

CONNECTED



Growing Communities

Virtual classes help locals thrive

NEW CHAPTER

PLAY BALL!



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

The Journey to Connectivity


NTCA members create broadband networks so fast and reliable that it's easy to take for granted the effort and expertise needed to bring these services to homes and businesses. These professionals do amazing work, particularly when considering the intricate, multi-step journey to build, expand and maintain a network.

It begins with detailed research and careful planning. The broadband provider must learn exactly how many homes and businesses might want service, as well as the challenges posed by the landscape. Then, a thorough review of the numbers determines if the project makes financial sense. It's a puzzle where the pieces are population density, infrastructure costs and potential demand for the service.

Then there's the engineering—design, build and inspect. Detailed maps identify routes for cables, permitting, environmental regulations and access to land. Some of these projects can take two to four years from the first engineering drawing to the first connection.

The work doesn't stop when the network goes live. These networks require maintenance, technology upgrades and customer support.

These networks are lifelines connecting rural communities to telehealth, education, remote work and cutting-edge technologies. With the help of service providers like yours, we're building broadband to last and ensuring no community gets left behind in our increasingly digital world.

To learn more, check out the Foundation for Rural Service and JSI's latest report, "Delivering Broadband From Beginning to 'End,'" at frs.org/delivering-broadband-beginning-end. 



Safe Searches

Tips to avoid scams

When you need information fast, a quick check of Google is often the first stop. In fact, some people find it easier to search online for everything, including the addresses for a specific website like a bank, trusted repair service or health care provider.

Unfortunately, scammers know this, too, so they sometimes create bogus sites with addresses confusingly close to the real thing.

Google is aware of this trend, and it touts advanced systems that keep users' search results 99% spam-free. The company also offers a few tips for closing the final security weaknesses.

- Pay close attention to the URL—the specific web address—before clicking any unfamiliar link. Typically, in an email, hovering the cursor over the address will show the complete link. Don't click the link if it looks suspicious.
- The three dots next to the search results in Google can be used to find more details about the webpage, store or business you're considering. You can find clues indicating if the site is legitimate before clicking the link.
- When you're looking for official resources, watch out for unusual address formatting. For example, there's typically only one correct customer service number for a larger company. But not all businesses have customer service numbers, and searching for them requires you to be mindful. Watch for strange formatting in the website address, including unexpected symbols or emojis.

A Rockin' RECIPE

Hannah Dasher cooks up an online storm



Performer Hannah Dasher created a countryfied niche for herself on social media.

Photo courtesy of Jeremy Ryan Photography

Story by BRANDI DIXON

Hannah Dasher is a blast of classic country and rock 'n' roll paired with social media influencer. Stepping into the home she calls “Honky-Tonk Graceland” and features on her social media is, as Hannah says, like going back in time to “your meemaw’s house.”

“Avocado green canisters, gold salt and pepper shakers, brass pots. I love my retro kitchen, and I love that the fans feel right at home,” she says, adding that she enjoys entertaining.

Music and songwriting are Hannah’s first loves. “I was rehearsing my acceptance speech for best new female vocalist of the year in my mirror at age 10,” she says. “I grew up listening to ’90s country radio, and knew I wanted to be an entertainer.”

Hannah pursued music professionally, taking her big hair and a heaping helping of Southern charm to Nashville, Tennessee. She started out writing songs for other artists, getting some big accolades thanks to collaborations with Brad

Paisley, Lainey Wilson and Ian Munsick, to name a few. She continued performing whenever she had the chance.

STAND BY YOUR PAN

In 2020 during the pandemic, Hannah found herself stuck. “All the stages shut down, and I needed a stage,” she says. “Talking with some friends I learned a lot of girls my age couldn’t cook, so I stumbled into the world of social media, and it was the perfect storm.”

Hannah took to TikTok to share her

family’s beloved recipes and a few of her own, all while sprinkling in a bit of her signature rockin’ country flavor. The recipe produced the now-viral Stand By Your Pan social media accounts. More than 1.5 million followers join Hannah daily in her retro kitchen.

