

CONNECTED

Fill 'Em Up

Flavor-injected food at Refuel

FRESH BAKED

MODERN
MILKING



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Broadband Built to Last


How the Universal Service Fund Helps Keep Americans Connected

When we're connected, America thrives, and for rural communities, the federal Universal Service Fund (USF) helps community-based providers deliver broadband built to last for generations. This fund is critical for ensuring high-quality, affordable broadband services are available for families, schools, libraries, health care facilities and so much more.

The idea behind the USF is that all Americans should have reliable access to communications services at a reasonable cost—it's been a national objective for over a century and was codified into law in the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Today, the USF enables providers to make a business case to invest in many rural areas, sustain networks once they are built and keep service rates affordable.

Unfortunately, the USF is at risk of disruption. Last summer, a federal circuit court declared that the way the USF is funded is unconstitutional, and the case is now before the Supreme Court for review.

According to an August 2024 survey of more than 200 NTCA members across 35 states, the loss of USF support could be catastrophic for rural consumers. Respondents reported that rural consumers could see their monthly bills increase by \$72. And 68% of respondents said they may need to cancel over \$1 billion in deployment projects.

These survey results highlight the importance of the USF in both getting and keeping rural consumers connected to high-quality, affordable services. You can learn more at ntca.org/universalservice. 



Adobe Stock illustration by Julien Eichinger

The Buzz

An internet roadmap

The online world moves fast, and it's a rich, helpful place. In fact, there are so many opportunities and so many resources that keeping up with the latest can prove daunting. Here are a few hot topics:

VIDEO SHORTS

These bite-sized videos usually last a few seconds. They're often lighter in tone. Many are great for showing fun or helpful ideas quickly, such as cooking tips, telling a joke or sharing engaging facts. Others are simply silly fun. Most social media services offer some version of these videos.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OR AI

AI is appearing in more and more places. It may help complete a text message, edit and sort photos on a smartphone or even create an image from scratch. And that's only the beginning. Think of AI as a smart, learning system capable of processing tremendous amounts of information—and it's changing and growing daily.

CRYPTOCURRENCY

This digital currency is stored and managed on secure systems. Bitcoin is a famous example, but there are many others. Some people use cryptocurrency to buy goods or services, and others consider it an investment. It's another growing, diversifying part of the digital world.

VIRTUAL REALITY OR VR

With the right hardware, such as VR goggles, virtual reality can be like stepping into a video game or movie. It's also a rapidly growing technology, expected to become more affordable and accessible over time.

Wading Into the Stream

Catch the current to entertainment

The arrival of streaming entertainment services brought the promise of simple, affordable access to deep, rich libraries of content.

So, how are these increasingly popular

services, ranging from Netflix to YouTube TV, doing? Seemingly endless content? Check. Simple and affordable? Well, that gets a little complicated.

With care, though, you can find the

services that not only meet your needs but also your budget. Live sports, ad-free options, high-definition streams and so much more are a few clicks away. 📺

DEFINE YOUR PRIORITIES

With so many possibilities, first consider what you generally want to watch. Do you love original dramas? Perhaps classic sitcoms and movies are your favorites? Are live sports or kids' programming your go-to shows? Or maybe it's a mix of all of the above. Here are a few options:

For exclusive originals: Netflix, Hulu and Max—formerly HBO Max—are standouts. They mix fresh shows and movies with a wealth of older favorites. And Hulu gives access to TV episodes the day after they air on traditional TV.

For family and classics:

Disney+ shines. And Peacock and Paramount+ serve up plenty of long-time favorites, as well as new shows.

AD TIERS

When it comes to pricing, streaming services increasingly offer a range of options—along with some tradeoffs.

Many services have lower-cost plans, but they come with ads. If you don't want interruptions, be prepared to pay extra. Similarly, Netflix offers a more expensive choice for high-definition content. Meanwhile Disney+ emphasizes the ability to bundle added services like Hulu.

