Ghost tours can include exploring the paranormal by bus or trolley, as well as on foot.

paranormal phenomena, like feeling unexplained cold spots or photographing disembodied faces and shadowy figures.

Allison pores through old newspapers and historical archives and interviews local people to give her tours as much local flavor as possible. “I’m looking for stories that are unique to the community that they come out of,” she says. While many stories across the country have common themes, Allison says, every place is a little bit different.

“You don’t have to believe in ghosts to enjoy the tour,” she says. Skeptics can have fun learning spooky stories. Tour guides often encourage guests to share their personal paranormal experiences to relate to one another. Ghost tours can’t guarantee guests will have an otherworldly encounter, but there is always a possibility.

If you’re ready to test your luck, consider joining these popular local tours, if you dare:

- Charleston, South Carolina’s, rich history, fascinating places, people and landmarks bring with them incredible stories—and lots of ghosts. Check them out through Bulldog Tours. bulldogtours.com/tours/ghost
- The Birmingham Ghost Walk in Alabama includes two walking tours and the Ghosts and Graveyards Chauffeured Experience. bhamhistory.com
- Old Louisville is home to what many consider to be the “most haunted neighborhood in America.” Learn why through Old Louisville Ghost Tours, in Louisville, Kentucky. louisvillehistorictours.com/louisville-ghost-tours 📱

FUN FACTS

- Most ghost tours in the U.S. run year-round.
- Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, claims to have America’s oldest ghost tour. It began in 1970 and is still running. In 1973, historian Richard Crowe started Chicago’s first ghost tour. He told ghost stories on the radio around Halloween, which inspired Allison Jornlin and her brother to establish American Ghost Walks.
- Many ghost stories have common themes. Allison notes the prevalence of stories about women who met unfortunate ends. Guides across the nation tell local stories of jilted lovers, forlorn widows and vanishing hitchhikers.

SCARING UP A GREAT TOUR

Are you spending the spooky season exploring a new town—or your own hometown? A ghost tour is a fun way to learn about the history of a place and its people. Before you book one, follow these tips:

CHOOSE A TOUR THAT SUITS YOUR GROUP

While each tour is unique, they typically fall into these categories: walking tours, bus tours, investigation tours and pub crawls. Investigation tours allow guests to become paranormal researchers for one night, and they typically focus on one building or property. A haunted pub crawl offers spirits of both the alcoholic and ethereal kinds.

CHECK THE WEBSITE

Tour companies list important information on their websites, including an overview, length of the tour, walking distance, accessibility, age-appropriateness and cancellation/refund policies. Many tours encourage guests to purchase tickets in advance.

READ THE REVIEWS

Check Google reviews and websites like Yelp or Tripadvisor for reviews. Search for detailed reviews that weigh the pros and cons of the tour. If you find positive reviews of a specific guide, you may be able to book a tour on a night when that person is working.

If you still have questions after your research, don’t be afraid to give the tour company a call.

Promoting Entrepreneurship

Freshwater regional business competition encourages students

Story by CHERÉ COEN

Freshwater Coast Community Foundation (FCCF) was created to help businesses grow and thrive in Abbeville and McCormick counties and the Starr-Iva area of Anderson County. To that end, the organization encourages entrepreneurship and provides business education to qualified business owners.

Looking to the future, the foundation decided to take an active role in developing the next generation of business leaders. To promote entrepreneurship in high schools, the foundation launched a competition in 2017. Named the Freshwater Coast Business Plan Competition and open to high schoolers at Crescent, Dixie and Abbeville high schools and Calhoun Falls Charter School, the event challenged the teens to develop a plan for a theoretical business. The students begin by competing with classmates within their own schools, with the winners then advancing to a regional competition.

“The goal is to promote entrepreneurship in the Freshwater region,” says Wilder Ferreira, the Freshwater Coast Rural Entrepreneurship Alliance coordinator and a rural agribusiness and rural development extension associate with Clemson University Extension Service.

This year’s competition, co-sponsored and hosted by West Carolina, was held in April and featured eight students from Crescent and Abbeville high schools. Students had eight and a half minutes to present their plans, followed by a few minutes of questions from the judges.