“I love that this brought country and noncountry music fans together,” she says. “It’s hard to pigeonhole into just one world, and I’m glad that I can be this representative of the past and the future via a semicelebrity chef.” 🗨️

ALL THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

When Hannah Dasher isn’t cranking out content, she’s picking up a guitar and writing music.

“God always sends it from the left side of the sky and out of my mouth,” she says of her process. “Sometimes it’s melody and lyrics simultaneously, but you just never know, and you always have to be looking for it.”

Hannah is on the road this year with her band on The Wanted Tour, featuring stops across the United States, the United Kingdom and Sweden. She encourages fans to spread the word and come see her and her “boys.”

Suggested Safeguards

Protect your data in a digital world

As I reflect on my first three months as West Carolina's fourth CEO, my wife, Melissa, and I find this area to be a slice of heaven. Rural America blesses us with a slower pace of life, neighbors who become friends, strong church communities, dazzling night skies and peaceful solitude on our lakes. With high-speed fiber internet rivaling—and even surpassing—many urban areas, the opportunities here are limitless.



CHRIS TOWNSON
Chief Executive Officer

Unfortunately, these opportunities extend to cybercriminals, as well. In our treasured communities, scammers and hackers look to steal personal information, financial data and your hard-earned money. The good news? You can fight back with knowledge and simple habits.

Cybercrime is surging everywhere. The FBI's Internet Crime Report shows Americans lost over \$12.5 billion to cybercrime in 2023 alone. It's not just businesses at risk. Individuals, especially older adults, are prime targets for phishing scams, fraudulent calls and identity theft.

Your best defense? Education.

This topic should not create fear but rather spur you to greater awareness and appropriate action. That's why West Carolina has launched Digital Defense 101 classes throughout our service area. These free sessions teach you how to spot scams, protect passwords and secure your home network. Watch our email and social media for announcements of future classes.

It is even more encouraging that you don't need technical expertise to protect yourself online.

Here are five simple actions that will empower and protect you today:

Strengthen your passwords—Create unique passwords or passphrases for each account. A good rule of thumb is to use at least 12 characters with mixed letters, numbers and symbols. Consider using a password manager.

Enable multifactor authentication—Adding an extra verification step makes it harder for hackers to access your accounts, even with your password.

Recognize phishing scams—When receiving urgent emails, texts or calls requesting personal information, pause before responding. Verify the source independently, not by clicking any link within the email.

Keep software updated—Set your devices to update automatically to maintain the latest security protections against vulnerabilities.

Secure your home WiFi—Limit network password sharing to family members only. With our WiFi X service, you can create separate guest networks for visitors.

Beyond our Digital Defense 101 classes, valuable resources include the Federal Trade Commission, consumer.ftc.gov, and the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency, cisa.gov/be-cyber-smart.

I'd be remiss if I didn't remind you of the exceptional protection our WiFi X service provides. Its state-of-the-art router acts as a digital fortress, blocking cyberthreats and intrusions from reaching your WiFi-enabled devices. However, keep in mind that it won't stop scammers from sending phishing emails or making fraudulent calls, so stay vigilant.

At West Carolina, looking out for each other extends to protecting you in the digital world. Take these preventive steps, stay informed and reach out with questions. Please remember, being connected is important, but being secure is essential.

Stay safe out there. 📞

west carolina

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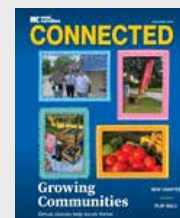
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Photos by West Carolina

The Clemson Extension Service, with the help of the Freshwater Coast Community Foundation, offers community members online classes to boost their agribusiness know-how.

See story on page 12.

REVVED UP FOR THE RURAL RUMBLE

In February, West Carolina fielded three of the 60 esports teams competing in the inaugural NTCA Rural Rumble. The gaming tournament featured teams competing in Rocket League, a futuristic 3D fantasy game where vehicles square off in a soccer-themed battle royale.

Team Bath Bomb included West Carolina employee David Worley who's gamer handle is "TangoSukka." Also included on the team was Zack "Pinky" LaCons and Jackson "Repeat" Clemmons. One unique trait of this team, is the three had never played together in a tournament before.

