

CONNECTED



Homemade Happiness

Vibrant meals await
at The Gray House

CULTURAL
INFLUENCE

DIGITAL SPRING
CLEANING



RURAL CONNECTIONS

By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A Grateful Goodbye

This column is different than the others I’ve written over the years, because it’s my last as CEO of NTCA. When I began working at NTCA nearly 40 years ago, “broadband” wasn’t a household word. “Universal service,” while a longtime national goal, was a concept more than a mission. And “rural America” was too often an afterthought in conversations about connectivity.

Over the course of my career, I have watched the industry transform and a movement grow, powered by NTCA’s small, community-based providers. These providers are determined to bring advanced broadband to the communities they call home, even in places where the maps say it couldn’t be done and the economics didn’t work. Every day they do the extraordinary, proving what is possible when community comes first.

I’ve been honored to witness that perseverance firsthand. I’ve seen providers work through the night after storms so families could reconnect with loved ones. Thanks to their hard work building Smart Rural Communities, students in small towns can access educational opportunities far beyond their county lines. Farmers, small businesses and entrepreneurs use their fiber connections to grow, compete and thrive—without leaving the places they love.

Broadband is about more than technology. It’s access to health care, education, safety and economic opportunities. It’s the ability to stay rooted while reaching outward. And at its core, it’s about people, the NTCA members who make connectivity possible and the customers they proudly serve.

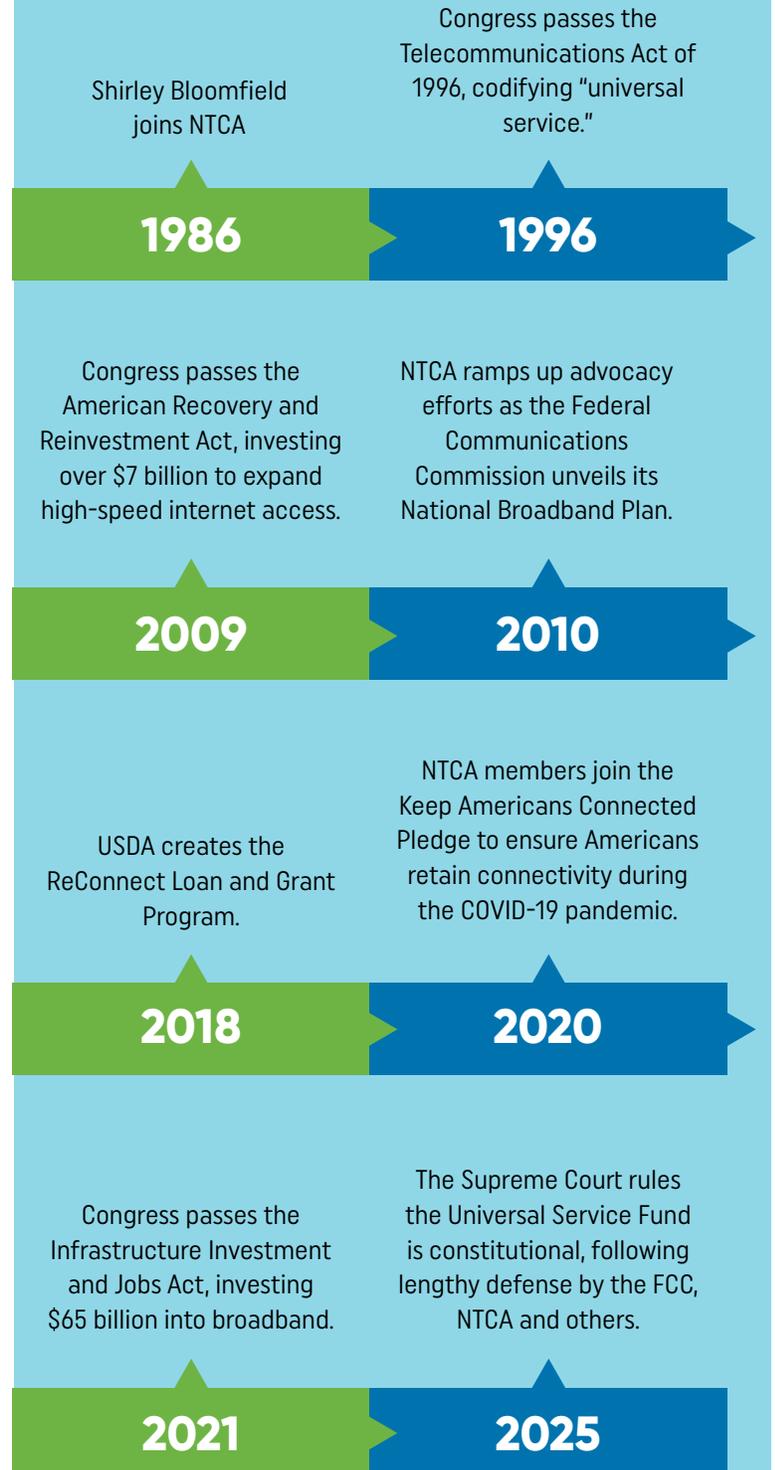
When I reflect on my many years with NTCA, I think about all of the people who shaped not only my journey, but the story of rural America itself. The CEOs who started out on construction crews or at finance desks, the family-owned companies now in their fourth generations, co-op boards that hold community meetings in gymnasiums, NTCA staff who pour every ounce of passion into serving members and the federal partners who understand what makes rural broadband so special.