Crescent High School’s Meagan Breland was this year’s first-place winner and took home \$300 for her Breland Beauty

business plan. Her classmate, Isabella Gillespie, claimed the \$200 second-place prize for her Soothing Scents proposal. Sydney Rich, also a Crescent High School student, won third-place honors and \$100 for her Crazy Crochet plan. The remaining participants received \$25 from West Carolina General Manager Jeff Wilson.

“The FCCF’s business plan competition is an awesome opportunity for young entrepreneurs to showcase their passion for business, as well as creative thinking,” says West Carolina Director of Network Operations and Business Solutions Chuck Nash. “I have had the privilege to serve as a judge for the past two years. These students and their ideas are very impressive.”

So far, about 60 students have put their skills to the test in the regional competitions. The participation number rises to about 300 when the preliminary school-level competitions are factored into the equation. Many of those competitors went on to launch real-world businesses. “About 50% of the students already run their business from home,” Wilder says. “Most of them sell their merchandise at school and local festivals. They don’t end up continuing with the business as college becomes priority. But what matters most is the entrepreneurial thinking that allows them to understand the implementation of a business idea to its fruition.

“What impressed me the most is their ingenuity in dealing with their accomplishments,” Wilder adds. “Those who run an enterprise and come to these competitions have become successful entrepreneurs. They understand their markets and what sells most. There is more entrepreneurial thinking in these local high schools than I thought.”

Area high school students compete in FCCF’s 2024 Business Plan Competition.



Photo courtesy of Freshwater Coast Community Foundation

BROADENING HORIZONS

FRS Youth Tour is a trip of a lifetime for Noah Harper

Story by DIANNA TROYER

Logging in to his online Piedmont Technical College classes, Noah Harper never takes for granted the broadband service West Carolina provides his family and other cooperative members.

Noah gained a broader understanding of the impact of broadband nationwide when West Carolina chose him to represent the cooperative on the Foundation for Rural Service Youth Tour of Washington, D.C., in early June.

“My career interests are between internet technology or computer science, so I understand how vital broadband is,” the McCormick resident says. “Broadband is amazing for me and my family because it provides us with high-speed internet service so we can do our jobs and schoolwork efficiently. Fast broadband internet is an indispensable feature that helps me with my studies now and will help me with my future goals.”

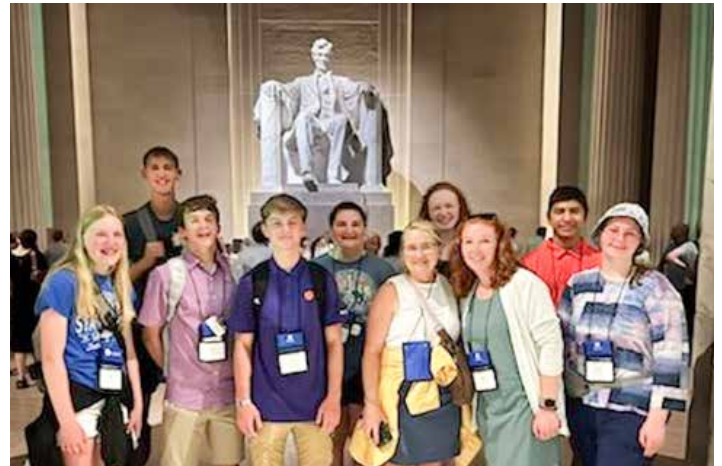
A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

In 1995, FRS began hosting the annual five-day tour to teach teens ages 15-17 from rural areas about broadband, government policies and U.S. history. Participants from across the nation meet legislators and visit museums, historical sites, national monuments and federal offices. The youth tour is also an opportunity for teens to interact with their peers and develop lifelong friendships.

Noah learned how federal legislators and regulatory agencies have approved programs to reduce the cost of internet access for income-eligible families. To provide high-speed internet service, West Carolina employees rely on various technologies including fiber optics, wireless and cable.