"We've all been playing the game for a while," David says. "I figured, let's just try it and see how it goes." The team cruised through its competition in the first round.

"Watching the tournament live was much better than I anticipated," says Shannon


Sears, West Carolina director of commercial operations. "I had watched some matches on YouTube so I would get a feel for the game and, to be honest, it was a little hard to follow. Once I had an idea of the players for each team, it made the experience much better to watch. In fact, the match was very exciting. Neither team had dropped a point throughout the tournament, but they split the first two games and forced a final game three."

Team Bath Bomb made it to the tournament final, competing against the Stout Blue Devils of the University of Wisconsin system. The West Carolina team lost the first match, won the second and narrowly lost the third, ultimately finishing second in the NTCA Rural Rumble.

"Even though Team Bath Bomb came up short of winning the title, the overall event was a huge success, and I am very proud



of them," Shannon says. "West Carolina had three teams that entered the tournament, and I appreciate them taking the time and representing our company against teams from all across the U.S. Gaming has become more and more popular in the U.S., and because of West Carolina's fiber network our gamers have the best opportunity to succeed."



MEMORIAL DAY

REMEMBER THOSE WHO GAVE ALL

West Carolina's offices will be closed on **Monday, May 26**, in observance of Memorial Day. Take time to recognize and remember the men and women who gave their lives in service to our country so we can continue to live in freedom.



Hats Off TO THE CLASS OF 2025!

Congratulations to all 2025 high school, college and technical school graduates. Enjoy this moment—your future is bright!

Everyone at West Carolina is excited for your future.



Minor Leagues

MAJOR FUN

Road trip to
baseball's most
entertaining
destinations

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Ric Sisler admits he misses the annual spring-to-fall marathon of a baseball season. “When it’s in your blood, it doesn’t matter what you’re doing. You’re always going to be pulled toward that industry, and I’m

certainly no exception,” he says. “Going to the ballpark, the camaraderie and being around the yard was just a thrill for me.

“I certainly don’t miss tarp pulls and some of those types of things,”

he says with a laugh, referring to the back-breaking work of getting protective tarps on and off the diamond during rainy weather.

The national pastime is most certainly in Ric’s blood. He played for three

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Marketers and merchandisers will say quite a lot. Creative—some may say outlandish—nicknames, mascots and logos are part of the landscape of minor league baseball. Here are a few of our favorites:

Florida: The Fort Myers Mighty Mussels—The nickname is more about seafood than sinew.

Alabama: Rocket City Trash Pandas—It pairs Huntsville’s role in the space industry with a cute raccoon reference.

Georgia: Augusta GreenJackets—The GreenJackets mascot is

akin to a yellow jacket, but the reference is to Augusta’s long history with The Masters golf tournament, which awards the winner a green jacket.

North Carolina: Kannapolis Cannon Ballers—The alliteration is nice for the team once known as the Intimidators after the late NASCAR star and Kannapolis native Dale Earnhardt Sr., who was then part-owner of the team. The Cannon Ballers mascot, Boomer, has an uncanny resemblance to Earnhardt.

Kentucky: Bowling Green Hot Rods—The nickname gives the team a link to the nearby National Corvette Museum.



Young fans take in a midseason fireworks display from ground level at PNC Field, home of the Scranton Wilkes-Barre RailRiders.

seasons in the New York Yankees minor league system before running several minor league organizations as a front office executive and as vice president/general manager of the independent South Coast League based in Georgia. His father, Dick Sisler, was a Major League Baseball manager and All-Star player, and his grandfather, George Sisler, is enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Ric, who is still involved in athletics as director of corporate sponsorships at Western Carolina University, says many fans of the game come back season after season.

“Minor league baseball has been part of the fabric of our society in a lot of smaller towns,” he says. “It was kind of a binding agent for folks to come watch baseball with their friends and neighbors and just have a wholesome time.”