As I step into my next chapter, I do so with deep gratitude, for the providers who serve with heart, communities that refuse to settle for “just good enough” and Americans who know that high-quality connectivity is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Thank you for reminding me every day why this work matters. [📧](#)

ADVANCING BROADBAND IN RURAL AMERICA

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association works to build a better broadband future for rural America, representing about 850 independent, family-owned and community-based telecommunications companies. The tenure of Shirley Bloomfield, named CEO in 2010, highlights a time of significant industry achievement.





Adobe Stock image by Primex Legacy

Keep Your Health on Track

Apps can be a helpful tool for managing medications

Story by MELANIE JONES

People who take just one pill a day may find it easy to remember. Adding in a few supplements makes the process a little more complicated. It's not hard to understand how individuals who take multiple prescriptions may need some help keeping up with it all.

It isn't simply a matter of remembering to take the pills or administer the injection. Some medications need to be taken at certain times of the day, while others require multiple, precisely timed doses. Certain drugs should be taken before eating, other treatments are taken with a meal, and still others instruct patients to take them on a full stomach.

Managing medications correctly is vital to staying healthy and living life to the fullest. Fortunately, there are digital tools that can help. Many of these apps also allow users to keep track of their vital signs and make notes about changes they notice in their health. With all this information at hand, doctor appointments can go much more smoothly.

Several free apps are available that not only remind users when to take their medicine but also offer information on how different drugs interact, track symptoms and even prepare a report for doctors. One warning—because they are free, some apps ask permission to share your data with drug companies so they can research drug compliance and effectiveness.

MY THERAPY

The My Therapy app has attracted attention in the last year, including being featured on ABC and in Wired magazine. The app allows users to set reminders, log when they've taken medicine or skipped it and track weight, blood pressure, blood sugar and other health indicators.

MEDISAFE

In addition to tracking prescriptions, schedules and health indicators and warning about potential drug interactions, Medisafe users can name a "Medifriend," someone who will be notified if a dose is

missed. Users can also keep tabs on their children's or other dependents' medication information separately from their own. When adding medications to their Medisafe profiles, users can specify the shape and color of the drug, helping them keep straight which pill or capsule is which.

DOSECAST

For people who have multiple medications to take at different times of the day, Dosecast may be the best choice. The app assigns a sound to each medication, so users receive prescription-specific reminder notifications. It also keeps track of when it's time to order refills. Like the other apps, Dosecast also allows users to track key health indicators.

All these apps are on Google Play or Apple's App Store. They also can interact with the health apps built into phones to provide a better overall picture of your health. [📱](#)

Why Reliability Matters Most for Rural Communities

Across Western and Upstate South Carolina, reliability is not just a nice thing to have. It is essential. From small towns and quiet neighborhoods to lakeside homes, campsites, family farms and local businesses, dependable connectivity plays a critical role in everyday life. When service is unreliable, work stops, learning is interrupted and connections are lost. That is why reliability matters most in the communities we are proud to serve.



CHRIS TOWNSON
Chief Executive Officer

Speed matters, and we continue to invest in delivering it. Fast internet opens doors for opportunity, education and economic growth. Through continued investment in our network, West Carolina is bringing Multi-Gig speeds to areas that were once underserved or overlooked. Rural communities deserve access to the same advanced technology as anywhere else, and we are committed to making sure our region is ready for what comes next.