Noah says two unforgettable stops on the itinerary were the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Arlington National Cemetery. Both places humanized the statistics of lives lost during wars. “It was really interesting to see firsthand what it was like during the Holocaust,” he says. “At Arlington Cemetery, you think about how those who are buried there are beloved and respected with high honor for sacrificing their lives.”

Standing at the Holocaust museum’s three-story Tower of Faces, Noah learned about the two-day mass shootings of 4,000 to 4,500 Jewish residents of the Lithuanian villages of Eisiskes, Valkininkai and Salcininkai. To memorialize their



The Lincoln Memorial impressed teens like Noah Harper, front row, third from left, and chaperones alike.

Photo courtesy of Noah Harper



The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is an unforgettable place for Noah.

Photo courtesy of Arlington National Cemetery

lives, Yaffa Eliach collected more than 1,000 reproductions of prewar photographs that her grandfather had taken, showing residents’ cultural, religious and business activities.

Noah also learned about Arlington National Cemetery’s iconic memorial—the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. A sarcophagus stands above the grave of a World War I soldier, who was buried when the tomb was dedicated on Nov. 11, 1921, as a place to reflect on service, valor and sacrifice. [📄](#)

Story by DAVID HERDER and DREW WOOLEY



RUNNING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Rural Athletes Must Overcome Hurdles to Win Scholarships

For much of her life, Olivia Murphy focused on becoming a collegiate swimmer. The biggest obstacle she faced didn't come in the pool—it was catching the eye of college coaches.

Each year thousands of student-athletes pursue college athletic scholarships. Ultimately, only about one out of every 50 succeeds, according to a 2021 study by Next College Student Athlete. That bar can be even tougher to clear for athletes like Olivia, who live in rural areas, where it's often difficult to get the attention of major programs.

For those students, earning a spot on a college roster takes more than just the talent and commitment to be a high-level athlete—it also takes a “second job” as a communicator and organizer, working just to be seen.

“I didn't start the actual recruitment process until summer of my junior year, which is a little late for some people,” says Olivia, a Tennessee resident and 2024 Tullahoma High School graduate.

MAKING A SPLASH

Olivia's path was more straightforward than that of many other athletes: Swim fast, win races. A key member of the Wildcats' school-record-setting relay team, she recorded plenty of fast times while helping the team win its first division title.

She knew she had the speed, she just needed the coaches to know it, too. “When you first reach out to a coach, whether it's through a questionnaire or an email, you put your best events and your best times in there,” Olivia says.

When prospective recruits submit statistics, coaches compare their times to those of their current swimmers, as well as the

ones winning division and national titles. Athletes from almost every sport send out these cold-call emails to coaches across the country. In sports like football and basketball, where skills can't be boiled down to a set of times or statistics, athletes will create their own highlight videos and send those to coaches.

This can be especially valuable for rural athletes. Coaches can't visit every town to scout athletes, but there's no travel time in opening an email. Olivia says coaches especially want to see the swimmers' videos. “They love videos,” she says. “Most coaches like to see video because they want to see your technique or where your weaknesses might be.”

SHOWCASING SKILLS

Sometimes, rather than sending videos, recruits travel to camps and showcases so coaches can watch them in action and compare their skills to athletes at a similar level. These are often sport-specific camps run by college programs where potential recruits get hands-on practice time with

Photo illustration by Mark Gilliland



Photo courtesy of Olivia Murphy

Olivia Murphy's best swimming events are the 100-meter freestyle, butterfly, backstroke and the 50-meter freestyle.

coaches. At regional showcases or tournaments, thousands of athletes can test their skills while scores of coaches look for diamonds in the rough.

Landyn Cox, a 2024 high school graduate from McKee, Kentucky, competes in archery and found success at these large events since most high schools don't have archery teams. He was offered a scholarship to be an archer at the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, Kentucky. He competed on the USA Archery U18 Compound National Team, the World Archery 3D Championships and other USA Archery Team events. He says the USAT events are a solid way to draw attention. "If you win like one of the USATs or certain big events, that gets your name out there pretty fast," he says.