While the minor leagues are about family fun and community pride to many fans, the game is a balance of business and player development for the teams and their MLB affiliates. The minors have long relied on fan-friendly, creative promotions and player interactions to sell tickets, and all of that comes with an affordable price tag.

“I think people have always gone to minor league games because it’s

affordable,” Ric says. “You had great entertainment and could see some potential big-league players there at

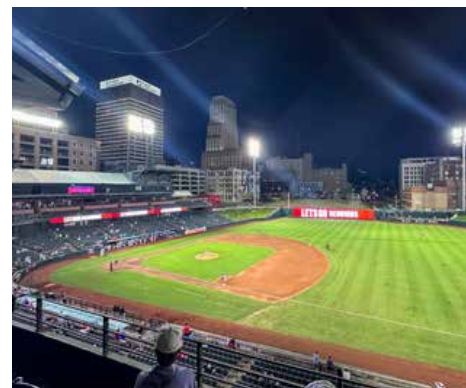


Photo courtesy of Andy Johns

The Memphis Redbirds offer another reason to visit West Tennessee.

an affordable price. You’re very close to the field and close to the players. It was a different setting from the Major League parks. I don’t want to see that change.”

Planning a trip this summer—or maybe even a baseball pilgrimage? There’s a game, sports history and tradition, as well as a bunch of fun waiting for you. 📺

HISTORIC HOME FIELDS

Some of the oldest ballparks in the country are in the Southeast, and three of them are on the National Register of Historic Places.

That list includes Birmingham, Alabama’s Rickwood Field, which is the nation’s oldest professional baseball park still with its original structure. Opened in 1910, two years before Boston’s Fenway Park, Rickwood was home to the Negro Leagues’ Birmingham Black Barons.

The double-A Birmingham Barons play an annual ceremonial game at Rickwood, and Major League Baseball hosted a game between the St. Louis Cardinals and San Francisco Giants at the venerable ballpark last season, a 6-5 Cardinals victory.

Jackie Robinson Ballpark in Daytona Beach, Florida, was the first ballpark to allow the Brooklyn Dodgers’ African American prospect whose name now graces the stadium to play with white players in the segregated South in 1946. The park dates to 1914 and was originally named Daytona City Island Ballpark.

Spartanburg, South Carolina’s Duncan Park was constructed in 1926 and was home to minor league baseball almost continually until 1994. It was also home to the Spartanburg Sluggers, a Negro League minors team from 1928-52. An estimated 21,000 spectators reportedly crowded in and around the ballpark to attend Game 5 of the 1938 American Legion World Series between Spartanburg and Los Angeles.

The 3,000-seat stadium is currently Spartanburg High School’s home field. The city of Spartanburg is building a new stadium for the Hub City Spartanburgers of the South Atlantic League. The city is the new home of the former Down East Wood Ducks of Kinston, North Carolina.



EMBRACING A NEW CHAPTER

CEO Chris Townson plans to lead West Carolina to new heights

Story by PATRICK SMITH

After 30 years in telecommunications, Chris Townson thought he'd retire in Middle Tennessee. Then he got a call from West Carolina.

"I really wasn't looking to leave my previous position," Chris says. "But once the opportunity presented itself to go to West Carolina, it wasn't something I could turn down. It's the people, the company culture and the challenge, both professionally and personally, that made me want to join the team."

Chris joins West Carolina as the organization's fourth CEO since its inception in 1952. With previous positions in Alabama

and Tennessee, Chris spent his first few months here learning about the community to understand what makes West Carolina so special.

"It's been a whirlwind," Chris says. "I was blessed to travel across our service areas with West Carolina's previous CEO, Jeff Wilson, for a few weeks. We covered a lot of miles and met with a few hundred people, not only from West Carolina, but also leaders and community members—barbers, bankers, mayors, preachers, teachers and more. I'm so excited about this community, the caliber of this team and the opportunities in front of us."



ABOVE: From left are West Carolina's current CEO Chris Townson and previous CEOs Jeff Wilson and Dave Herron.

LEFT: Chris Townson speaks to West Carolina employees during an event at the cooperative.

FROM HUMBLE ROOTS TO CEO

Growing up on a farm, Chris learned the principles of hard work at an early age.