But speed alone does not tell the full story. A connection that is fast but inconsistent does not meet the needs of a small-business owner on a town square, a student learning from home or a family balancing work and life online. Dependability is what people rely on every day. Knowing your service will work when you need it most builds trust, and that trust is earned through long-term commitment.

That commitment shows up not only in the strength of our network, but in the people behind it. Our employees live here. They spend weekends at local lakes, gather at Friday-night games and support the same schools, churches and community organizations as our members. When storms roll through or service is disrupted, they go above and beyond, often working long hours to restore connectivity as quickly and safely as possible. Their dedication to serving neighbors is at the heart of West Carolina.

We also believe that being a reliable provider means being a true community partner. Rural communities across Western and Upstate South Carolina are strong, resilient and deeply connected by shared values and pride of place. We reinvest locally through fiscal support, economic development initiatives and volunteerism because thriving communities require more than technology alone. They require organizations willing to stay engaged for the long term.

We may not always be the lowest-cost option, and we are transparent about that. What we promise instead is to be the best. The best in reliability. The best in service. The best in long-term commitment. Being a backbone of our communities means supporting growth, stability and opportunity today and for generations to come.

Reliable connectivity is vital to the continued strength of rural America. We are proud to play our part by building a network our communities can depend on and by standing alongside the people we serve every step of the way. 📞

WC west
carolina

CONNECTED

MARCH/APRIL 2026

VOL. 14, NO. 2

West Carolina Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by West Carolina Telephone, © 2026. It is distributed without charge to all members/owners of the cooperative.

WC west
carolina

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

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Westley "Wes" McAllister, President
North McCormick, Area 8

John Michael Thomas, Vice President
Iva, Area 2

Jane U. Stone, Secretary
Donalds, Area 3

Aimee Gray
Starr, Area 1

Lee W. Logan
Due West, Area 4

Eric McCall
Antreville/Lowndesville, Area 5

James Robert Hester
Calhoun Falls, Area 6

Darren Campbell Lewis
Abbeville, Area 7

Talmadge R. Bussey
South McCormick, Area 9

Produced for West Carolina by:

Pioneer
UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



Photo by Matt Ledger

The Gray House is a homestyle restaurant and bed-and-breakfast serving Southern comfort food classics prepared by Kathy Stone. See story Page 13.

WEST CAROLINA SUPPORTS DUE WEST ROBOTICS STEM CENTER

West Carolina deepened its long-standing support of Due West Robotics with a \$117,000 contribution toward the team's new STEM Robotics Center. The donation will help advance development of the facility, which is designed to expand hands-on science, technology, engineering and math learning opportunities for students across the region.

"We believe in investing where it matters most—in our students and the future of this community," West Carolina CEO Chris Townson says. "Supporting Due West Robotics is about opening doors and helping young people build skills that will serve them for a lifetime."

The project has generated strong momentum through community involvement, with volunteers contributing time to construction efforts and additional donors providing financial support. West Carolina is proud to stand alongside Due West Robotics and its community partners in bringing the STEM Robotics Center to life.



FROM LEFT: VP of CX & Sales Operations Shannon Sears and West Carolina CEO Chris Townson present a donation to Charles Angel, president of the Due West Robotics program, along with West Carolina board member Lee Logan, who represents Due West.

UPCOMING CLASSES

West Carolina strives to offer a variety of learning opportunities for our members. From everyday tech questions to understanding new streaming services, our educational sessions are designed to provide clear, helpful information that makes technology easier to use.

Here are some of the topics we currently offer:

- Digital Defense—Tips to stay safe online and avoid scams.
- Streaming 101—A beginner's guide to understanding streaming platforms.
- Introduction to Artificial Intelligence—What is AI and how is it shaping the world?
- WiFi X Service—Learn the ins and outs of our premier WiFi X router and app service.

If you'd like to be notified when classes are scheduled, email marketing@wctel.com to be added to our notification list.



West Carolina hosts a presentation about the best steps to recognize and avoid cyberthreats.

Internet FYIs

From technology basics to everyday how-tos, our educational blog series focuses on sharing information that's easy to understand and helpful. Here are a few recent highlights offering insights, tips and answers to common questions.