Netflix: A lower-priced ad tier was introduced in 2023 to go along with the more expensive ad-free option.

Disney+ and Hulu: The price difference between ad-supported and ad-free versions is significant, so be aware when considering such services.

Amazon: Members of Amazon Prime must now pay an extra fee to remove ads from streaming content.

So, the price considerations of comparing streaming services to traditional cable television is more complex. But the system offers consumers greater choice—after all, many people don't mind ads. Pricing and offers can change quickly, so check each service for the current rates and offers.

LIVE SPORTS

Traditional TV networks are still the biggest player in the live sports world, but services like YouTube TV and Sling allow you to tap into many of those channels. However, the streamers are catching up.

Services like ESPN+, Peacock and Paramount+ have exclusive sports content. Amazon Prime hosts NFL games on Thursday nights. Even Netflix recently showcased a live night of boxing.

Then, there are also the direct-to-consumer options, like the NFL's Sunday Ticket or MLS Season Pass on Apple TV. Fans can binge-watch their favorite leagues.

A New Chapter for West Carolina

Dear Valued Customers,

As I prepare to join West Carolina as your new Chief Executive Officer this February, I'm humbled to become only the fourth CEO/General Manager in this organization's remarkable 73-year history. Following in Jeff Wilson's footsteps is both an honor and a responsibility I take very seriously.



CHRIS TOWNSON
Chief Executive Officer

My journey in telecommunications began quite literally at ground level – as an installer/repairman at Farmer's Telecommunications Cooperative in Rainsville, Ala. In almost 22 years there, I worked my way through various roles, from information systems specialist to management positions in customer service and government affairs. Each role taught me something valuable about serving our members and communities.

For more than eight years, I've had the privilege of serving as CEO/GM of DeKalb Telephone Cooperative (DTC Communications) in Alexandria, Tenn. One of my proudest achievements there was helping to establish Trilight, a collaboration between seven telephone cooperatives to expand broadband access to electric cooperatives and municipalities. This initiative demonstrated what we can achieve when we work together to serve our communities.


Throughout my 30-year career in the telecommunications industry, one truth has remained constant: the vital importance of connecting rural communities. It's not just about providing services; it's about enabling opportunities, supporting families, and strengthening communities. This mission has driven my involvement with NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association, where I currently chair the Government Affairs Committee, as well as my work with the Tennessee Broadband Association and the Telecommunications Association of the Southeast.

On a personal note, my wife Melissa and I are excited to join your community. After 29 years of marriage, we're blessed with two wonderful adult sons, Christian and Ethan, a beautiful daughter-in-law, Danyel, and we're thrilled to have recently welcomed our first granddaughter, Lottie Ann. Beyond my telecommunications career, my background in organizational leadership and ministry – including time as a Youth Pastor and Campus Minister – has reinforced my belief in the importance of serving others and building strong community relationships.

I want to acknowledge Jeff Wilson's exceptional leadership in positioning West Carolina for continued success. His vision and dedication have created a strong foundation that we'll continue to build upon. I'm also grateful to Board President Wes McAllister and the entire Board of Directors for their confidence in me to help write the next chapter of West Carolina's story.

What draws me most to West Carolina is its deep family and community-oriented culture. These values align perfectly with my own beliefs about how a cooperative should serve its members. As I step into this role, I'm committed to preserving and strengthening these values while ensuring we continue to innovate and grow to meet your needs.

I look forward to meeting many of you in the coming months and hearing your thoughts about how we can better serve our communities. Thank you for welcoming Melissa and me into the West Carolina family.

Sincerely, Chris Townson 

west carolina

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West Carolina Telephone
233 Highway 28 Bypass
Abbeville, SC 29620
Telephone: 864-446-2111
westcarolina.com

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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



Refuel is an Abbeville restaurant with a vintage vibe from the era when the property was a full-service gas station.
See story on page 8.

Photo by Matt Ledger



Udderly Delicious

Technology elevates dairy processes at Milky Way Farm

Story by LAZ DENES

At Anderson County's Milky Way Farm, cows milk themselves—multiple times daily. And there are robots.