"My dad is a plumber and a preacher, and my grandfather was a roofer and a farmer," Chris says. "My whole family has a hardworking background to serve people."

With a drive to serve others, Chris has held nearly every job at a telecommunications company during his career—whether it's splicing cables or advocating for funding with national leaders in Washington, D.C.

"I started as an installer repairman at Farmers Telecommunications Cooperative in Rainsville, Alabama, when I was 19 years old," he says. "Then, after a few outside roles, I moved to information systems and then into industry relations and government affairs. All the while, I was in night school to get my organizational management degree. My final role at Farmers was working as the manager of customer service."

In 2016, Chris became the CEO of DTC Communications in Alexandria, Tennessee, leading the cooperative through extensive growth.

"We received nine federal, state and local grants to finish the 100% fiber-to-the-home project about four years ahead of schedule," Chris says. "We essentially doubled the size of the company, both in revenue and customer base, and that really secured the company on a firm foundation to serve the members."

Now 50 years old, Chris takes the reins to continue what he describes as the current "hypergrowth" model at West Carolina.

"We have an incredible opportunity to build on our momentum and take West Carolina to new heights," he says. "Whether it's through expanding broadband, enhancing our services or strengthening our community partnerships, the future is bright."

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

As West Carolina adds hundreds of customers each month and the size of its

footprint continues to grow, the opportunity now centers around ensuring all customers experience the quality service the company has delivered for more than 70 years.

"The opportunities are limitless for us at West Carolina," Chris says. "We'll continue to focus on our mission and core values of honesty, integrity and service to others, all while innovating and evolving with today's technology."

For the people it serves, Chris knows West Carolina is more than a telecommunications provider. It's a lifeline for businesses, schools and families.

"Telecommunications is more than technology, it's about people," Chris says. "It's about helping families stay in touch, enabling businesses to grow and providing students with the tools they need to succeed. In today's world, reliable broadband is just as essential as electricity or water. I want every member and customer to know that when they do business with West Carolina, they're being served by a team that genuinely cares about their needs."

"This is a place where people take

pride in their community, where neighbors look out for each other and where businesses and families thrive together," Chris says.

—Chris Townson, CEO

"We may connect someone who develops the next great app or finds a new medical cure, and it's because our work helps them to connect like they couldn't before. Possibilities like this reinforce why we do what we do."

"Whether it's improving infrastructure, investing in new technology or working with state and federal partners to secure funding, my commitment as part of the West Carolina team is to deliver the highest quality service," he adds. "I'm honored to be here, and I can't wait to see what we accomplish together." 📞

LOOK TOWARD THE

Light

Whatever you call them, fireflies mesmerize

Story by SARA DIAMOND PATTERSON

Catching lightning bugs in a Mason jar with holes punched in the lid is a summer ritual for kids across the country. Watching their light show together is often a time for families to slow down, which is what Lynn Frierson Faust's family began doing in the Great Smoky Mountains during the 1960s.

They marveled for years at the unique light display, as the flying beetles blinked on and off at the same time for several hours after dark. When Lynn heard the August 1991 edition of *Science News* magazine featured an article on fireflies that blink in unison, she figured she would finally find out why and how they made their magic.

"I remember thinking, 'Oh cool, a lightning bug feature. It'll talk about our light show.' Only it didn't mention one thing," she says. In fact,

the authors said the Western Hemisphere had no species of fireflies that blinked synchronously.

Lynn let them know they were mistaken and invited them to come to the Smokies to see the show for themselves. The scientists did and agreed Lynn was right, lighting the way for her life's work.

'JUST SO DARN FUN'

As "The Lightning Bug Lady," Lynn is internationally known for her research on the ecology and habits of the more than 125 species of U.S. fireflies, helping

THE LOWDOWN

HOW: Fireflies produce their magical flashes through bioluminescence, a chemical reaction.

WHY: Each of the more than 125 species of fireflies in the United States—2,000 worldwide—has a unique signature flash pattern the males use to attract females of their specific type.