Check out our latest topics by visiting westcarolina.com/media-center

- Understanding WiFi Speed Tests
- Common Internet Issues
- A Fresh New Look for Your WiFi X App
- Not All Fiber is Created Equal



West Carolina VP of CX & Sales Operations Shannon Sears explains the many benefits of the WiFi X program.

Walk This Way

Enjoy the pedestrian-friendly side of Greenville

Story by LAURA MCGILL

Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with unique urban views and abundant natural hues, Greenville, South Carolina, offers plenty of ways to set your own pace. Enjoy a laced-up, fresh-air visit when you create your personal walking itinerary with choices for foodies, art lovers, sports fans, history buffs and nature enthusiasts.

DOWNTOWN DIRECTIONS

Perfect for a stroll, the wide and welcoming sidewalks of Main Street invite

visitors to explore the local scene. Start at NOMA Square and fuel up with a hearty breakfast at Roost Free Range Kitchen. Then it's time to start walking. Venture south to Falls Park on the Reedy to enjoy an urban waterfall. Get the best views from Liberty Bridge. Look up to appreciate the bridge's unique single-suspension construction. Be sure to check the schedule for the Greenville Drive, the High-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox. They play home games on Main Street's Fluor Field, which is modeled after Boston's famous

Fenway Park, complete with its own Big Green Monster left-field wall.

TRAIPSING THE TRAIL

With design and etiquette guidelines to safeguard children and those with mobility challenges, the Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail provides 28 miles of natural beauty for all fitness levels. Take a casual walk, a jog or a bike ride to discover area parks, attractions, shops and eateries. Didn't bring a bike? No problem. Greenville has several bike rental options.



Photo courtesy of VisitGreenvilleSC/Chelsey Ashford Photography

Wide shady pathways beckon cyclists to explore.



Photo courtesy of VisitGreenvilleSC/Kris Decker - Firewater Photography

Covering more than 28 miles, the Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail Network is a favorite for walking, running and cycling.

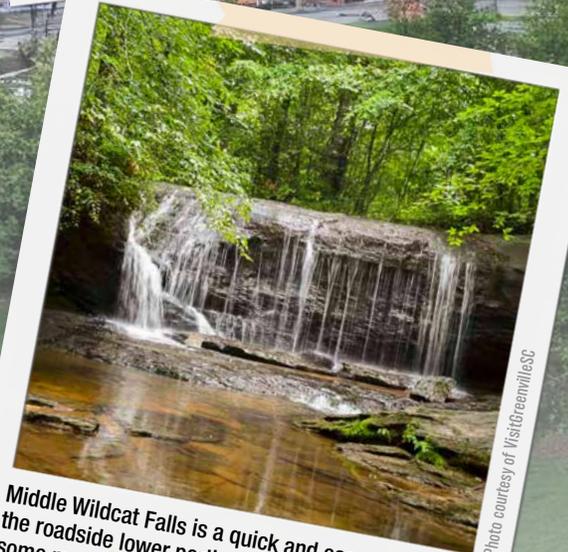


Photo courtesy of VisitGreenvilleSC

Middle Wildcat Falls is a quick and easy hike from the roadside lower portion. Continue upstream with some moderate hiking to view Upper Wildcat Falls.

Urban waterfall at Falls Park

Plan to spend several hours at Cleveland Park, home to the Greenville Zoo, Rock Quarry Falls and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Treat yourself to a scratch-made pastry and a craft coffee at Swamp Rabbit Cafe & Grocery, a popular spot along the trail.

FUN FESTIVALS

Celebrate scientists, chefs, pitmasters and painters. On April 4, iMAGINE Upstate STEAM Festival spotlights science, technology, engineering, arts and math. Remember to grab extra napkins to savor the dishes at Southern

Roots: A BBQ Reunion on April 11. The culinary experiences continue April 16-19 at Spring Fest with a series of foodie events. Catch your breath and get ready for Artisphere, May 8-10, featuring the works of visual artists representing many different mediums.

WONDERFUL WATERFALLS

Within an hour's drive from downtown Greenville, enjoy the beauty of six more waterfalls. Easy views can be found at Wildcat Wayside Falls, a roadside pull-off. The middle portion of those falls is an easy hike, while the upper section calls

for moderate hiking. For those who are feeling energetic, the 1,200-foot change of elevation at Rainbow Falls offers a strenuous hiking challenge.