The milking barn is outfitted with the latest dairy farming technology, including systems for automated milking, sophisticated tracking and data collection. It's also supported by an array of video cameras. Tying it all together is West Carolina's high-speed fiber network, which plays an integral role in keeping the internet-connected workflow moving.

This technology has made all the difference for Iris Peeler Barham and her brother, Davis Peeler, fourth-generation dairy farmers who work alongside their father, L.D. Peeler. But going high-tech was a profound change.

They oversee the 232-acre operation that began in 1987 in the rolling hills between Lake Howell and the town of Starr. From the outset, their closed herd of grass-fed Jersey cows, now numbering 120, was milked the traditional way—by human hands.

Automated technology, installed in 2021, allows a customized milking schedule for every cow, each tagged with an electronic identification tag. The system collects information on milk quantity and quality, as well as cow health and milking frequency. It also dispenses feed while the cow is milked and raises alarms as necessary.

"It's always been and still is 24/7, but it's brought a different quality of life for us," Iris says. "You can be at the soccer field watching your kids play and be able to deal with any issues from there by just logging into the system on your phone. That was not the case with the old system."

FOCUS ON NUTRITION

Milky Way Farm specializes in raw milk, and all of its milk contains the A2 protein, which is easier for some people to digest while retaining the milk's natural nutrients, fat, vitamins and purity. Its raw milk products also include buttermilk and

cream. It also offers low-temperature, vat-pasteurized, nonhomogenized whole milk, including chocolate, strawberry and nine other flavors rotated seasonally.

FROM LEFT: The robotic milking machines in the parlor can handle two cows at a time.
L.D. Peeler loads milk jugs for the automated bottling system at Milky Way Farm.

More than 50 retail outlets throughout the state carry Milky Way Farm products. Weekly milk drops at various points along the I-85 corridor can be scheduled via the farm's website. Products are also available by appointment at the farm.

As for the future, Iris envisions the family business carrying on for generations. "My brother and I have four children. He has two and I have two, and we would not want to raise them in any other environment," she says. "They're working alongside us in the operation, so it teaches them work ethic and where their food comes from and how to take care of the Earth and all that. We're fortunate that our customers are happy with our product and keep buying it, which allows us to do what we do."

☎

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

Roller coasters take thrill-seekers to the limit

Story by KATHY DENES

It's a rite of passage—a child in the roller coaster line steps up to the mark, stands up straight and finally hits that magical measurement, tall enough to be welcomed aboard for a lifetime of adventure.

The thrill of roller coasters never grows old, whether they're modern rockets of cold, sleek steel or creaky, wooden rides that are a nostalgic nod to yesteryear. Around 1,000 coasters in the United States and thousands worldwide offer limitless options for destination vacations.

"At this point, I've been on just under 1,200 unique coasters at over 300 different amusement parks," says James Nocito, a CoasterNerds contributing writer whose hobby of "chasing down rides" has taken him to 38 countries on four continents.

"Sometimes, I do actually think the hobby is ridiculous, but it's also given me a chance to visit all sorts of places I probably wouldn't have otherwise, like all 50 U.S. states. I guess I've always compared it to people who try to see a baseball game at every Major League Baseball stadium or such."

Roller coaster fans seeking out the fastest ride, wildest twists and turns or just a new experience have created a community. Numerous websites, like coaster101.com, and social media pages, like Facebook's CoasterNerds, are dedicated to informing and connecting enthusiasts.

"There's this whole community within the parks and coasters fandom, and some of the best people I met from internet chatrooms or online message boards when I was a teenager are people I know 20-plus years later, now hanging out in person," James says.