WHERE: Everywhere. Many Western species do not flash or fly, but they're out there.

WHEN: Warm summer nights.



AI-generated artwork by Firefly

LEND A HAND

Pesticides and habitat reduction have taken a toll on firefly populations. Maintaining a "wild" area of your yard with a little water, native vegetation and undisturbed soil will make your home more firefly friendly. But the easiest way to help is simply by turning out the lights during their active period. Visit xerces.org or firefly.org for more tips.

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Photo courtesy of Lynn Frierson Faust



A BBC crew takes a break from filming in 2019. Naturalist Lynn Frierson Faust examines equipment she and Mark Zloba, ecological manager at the Edge of Appalachia, use to gather fireflies at the preserve outside of Cincinnati.

to raise awareness of their unique life cycles and importance within ecosystems.

She scrambles to 14 states each year to catch them emerging during their eight-week active season, usually early June to late July. For 18 years, she has been the worldwide go-to on the subject, serving as on-site scientific consultant for BBC Earth, Discovery, National Geographic and other international film crews. Lynn's 2017 book, "Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs," was the first-ever comprehensive firefly field guide and shared the results of her nearly three decades of research on behalf of museums, universities, state and national parks and nature centers.

"I'm not a scientist per se, but I've done the research, a whole lot of research," she says. "I'm just a regular person obsessed with these and fortunate to have the time and a little knowledge to build on."

Throughout history, fireflies have symbolized hope and mystery, serving as transient reminders that life is fleeting. In some cultures, people see them as their lost ancestors, a sacred connection between the earthly and spiritual worlds.

When she began, Lynn didn't have much research to start with. "There were just a bunch of dusty old scientific papers, but that's about it," she says. "There's just not been that much research done on them since they aren't harmful or helpful to people or crops."

They are, however, a great indicator species for the health of ecosystems. "When they disappear, we have to know why and where to look." And

HERE THEY ARE!

No matter where you are, you don't have to go far to find the magic. You can look for lightning bugs anywhere from your backyard to wildlife management areas or wooded parks, avoiding light pollution and areas that spray for mosquitos.

The Southeast offers the most variety of firefly species. "Generally speaking—and this holds true for almost all living things—as you go south closer toward the equator, you get a greater diversity of species but maybe fewer numbers," firefly expert Lynn Frierson Faust says. "Whereas when you go north in latitude, you get greater numbers but fewer species."

The *Photinus carolinus* species in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park of Tennessee and North Carolina are known for their synchronous flashes. You can see them put on a similar show at South Carolina's Congaree National Park. Thousands of these fireflies emit between five to eight flashes of light all at once followed by eight to 10 seconds of darkness.

Their light shows have become so popular, each year more than 20,000 people enter a lottery drawing at each park for viewing spots during the two-week active period, usually in early June depending on temperatures and soil moisture.

Lynn says they will always serve as a nostalgic reminder of days gone by.

"Lightning bugs are fantastic ambassadors leading people back into nature and to a better understanding of the connectedness of it all," she says. "Plus, they're just so darn fun." 📺

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NAME GAME

Officially known as Lampyridae, worldwide fireflies are called blinkies, glowflies, moon bugs, peeney-wallies, blinkin' bees, hoturu, fire beetles and candle flies. Here at home, "lightning bug" is more common in the South and Midwest, while "firefly" is typically heard in the West and large cities in the East. Some researchers attribute the differences to weather. While lightning is most active in the South and Midwest, the West sees the most wildfires.

TEACHING SUCCESS

Agribusiness gets real boost from virtual classroom

Story by JOHN CLAYTON



FAR LEFT: Wilder Ferreira teaches online classes aimed at small-business and agribusiness owners through the Clemson Extension Service.

LEFT: Wilder advises many community organizations, including the Freshwater Coast Rural Entrepreneurship Alliance.

Wilder Ferreira found his calling while working for his family's auto parts business as a young man in Brazil, and it wasn't oil filters and spark plugs. He negotiated with his father to spend one week a month working as a consultant, helping business owners with their computer systems.