Greenville-area waterfalls are part of the Blue Ridge Escarpment, a geological feature where the Blue Ridge Mountains dramatically drop 2,000 feet to the Piedmont below. In total, the area is home to more than 50 waterfalls.

Plan your Greenville, South Carolina, trip at visitgreenvillesc.com or on Facebook @visitgreenvillesc. 

Adobe Stock image by Olena

Building Lifelong Readers

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

Reading with her children is the memory Lena Miller considers her most cherished. It's one she wants other parents to share.

"Even as infants, I would read to them," says Lena, CEO of the Freshwater Coast Community Foundation (FCCF). "I really believe in early childhood reading."

"Barnyard Dance!" by Sandra Boynton was one of their favorites. Today, Lena's children are adults, and they remain avid readers, something she believes was sparked by their earliest encounters with books.

Exposing children to reading as early as possible was her motivation in creating Drop Everything and Read, a month-long celebration in April, encouraging families to press pause, grab a book and enjoy reading.

CELEBRATING STORIES

The nation already takes a day to Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R.) on April 12, the birthday of author Beverly Cleary, whose character Ramona Quimby famously enjoys D.E.A.R. time.

"Now, Freshwater Coast says one day is not enough to celebrate reading," Lena says. "We're going to have a monthlong celebration of reading."

FCCF is dedicated to improving the quality of life in Abbeville and

McCormick counties and the Starr-Iva area of Anderson County. Its focus is on arts and culture, entrepreneurship, education, health and well-being. Lena joined FCCF as CEO, the nonprofit's first paid position, in January 2025.

FCCF kicked off a new program, Cradle to Career, in July. "We're in the very beginning stages of planning what that is going to encompass, but essentially what we want to do is provide opportunities and initiatives from



Abbeville County Library Children's Coordinator Lois Rhodes reads a story about barnyard animals.

Photos courtesy of John Clayton



ABOVE: Children gather in the Abbeville County Library to hear a story.

RIGHT: Lena Miller, CEO of the Freshwater Coast Community Foundation.



Photo courtesy of the FCCCF.

basically birth, all the way through high school,” the Calhoun Falls native says.

The communitywide initiative will focus on key markers for children, from early childhood and kindergarten readiness through college, technical training and certifications.

D.E.A.R. Month is the first initiative under the Cradle to Career umbrella.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Lena has planned reading events with different community organizations, including local schools, emergency management services, and FFA and 4-H groups. Each event will have a theme. For example, the Reading Huddle will likely feature high school athletes reading to elementary school-aged students.

There will be related activities, snacks and giveaways. Each event will feature a backdrop for pictures. Readers will be

happy to know that libraries in Abbeville, Anderson, and McCormick counties are incorporating D.E.A.R. themes into their regularly scheduled programs.

One of the D.E.A.R. monthly events is called, ‘Pajammin’, encouraging attendees to wear their jammies and serving hot cocoa, which is originally inspired by a Ziggy Marley children’s book.

“We’re very excited, because this program will encourage residents of all ages to make reading a daily priority,” says Kristina Sutherly, the Abbeville County Library System’s health advocate and special initiatives manager. “It also celebrates the power of books and building knowledge, creativity and connection across our community.”

Kristina is an avid reader. Like Lena, childhood reading is a core memory for

her. She vividly remembers her mother gathering her and her siblings each night for bedtime stories. “Make Way for Ducklings,” by Robert McCloskey, was a favorite, and it’s still on the library’s shelf today.

The library system plans to hold its events at special story times for children throughout April, running on Wednesdays from 10:30-11:30 a.m. and again in the afternoon from 3:30-4:30. The library system will feature the themes Down on the Farm, Into the Wild, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Building Readers.

Kristina is planning a book walk to promote outdoor activity and to encourage participation from adults.

She hopes the library can serve as a community space for other organizations holding special D.E.A.R. initiatives.

GRAB EARLY READERS

“Consistency is so important,” Kristina says, as is finding books that appeal to children.

She encourages everyone to become patrons of their local libraries. Taking out books is free, and the breadth and scope of books helps parents expose their children to many different subjects.

“If you make it consistent and you make it a ritual, that’s going to stay with those children for the rest of their lives,” Kristina says.

Lena encourages families to start reading with children as early as possible and to spend time reading every day.

“Reading plays a vital role in every individual’s development,” Kristina says. “It strengthens critical thinking, enhances communication skills, fuels imagination and supports lifelong learning.”