He hesitates to cite one roller coaster as his favorite, "but if I were going to suggest to someone some of the biggest, baddest or craziest rides in the U.S., I'd probably start with Fury 325." That ride at Carowinds in Charlotte, North Carolina, is North America's tallest, fastest and longest giga coaster—one with a height or drop of at least 300 feet. 🚂

IF YOU'RE GOING

- For a selection of the country's top 100 coasters, consult coasterbuzz.com/rollercoasters/top100.
- If taking younger travelers along, be sure to check height requirements for the coasters you hope to experience.
- To check real-time waits before you go, visit queue-times.com.
- Concerned about motion sickness? Snack on something fairly bland 30 minutes to an hour before jumping in line.





PLANNING A COASTER VACATION?

Consider visiting these thrill rides:

The Beast broke all records when it opened at Kings Island in Mason, Ohio, in 1979, and it still reigns as Guinness World Records' longest wooden roller coaster.

The Voyage at Holiday World in Santa Claus, Indiana, is the world's second-longest wooden coaster, running for 1.2 miles and featuring a world-record five underground tunnels.

It's always coaster weather at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, where the 7-acre center court offers five unique options.

Two record-breaking coasters—the nation's first tilt coaster, the Circuit Breaker, and Palindrome, a one-of-a-kind infinity coaster—are set to open in Texas this year at Austin's COTALand.

Also opening this year at Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, is the Siren's Curse, expected to break records for height, speed and longest tilt.



Photo courtesy of Lake Winnepesaukah



Adobe Stock photo by Panosk18

TOP: The Cannon Ball at Lake Winnepesaukah is the oldest wooden roller coaster in Georgia.

ABOVE: The Six Flags family of parks is known for exciting roller coasters, like the Joker at Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson Township, N.J.

LEFT: Southern California's mild weather means rides like the roller coaster and Ferris wheel at Pacific Amusement Park on the Santa Monica Pier can be enjoyed throughout the year.

FIND YOUR THRILL

Look for CoasterNerds on Facebook and visit these websites for more information: coasterforce.com, aceonline.org, coaster101.com and coasterbuzz.com.



Adobe Stock illustration by Wasun

FAMILY PIT STOP

Refuel revamps gas station for food, fun in Abbeville

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Stacia Powell always knew she wanted to follow in her family's entrepreneurial tradition, she just wasn't sure how. She grew up helping her father run a popular grocery store in Abbeville, working as a cashier, book-keeper and eventually in customer service. She worked for her sister at a small cafe in town. Her other sister ran an ice cream parlor.

Then the old gas station building on the corner of Church and Vienna streets became available in 2023, and Stacia knew she had to do something with it.

"I knew I wanted this building," she says. "I always sort of staked my claim on it, I would come take pictures of it. It's hard for me to see something old fall down. I had dreams of opening it but didn't know what for."

Over 10 months, Stacia and her husband transformed the 1950s gas station into Refuel, a Southern cuisine restaurant and ice cream parlor. In the wake of her sister's ice cream parlor closing, Stacia's hope is that the combination of food and sweets can give Abbeville a fun gathering place for families that will last.

"My main goal was to help people put the cellphone down, have dinner and talk to each other," she says. "It's a hard thing because people don't want to change in that way, but then you wouldn't believe the response we get."



Photo by Matt Ledger

Stacia Powell started the Refuel project as an ice cream shop, adding food to make it a year-round business.

One of Stacia's favorite touches is the conversation cards at each table, which provide interesting topic suggestions to drum up dinner discussions. "When people see those conversation cards on the table, they're like, 'This is a really neat idea.' And they actually use them, which I'm excited about," she says. "I've seen 70-year-olds who have been together for 50 years having conversations about things they've never talked about because of those conversation cards."

Refuel started serving ice cream in December 2023, a month before the restaurant opened. In the first year of operation, Stacia was pleasantly surprised by the positive reception from the community. Moving forward, her biggest priorities will be creating space to grow, expanding hours and making the outside of the building more accommodating for families.

But no matter what challenges she tackles next, Stacia is confident knowing West Carolina has her back. She has already relied on its quality high-speed internet and phone service to promote Refuel on social media and to manage sales and online orders.