"I started to see some of the things they were doing wrong and saw things they could do better," Wilder says. "I said, 'Maybe I should be teaching this.'"

Wilder now lives in South Carolina, where he's spent the last 10 years teaching small-business and agribusiness owners how to maximize their potential. In 2015, he began with in-person classes, but those classes are now held online through the Clemson Extension Service.

"I came to Abbeville and McCormick with the idea of rural entrepreneurship, not rural economic development—teaching folks how to be good employers, good employees and good entrepreneurs," Wilder says. "We teach folks all the time, but there was more than just teaching. We needed to do some economic development."

GETTING HERE

Wilder earned a master's degree in agricultural economics from Auburn University. He arrived in Clemson in 1999 and

began work with the university's extension service, a resource for farmers and agribusiness owners around the state.

Wilder brought the desire to teach and expertise in production and food economics, marketing, computer modeling, accounting and the ability to develop feasibility studies. The right tools came later.

"We've helped with grants and private sector projects for \$20 million in investments over the last 10 years, but the focus

“I wouldn't be able to teach 200-300 people if not for their internet connections.”

—Wilder Ferreira, Clemson Extension Service associate

was always on individuals—getting that person to believe in himself or herself and get an education from us,” Wilder says. “Everything was set up, and we realized the more people I teach virtually, the more I can help. Instead of teaching one class in Abbeville for three people or one class in McCormick for two people, we decided we can reach way more people virtually, and we can assist individuals as they need it.”

The virtual classes are more accessible, especially for people on a tight schedule, and Wilder says nothing is lost in the virtual classroom. “I think I’ve become a little bit of an expert in teaching with the same vibe as in the classroom,” he says.

Last year, around 250 people took part in the virtual workshops, which are open to anyone who would like to learn.

Attendees sign up through Eventbrite, an online service for ticket sales and registrations for events such as lectures, classes and workshops.

Wilder’s classes include Entrepreneurship 101, How to Develop a Marketing Plan for Your Small Business and Understanding Organizational

Behavior.

“I have about 10 workshops just for business creation, retention and expansion,” Wilder says. “Then, I go straight to personal development for another five to six workshops on how to be positive, decision making and time management. The last session is more about building trust within the organization, how to retain good employees, how to deal with negative people within an organization.”

STARTING POINTS

The Abbeville-based Freshwater Coast Community Foundation and West Carolina help the educational initiative with grants, but it goes deeper than that.

“This wouldn’t be possible without West Carolina,” Wilder says. “I wouldn’t be able to teach 200-300 people if not for their internet connections.”

Due West’s Lee Logan, executive director of the FCCF and

member of the West Carolina Board of Directors, says helping provide educational opportunities makes sense for both organizations.

“We felt that there was intentional work that needed to be done to help the rural counties that depend a great deal on agricultural and medium to small businesses that don’t have quite the same opportunities that the larger, more urban counties do,” Lee says. We want to keep them vibrant, economically sustainable and in the loop regarding growth in our communities. That encourages young people to stay in our communities and raise their families. We want them to see it as a reasonable option that won’t be unnecessarily limited because of their location.”

Wilder, Clemson Extension and the project seem to be a “perfect fit” for what the area, and others like it across South Carolina, needed.

According to the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, agribusiness in the state represents more than \$50 billion in economic impact and is responsible for nearly 260,000 jobs.

But the business of farming is changing rapidly, and continuing education is one way to keep up.

“Maybe how you produce your product is sort of ingrained in your DNA if you grew up in farming,” Lee says. “You can work hard and try to stay up to date on how you produce your products, but then what do you do with it? In this day and age, how do I get into the market? How do I get the most for my investment? How do I learn to interact with the people who would buy my produce and products in today’s market? That’s what these initiatives are for.”



With tips from the online classes, Ken and Judy Hedrick, from Troy, display their produce during a weekend event.

Photos courtesy of Wilder Ferreira

Fantastic Frying

Flavorful chicken with the finest sides

Many say munching on piping-hot, crispy fried chicken is a joy like no other. Whether it's juicy white meat from the breast or the wings or the deep, engaging flavors of the dark meat found in thighs and legs, when it comes to fried chicken, most everyone has a preference. But there are a few things that good pieces of fried chicken have in common—the skin must stay on, and it must be crispy.