MAKING A DECISION

Once coaches begin recruiting, the challenge comes in settling on a school. Olivia narrowed down her list to three. "I wanted to limit myself to three visits because I'm really bad at decisions," she says.

Part of the process was deciding what size school she wanted to attend. Many athletes feel the need to compete at a prestigious NCAA Division 1 school, but they



Photo courtesy of USA Archery

Landyn Cox first competed in archery through the National Archery in the Schools program.

SCORING AN OFFER

1. Know your skill level and learn the NCAA or NAIA eligibility requirements.
2. Compile an athletic resume with:
 - Skills video
 - Athletic stats
 - Academic transcripts, ACT/SAT scores
 - Extracurricular activities
3. Email coaches.
 - Include your athletic resume.
 - Subject line: Name, position, current grade level and key stat: "Jane Doe, High School Sophomore, Pitcher, 90 mph fastball"
 - Individually craft each email, clearly stating why you're interested in that program.
4. Make campus visits and meet coaches. Keep sending updated stats.
5. Lock down your offer and negotiate your amount. Don't discount merit-based, academic or other scholarships.



could find a home—and potentially more playing time or better financial aid—at a smaller school. "Division 1 isn't everything," Olivia says. "It's not live or die."

No matter the size or program, a visit is the critical component. After a successful recruiting visit where she got along great with her future teammates, Olivia chose Delta State University, a Division II school in Cleveland, Mississippi.

"They need to go where they feel like they best fit," she says. "I was like,

'There's no way that I'm not going to go Division 1,' and then I found a school that matches up with Division 1 schools and I got better scholarship offers and felt like I fit with the team better. And so, I was like, 'Oh, that's not the end of the world.'"

But it will be a whole new world for Olivia, Landyn and other rural athletes as they aim to parlay their hometown successes and hard work to the next level. 🏹

Monster Mash Up

Lowndesville Bash, festival join forces for fall fun

Story by DIANNA TROYER

Bubba and Stephanie Snow, as well as their two daughters, are uncertain of their costumes for a fall Halloween-themed festival and car show in Lowndesville's park. But they know what car will get them there—Poison Ivy, their cherished 1960 Chevrolet Bel Air.

A few years ago, Bubba rescued the vintage car from a patch of poison ivy. "We were driving around, and I happened to see the front end in the woods and recognized what it was," he says.

The Iva resident stopped at a nearby house, where the owner, Furman Cain, told him the white car had been parked there for about 40 years. "I bought it and got it running again," Bubba says. "We left the rust on it to give it character."

He enters Poison Ivy annually in the Lowndesville Bash Classic Car Show. The event was first organized by the Lowndesville Community Club, an organization formed in June 2021 to plan events that would bring together residents from surrounding towns. The club also planned the Fall Festival.

BETTER TOGETHER

For the first time this fall, the Bash and Fall Festival will be combined. "They're both big, fun, free family events with a cool hometown vibe," Bubba says. "Our girls love the valve cover races." Contestants make a race car by decorating and adding wheels to a valve cover from an automobile engine.

The two events were combined to make them bigger and better, says John Parnell, president of the Lowndesville Community Club. "Attendance has grown steadily every year at both events."

Last year, the Bash drew more than 120 classic cars and trucks and 20 tractors. More than 1,500 attendees came from Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

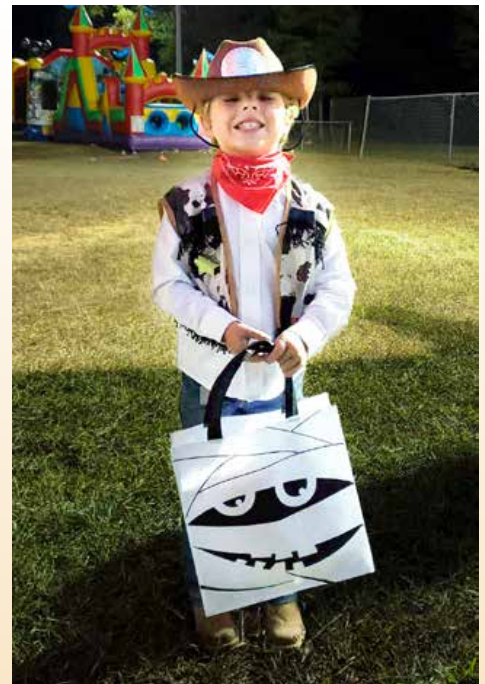
This year the Bash will have a Halloween-themed car show, a trunk-or-treat and live music by rockabilly sensations Slim & the Gems. The special guest emcee is radio personality Memphis Kimber from Memphis, Tennessee.