"Of course, West Carolina is who we went to," she says. "We have that for our home service, and the people that work there are more like family than a work environment. So, we would always go with West Carolina. Everything about them is wonderful." 🗣️

REFUEL

100 Vienna St., Abbeville

864-366-0505

refuelabbeville.com

Follow the restaurant on Facebook and Instagram.



Abby and Andrew Ellenburg own The Bakery on Main in Greenwood.



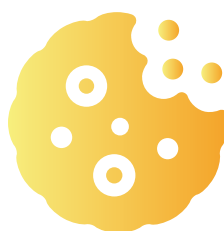
Photos courtesy of The Bakery on Main

The bakery's cinnamon rolls are nearly as tall as a coffee cup.

Sweet Success

The Bakery on Main is a dream come true

Story by BRANDI DIXON



Abby Ellenberg grew up in the kitchen baking with her mother. With her mother's love and guidance, Abby developed a deep affinity for all things made with flour.

"My grandmother was also a huge part of my learning to bake as my sisters and I would help her bake my great-grandmother's old Christmas cookies and recipes each December, creating a beautiful Christmas tradition that I will always cherish," Abby says.

Today Abby and her husband, Andrew, are the owners of The Bakery on Main in Greenwood where she gets to share her passion. The Abbeville community

welcomed her with open arms in 2019, when Abby first opened as Daily Bread Bakery. "From the beginning, the bakery has always been a team endeavor that my husband, Andrew, and I have built together," she says.

RELOCATING AND REBRANDING

After nearly five years in business in Abbeville, Abby and Andrew outgrew the beloved 700-square-foot bakery, and they began to look for a larger location to accommodate more customers, seating and shelf space to display the fruits of Abby's labor.

The couple grew up in Greenwood,

so it only made sense to put down roots there. They found the perfect little spot at 324 Main St., Suite B, not far from where Abby sold her baked goods at a local farmers market.

"With the relocation to Main Street in Greenwood, we decided it was the perfect timing to do a little rebranding, leading to the name change, The Bakery on Main," Abby says. "Bigger isn't always better, but in our case, a bigger space meant more room for all our beloved customers and family to come together. More room for tables and chairs, space for sitting and staying a while. It meant a bigger kitchen where my little girl dreams of owning my bakery would continue to thrive."

With its vast menu of sweets, treats and even gluten-free delights, The Bakery on Main aims to be welcoming.

"I want to make sure that each person that walks into my business feels welcomed and like they are somebody," Abby says, adding that customers are welcome to work, study or simply gather and chat for a while. ☺

EASTER TREATS NOT TO MISS

Each holiday, The Bakery on Main offers an assortment of fun, seasonal, tasty and festive delights, and Easter is no exception. Notable treats this season include the ever-popular Easter egg Rice Krispies treats for the kids' baskets and hot cross buns perfect for Easter Sunday brunch.

Empowerment Through Sports

Adaptive competitions and

Story by DREW WOOLLEY and JEN CALHOUN



ADAPTIVE CLIMBERS FESTIVAL

After Shane Farver's lower-level spinal cord injury, the rock-climbing enthusiast realized he needed to learn new ways of moving through the world, whether scrambling up rocks or making his way through shopping malls and office buildings.

"Early on in my recovery, a friend of mine said, 'A cool thing about climbing is the problem-solving aspect of it. You have to figure out how to get from this hold to that hold as efficiently as possible using your body as it is and kind of figuring those things out,'" Shane says.

It's the same for people with disabilities, he says. "We have to be problem-solvers, because—very often—the world is not made for us."

Today, Shane is communications director and a member of the organizing committee for the Adaptive Climbers Festival. The three-day event offers people with disabilities a chance to learn rock climbing and other outdoor skills while camping and communing in Eastern Kentucky's Red River Gorge.

"We really emphasize the notion that we do not take people with disabilities rock climbing," Shane says. "We teach people with disabilities how to rock climb. The nuance there is we're not here to take you on a ride. We're here to empower you and help you see what's possible in rock climbing and hopefully provide some confidence elsewhere in your life."