That's not too much to ask, but it's something that many cooks cannot achieve. There's a knack to it that may take a few extra steps, but the endgame is well worth it.

Serve the chicken alongside a big spoonful of potato salad and finish with a bowl of banana pudding and you have a meal fit for a beautiful summer evening.



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CRISPY FRIED CHICKEN

- 1 (4-pound) chicken, cut into pieces
- 1 cup whole milk buttermilk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour for coating
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 quarts vegetable oil for frying

Dry chicken with paper towels. Put the flour in a large plastic bag. Let the amount of chicken you are cooking dictate the amount of flour you use. Season the flour with paprika, garlic powder, salt and pepper to taste. Paprika helps to brown the chicken.

Dip chicken pieces in buttermilk then, a few at a time, put them in the bag with the flour, seal the bag and shake to coat well.

Place the coated chicken on a cookie sheet or tray, and cover with a clean dish

towel or waxed paper. Let sit until the flour reaches a paste-like consistency. This step is important to ensure that the skin will be crispy and adhere to the chicken.

Fill a large skillet (cast iron is best) about 1/3 to 1/2 full of vegetable oil. Heat until very hot.

Put in as many chicken pieces as the skillet can hold. Brown the chicken in hot oil on both sides.

When browned, reduce heat and cover the skillet. Let cook for 30 minutes (the chicken will be cooked through but not crispy). Remove cover, raise heat again and continue to fry until crispy. Drain the fried chicken on paper towels. Depending on how much chicken you have, you may have to fry it in a few batches. Keep the finished chicken in a slightly warm oven while preparing the rest.



LOADED BAKED POTATO SALAD

- 4 pounds russet potatoes
- 1-2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 3/4 cup sour cream or full-fat Greek yogurt
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 12 ounces bacon, cooked, cooled and chopped
- 6 green onions, whites and green parts, chopped

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place cleaned potatoes on a baking sheet and pierce four to five times with a fork. Lightly coat with olive oil, sprinkle with kosher salt and cook for 50-60 minutes or until easily pierced with a cake tester or skewer. Remove from the oven and let cool for 5 minutes. When cool enough to

handle, peel the potatoes and cut into 1-inch chunks, discarding the potato skins. The potato flesh may crumble and get shaggy, and that's OK—transfer it all to a large mixing bowl. While still warm, sprinkle the potatoes with the apple cider vinegar. Set aside for 15-30 minutes or until the potatoes are cooled.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a large skillet or in the oven, drain and let cool. Crumble into bite-size pieces.

In a small bowl, mix the mayonnaise and sour cream. Season with the kosher salt and pepper.

When the potatoes are cool, pour the mayonnaise mix over them with the crumbled bacon, green onion and cheddar cheese. Gently fold the ingredients together. Season with more salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate for 3 hours up to overnight before serving. Store in the refrigerator for up to four days.

NUTTER BUTTER 'NANA PUDDING

- 8 ounces softened cream cheese
- 1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 (3.4-ounce) boxes instant vanilla pudding
- 2 3/4 cups cold milk

- 8 ounces whipped topping divided
- 1 (1-pound) package Nutter Butter or other peanut butter sandwich cookies
- 5-7 ripe bananas, sliced



In a large mixing bowl, beat the softened cream cheese until smooth. Add the condensed milk and mix until there are no lumps.

In a second bowl, mix the pudding mix and milk together until smooth. Pour the pudding into the cream cheese mixture and mix until completely combined. Fold in half of the whipped topping.

Line the bottom of a trifle dish with a layer of Nutter Butter cookies. Add a layer of banana slices on top of the cookies. Spread a layer of the pudding mixture evenly over the bananas. Repeat 1-3 times, depending on the size of your dish.

Spread the remaining whipped topping on top of the pudding. Cover and chill for at least 4 hours but overnight is best.

Crush a few Nutter Butters on top of the whipped topping immediately before serving. 🍪

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