Other scheduled events include a spooky pinup contest with a cash prize for the winner, a bounce house for the kids, tractors, farm implements, food and more.

"We're hearing an even bigger buzz about this year's Bash and are so excited to see what kind of turnout we'll have," says Billie Jayne DeVille, owner of DeVille Magazine. The magazine partnered with J-RAP Restorations and the Community Club to host the first car show.

"If you're looking for a way to support a small community and have a fun-filled day at the same time, come to the park," she says. 📍

Events begin at 11 a.m. Oct. 26 at the park in Lowndesville, South Carolina, at 113 Marshall Ave. Visit **J-RAP Restoration's** Facebook page for more information.



Time to rustle up some treats.



More than 120 classic cars and 20 tractors were on display during the 2023 Lowndesville Bash, attended by more than 1,500 people.

Photos courtesy of Lowndesville Community Club

Who Can You Call?



Busting those spooky phone scams

Kristen Booth has worked at West Carolina for 14 years as a security and business sales consultant. She periodically gets calls from customers—and even family members—concerned about voicemail messages from suspected scam artists.



Kristen Booth

“Phone scams have been a persistent issue for much longer than I’ve been here,” Kristen says. “They’ve unfortunately become so common that many of us don’t answer

phone calls if we don’t recognize the number. However, cybercriminals are figuring out ways around this and, yet again, tricking us into their schemes.”

They use various tactics, from posing as business representatives to impersonating relatives, making it challenging to stay vigilant. Always approach phone calls and text messages requesting sensitive information or payments with skepticism. It’s safest to contact the person or

company directly using a known number to confirm the request’s legitimacy.

Here are some essential tips to help avoid falling victim to phone scams.

- **Stay alert:** Be cautious of unexpected calls, texts or emails requesting personal or financial information. Always verify the sender’s identity prior to sharing information.
- **Verify requests:** If you receive suspicious messages or calls claiming to be a trusted organization, verify the request through other official channels.
- **Protect personal information:** Avoid sharing sensitive information like passwords, account numbers or Social Security numbers over the phone or online unless you initiated the contact and are certain of the recipient’s authenticity.
- **Beware of caller ID spoofing:** This is when scammers alter the caller ID information to make it appear as though the call is coming from a different number. This can trick you into answering calls since the number shows up with your local area code, or it may even look like a number you know and trust.
- **Educate yourself:** Stay informed about the latest phishing and phone scam tactics. Be wary of common techniques such as urgent requests for money, threats of legal action or offers that seem too good to be true.
- **Report suspicious activity:** If you suspect you’ve encountered a phishing attempt or phone scam, report it to the appropriate authorities, such as your bank, the Federal Trade Commission or local law enforcement.

Scams can be avoided if you know what to watch out for. Keep educating yourself and stay vigilant against potential cybercriminals. Stay tuned for more cybersecurity tips! 📧

Kick Off THE SEASON



Healthy Eats for Your Tailgate

It's time to think about tailgating. Even if you aren't a football fan, you can enjoy the food that goes along with the big game, from pots of chili to tater skins and Buffalo wings.

But these tailgating treats may not agree with your waistline. There are healthy alternatives to consider for lightening up your football spread without sacrificing taste. You'll score some touchdowns yourself.



Food Editor Anne P. Braly is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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

WHITE CHICKEN CHILI

- 4 boneless chicken breasts (2 to 2 1/2 pounds)
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 3/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 2 cans whole green chilies, chopped (see tip)
- 3-4 cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed (see note)
- 2-3 teaspoons cumin
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2-1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/2-1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- Additional chicken broth, if needed

In large pot, add chicken breasts and completely cover with water (4-6 cups). Simmer chicken breasts with basil, salt, onion powder, garlic powder, thyme and parsley until completely cooked.