SWEET SETUP

The idea for the Adaptive Climbers Festival came about during a hot tub hang with a few adaptive climbers and their allies. "They were talking about the fact that outside of the competitive environment, there aren't a lot of opportunities for people with disabilities to rock climb," Shane says.

The first Adaptive Climbers Festival was in 2018 at a climbing area in northwest Alabama, but by 2022 the event found its home at Lago Linda Hideaway, a 410-acre wonderland that offers cabins, RV sites and campgrounds surrounding a 5-acre lake.

"We have our run of the place," Shane says. "Once we figured out that setup, we didn't want to hold it anywhere else. We also have other partners who help us out, including the local search and rescue folks. It's a huge coordinated effort."

MOVING MOUNTAINS

The event offers about 30 clinics, including courses on rappelling and anchor-building, which shows attendees how to set up their ropes for climbing. Most of the courses are led by people with disabilities.

"That's kind of our ethos—the idea that we're here to empower people and to give people opportunities to grow and lead," Shane says.

The Adaptive Climbers Festival has grown from about 30 participants to about 150 in 2024, including attendees from across the country, as well as some from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Spain. 🌍

events shatter barriers



Photos courtesy of Beth King



ABOVE: Training to succeed in new sports, like javelin, cycling, powerlifting and rowing, gives Beth King the confidence to overcome life's other challenges.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Participants in the Adaptive Climbers Festival come from all over the world to enjoy a weekend of rock climbing, fellowship and fun in Eastern Kentucky's Red River Gorge area.

RESTORING FREEDOM

The first time Beth King saw a recumbent tricycle, she thought it was a joke. She rarely left the house for anything other than doctors' appointments after retiring from the military in 2014 due to injuries she sustained three years earlier when a rocket-propelled grenade brought down her Chinook helicopter in Afghanistan.

Then, after battling a traumatic brain injury, rehabbing for permanent damage to her spine and back and undergoing a bilateral joint replacement for severe pain in her jaw, Beth's occupational therapist wanted her to hop on what to her looked like a child's toy.

"When she showed me a picture, it looked like a Big Wheel from when I was a kid," says Beth, who was not happy about the idea. "But halfway through my first ride, I realized I'm out here by myself, no one's running after me to catch me. And I really found that

liberating. I felt a sense of independence I hadn't felt in years."

She then took part in the Wounded Warrior Project's Soldier Ride, introducing her to the world of adaptive sports. Now based in Missouri, Beth has trained in javelin, rowing, discus and powerlifting, even competing at the 2022 Invictus Games in the Netherlands. She hopes to qualify for the Paralympics in 2028.

"It's what saved me. I was really struggling with depression, suicidal thoughts and isolation. I just couldn't deal with anything. And it gave me something to train for, to get out of bed for," Beth says. "Sports made me realize that I could still do all the things that I thought I lost."

FINDING INSPIRATION

Realizing she was losing almost all function in her feet, in 2023 Beth decided to have her right foot amputated, allowing her to begin learning to walk with an artificial one. Last year, she completed her first year of welding school, a goal she set after retiring from the military.

"I think sports really gave me the confidence to advocate for myself. To believe that I didn't really lose as much as I thought I had," she says. "If you had asked me a year ago if I'd be welding right now, I would have said, 'No way.' I couldn't see a life bigger than the box I had put myself in with my injuries."

Once she finishes school, Beth hopes to be able to make adaptive equipment for more people. "I don't think people always understand that it's not just sports equipment. It's freedom," she says. "It's a regular life and feeling like you're a part of things. To have a place where people can go and just have fun and play a sport, even if it might look different. I think people are starting to realize that it really does matter."

WELCOME CHRIS TOWNSON, WEST CAROLINA'S NEW CEO



beginning as an installer/repairman at Farmers Telecommunications Cooperative in Rainsville, Alabama. Over his 23-year tenure at FTC, Townson transitioned through various roles, including information systems specialist and management positions such as manager of customer service and support and manager of industrial relations and government affairs. Most recently, he served as CEO/GM of DTC Communications in Alexandria, Tennessee, a position he accepted in 2016.