Remove chicken from broth and let cool. Reserve the seasoned broth for the chili. Once chicken is cool, chop and set aside.

In a large stock pot, add butter and olive oil, and saute onion, celery and bell pepper until vegetables are translucent. Add chopped chilies and two cans cannellini beans. When mixture is warm, mash beans with a potato masher.

Add 2-3 cups of the reserved broth, chopped chicken, cumin and 1-2 more cans cannellini beans. Let simmer 30 minutes to an hour. If mixture becomes too thick, add more broth. Add sour cream, heavy cream and fresh cilantro, and stir well. Taste and adjust seasonings, such as salt and cumin. Just before serving, stir in grated Monterey Jack cheese and ladle into serving bowls.

Tip: You will get better quality if you buy the whole chilies rather than chopped chilies.

Note: Progresso brand provides a better-quality bean that holds up well as the chili simmers, and you should only need three cans. If you use another brand and find that it is disintegrating as the chili simmers, add a fourth can of beans.



PARMESAN CHICKEN WINGS

These delicious wings are oven-baked.

- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons ground pepper
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- 1 1/2 cups panko breadcrumbs
- 1 1/4 cups grated parmesan cheese
- 2 pounds chicken wings, cut at joints, wing tips discarded
- 3 tablespoons balsamic glaze (store-bought or made from scratch)
- Lemon wedges
- Ranch dressing
- Celery and carrot sticks

Preheat oven to 450 F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Coat with cooking spray. Combine flour, garlic powder and pepper in a shallow dish.

Place eggs in a second shallow dish. Combine panko and cheese in a third shallow dish. Working in batches, dredge chicken pieces in the flour mixture, then the eggs and finally in the panko mixture, shaking off excess after each dredging. Place on the prepared baking sheet. Coat the chicken lightly with cooking spray.

Bake, turning the chicken halfway through, until the chicken is golden brown, and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest portion registers 165 F, 20-25 minutes.

Arrange the chicken on a platter. Drizzle with balsamic glaze and serve with lemon wedges and ranch dressing for dipping with celery and carrots.

DOUBLE DIP HUMMUS

This recipe from Eating Well could be the creamiest hummus you've ever tasted. It's best made a day in advance.

- 8 ounces dried chickpeas (about 1 cup)
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 7 large cloves garlic, divided
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1/2 cup tahini, divided
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice plus 1 tablespoon, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin, plus more for garnish
- Paprika for garnish
- 1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons of the prettiest chickpeas for garnish.

Rinse the remaining chickpeas and garlic and set the colander over a bowl. Refrigerate the chickpea mixture, reserved cooking water and pretty chickpeas separately overnight.

The next day, combine the chickpeas, 6 of the garlic cloves and 1/2 cup of the reserved cooking water in a food processor (or blender) with 1/4 cup each oil, tahini and lemon juice. Add salt and cumin. Process until creamy. Transfer to a serving bowl. Puree the remaining 1/4 cup each oil and tahini with the remaining garlic clove, 2 tablespoons of the cooking water and 1 tablespoon lemon juice until smooth.

Place chickpeas in a medium saucepan and cover with 2 inches of water. Stir in baking soda. Soak overnight. Drain the chickpeas and rinse well. Rinse out the pan. Return the chickpeas to the pan and cover with 2 inches of fresh water. Add garlic. Bring to a boil. Keep at a rolling boil until the chickpeas are tender and almost falling apart, 25-40 minutes.

Reserve about 3/4 cup of the cooking water, then drain the chickpeas. Set aside

Make an indentation in the center of the hummus and spoon in the tahini-lemon mixture. Sprinkle the hummus with cumin and paprika, if desired. Garnish with the reserved whole chickpeas and parsley. Serve with fresh carrots, celery and other colorful vegetables and/or pita chips. 📄



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