"Chris' professional qualifications are outstanding, and his personality and character make him a wonderful addition to the West Carolina family," West Carolina Board President Wes McAllister says. "We believe he will continue to cultivate the deep family and community-oriented culture that defines our organization."

The West Carolina Board of Directors selected Chris Townson as the cooperative's new chief executive officer, succeeding Jeff Wilson. Townson joined West Carolina in February, becoming the fourth CEO/general manager in West Carolina's 73-year history.

Townson brings 30 years of experience in the telecommunications industry,

Townson is also known for his dedication to the telecommunications community. He has served on multiple committees of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, including his current position as chair of the government affairs committee. He has held leadership roles with the Tennessee Broadband Association and the Telecommunications Association of the Southeast.

Townson holds a doctor of ministry degree in organizational leadership and growth from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has also served as campus minister at Northeast Alabama Community College and held various roles in youth ministry.

Townson and his wife of 29 years, Melissa, look forward to joining the Upcountry and West Carolina communities. They have two adult sons, Christian and Ethan, a daughter-in-law, Danyel, and recently welcomed their first granddaughter, Lottie Ann.

STAY CONNECTED

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*A wired phone is required.



JR Hagan, Network Ops Field Team Lead



THE FUTURE OF FARMING



Jake McAllister is a fifth-generation farmer.

Scholarship recipient maximizes opportunities

Story by JUDY GARRISON

Jake McAllister calls his time at Clemson University the “most influential years” of his life. The fifth-generation farmer will complete his master’s degree there in the spring and return to his family farm in Mount Carmel.

The McAllister family has been influential in McCormick County since 1888, playing a part in everything from the general mercantile business to the timber and furniture industries. But it was the McAllisters’ beef cattle operation, Blue Branch Farms, that mapped Jake’s future. And the Foundation for Rural Service scholarship, awarded to Jake through West Carolina, helped make his path a reality.

Jake believes the scholarship is a validation of his choices, not only to go to college but also to return home. The FRS scholarship acknowledges individuals in rural areas who are passionate about where they come from and what they plan to do.

“Not many people have the opportunity to have a part in the legacy of agriculture in South Carolina,” he says.

Weighing his options, Jake chose to study agricultural mechanization and business, which provides in-person labs and real-world scenarios. “It has given me many tools to relate to the beef cattle industry and how our physical operations can be improved in order to better herd health and management,” Jake says.

The degree deals in analytical efficiency and has less to do with mechanical experience. For example, students in the machinery management class have to determine what the season of tillage, spraying, planting and harvesting would be for a certain crop. Then, they must decide which pieces of machinery and sizes are needed and whether it’s best to rent, lease or buy the equipment. Other factors they must consider include seed and fertilizer costs.

Calculations in Microsoft Excel help students understand the cost analysis and decisions in farming operations. Given this format, the speed of West Carolina’s broadband network is imperative for success.

“The reliability of the network remains unmatched,” Jake says. During his sophomore and junior years at Clemson, he spent time as an intern learning from the installers and technicians who keep South Carolina rural areas active and updated.

“Agriculture and technology are becoming a common theme,” he says. “Farmers are able to monitor irrigation devices by phone from miles away. Ranchers are able to enter data into software to be viewed later. Farmers will have to adapt to change in order to operate at full capacity. A good broadband network is a necessity for the future of agriculture.”

As for Jake, he believes “the best is yet to come.” 📱

Photo courtesy of Jake McAllister

Pasta Supremo

Italian translates to a great meal

Italian cuisine, with its fresh ingredients and age-old techniques, has woven itself into the fabric of American culture.

Pizza, spaghetti and Alfredo are all favorites, but lasagna may top the list. It's simply hard to resist. Keep the Italian theme going with an Italian chopped salad and a cannoli poke cake. Loosen your belt and get ready to embark on your Italian culinary experience without leaving home.



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

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

ITALIAN LASAGNA

- 1 pound sweet Italian sausage
- 3/4 pound lean ground beef
- 1/2 cup minced onion
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 2 (6.5-ounce) cans tomato sauce
- 2 (6-ounce) cans tomato paste
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried basil leaves
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 12 lasagna noodles
- 16 ounces ricotta cheese
- 1 egg
- 3/4 pound mozzarella cheese, sliced
- 3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Heat the oven to 375 F.

Cook sausage, ground beef, onion and garlic in a Dutch oven over medium heat until well browned.

Stir in crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, tomato paste and water. Season with sugar, 2 tablespoons parsley, basil,

1 teaspoon salt, Italian seasoning, fennel seeds and pepper. Simmer, covered, for about 1 1/2 hours, stirring occasionally.

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Cook lasagna noodles in boiling water for 8 to 10 minutes. Drain noodles, and rinse with cold water.

In a mixing bowl, combine ricotta cheese with egg, remaining 2 tablespoons parsley and 1/2 teaspoon salt.

To assemble, spread 1 1/2 cups of meat sauce in the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Arrange 3 to 4 noodles lengthwise over meat sauce to cover. Spread with 1/2 of the ricotta cheese mixture. Top with 1/3 of the mozzarella cheese slices. Spoon 1 1/2 cups meat sauce over mozzarella, and sprinkle with 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese.

Repeat layers, and top with remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheese. Cover with foil. To prevent sticking, either spray foil with cooking spray or make sure the foil does not touch the cheese. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 25 minutes. Remove lasagna from oven, and let it rest for 15 minutes before slicing and serving.



CANNOLI POKE CAKE

- 1 (15.25 ounce) yellow cake mix, plus ingredients on box to make the cake as directed

Topping:

- 1 1/2 cups ricotta cheese, well drained
- 2 cups mascarpone cheese
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1 (3.4-ounce box) instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon fresh orange zest
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 10 ounces mini chocolate chips

Make sure ricotta cheese is well drained—overnight is best, if possible, because it needs to be thick.

Prepare and bake cake according to directions on the package for a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Remove cake from oven

and poke holes all over it using the handle of a wooden spoon, large wood skewer or a straw. Set cake aside to cool.

In a large bowl, beat the ricotta and mascarpone cheese with an electric mixer on medium speed until well combined. Beat in the powdered sugar and dry pudding mix. Then beat in the vanilla, orange zest, cinnamon and salt. Once well combined, slowly beat in the milk a little at a time.

Spread about 1/3 of the topping over the cake, making sure it gets into holes. Then continue spreading the remaining topping, and sprinkle on the mini chocolate chips. Cover the cake and refrigerate for a few hours or overnight. Cut and serve well chilled.

Note: This cake is especially good with a little chocolate syrup drizzled over the top.

ITALIAN CHOPPED SALAD

Make the dressing in advance to allow flavors to marry.

Lemon Vinaigrette:

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 shallot, finely chopped

- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Salad:

- 1 head iceberg lettuce
- 1 head radicchio
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1 can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 4 ounces fresh pearl mozzarella, drained
- 4 ounces provolone cheese, diced
- 5 pepperoncini peppers, stemmed and sliced
- Kosher salt and pepper, as needed
- 1 teaspoon fresh oregano, for garnish

Make the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, vinegar, shallot, garlic, oregano, salt and pepper. Set aside.

Cut the iceberg lettuce in half, then cut out the core. Slice the lettuce lengthwise into 1/4-inch strips. Repeat with the radicchio.

In a large bowl, combine the lettuce, radicchio, onion, tomatoes, chickpeas, mozzarella, provolone and pepperoncini. Drizzle with the dressing and toss gently to coat. You may not need all of the dressing, so serve any leftover vinaigrette on the side. Season salad with salt and pepper and toss again. Garnish with oregano, if desired, and serve. 🍴





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