For more information, visit FCCF’s website, freshwatercoastfoundation.org.

ALWAYS PREPARED

Scouting America readies kids to protect themselves online



Dozens of Scouts attend a Department of Homeland Security event about online safety.

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In his days as a Scout, Justin Williams was always drawn to outdoor skills. He excelled at building fires and tying knots. He struggled more with identifying plants, and, even today, he says he still hasn't picked up the knack for it. But as he got older, the leadership skills he was learning every step of the way stood out to him.

"Those are all important skills, but the thing we're really coaching is how to work within a team, be good citizens for the future and make good, ethical decisions," he says. "I thought I was just having fun. But I was really learning a lot of leadership skills that have benefited me throughout my life."

Today, as scout executive for Scouting America's Palmetto Council in South Carolina and den leader for a group of second graders, Justin is amazed at the technology available to young children. There's even technology that could have helped him identify plants as a Scout.

As a result, while Scouting America, formerly the Boy Scouts of America, still emphasizes the importance of getting outside and working with others, the organization is increasingly recognizing the need to meet kids where they are with technology.

Just last year, it introduced its first merit badges for cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Others, like the Know2Protect badge, are specifically aimed at teaching Scouts about the importance of personal safety online.

"While we know there are a lot of benefits to technology, we also know that, unfortunately, there are people online who do not have our kids' best interest at heart," Justin says. "We need to help our kids recognize who is an ally, who is trying to do them harm and what to do when they encounter those types of people."

THE NEW NORMAL

For Scouting America's Chief Safeguarding Officer Glen Pounder, that work starts with the adults around each Scout. His office in Irving, Texas, provides training for all Scout leaders around the threats kids may face online—from cyberbullying and body image issues to pornography and sexual exploitation.

"One of our key mottoes is be prepared for life. There's no life these days without the online space," he says. "Our new normal as an organization is we have to be comfortable always looking for what is next, particularly with technology. I think it's about landing the message in a way that is not creating fear. That this is just part of preparing for life."

Starting from kindergarten, Scouting America encourages parents of new Scouts to have their own conversations with their children about general safety practices. As kids earn their annual ranks, they must complete six core components, one of which is additional safety training. Starting in fourth grade, that training includes lessons on what information they should not give out in online settings.

In addition, Scouting America partnered with the Department of Homeland Security in 2024 to build an awareness campaign about the risks kids face online. Scouts and their families can join in-person training sessions and activities or online presentations to learn how to prevent and report online abuse, earning them an exclusive Know2Protect patch.

Glen's hope is that more widespread awareness and training within Scouting America troops can even help protect kids who are not part of the program.

"There's a ripple effect outside of scouting. Each Scout has

friends, siblings and other non-Scouts around them that they share things with,” he says. “So, if you’ve got a million trained Scouts out there it makes it much harder for anyone who’s thinking about abusing their position of trust to get away with it.”

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

While preventing these abuses from happening in the first place is the top priority, Glen emphasizes it is just as important for kids to feel comfortable speaking with an adult, whether it’s a parent or a Scout leader, if they do find themselves in one of these situations. If not, the outcome can be tragic.

Justin cites the example of an Eagle Scout in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in the last few years who took his own life. He had connected with someone online and shared compromising photos, only to have those photos used to exploit him.

“He didn’t think there was any other option, so he decided to take his own life,” Justin says. “When you think about the perfect kid, this is the kid that would come to mind. So, this isn’t something that only targets dysfunctional families. Criminals are getting smarter every day, and we just can’t take anything for granted.”

For Glen, that comes down to preparing kids for dangerous situations, trusting them to use the tools available to them and offering understanding if they find themselves in trouble.

“If we haven’t empowered these kids correctly, then the fear stays with them. We need to take that fear away,” he says. “Our focus is on prevention first. But then, if something happens, take a breath and then we’ll move forward. We know what to do, we’re going to get there. You’re not alone in this.” 📱

BADGE OF HONOR

Scouting America badges aren’t just for archery and pioneering anymore. Here are a few tech-savvy badges and patches today’s Scouts are collecting.

Cybersecurity Merit Badge

Introduces Scouts to various cyberthreats, including viruses, worms, social engineering and denial-of-service attacks. They learn to protect themselves with strong passwords, firewalls, antivirus software and encryption.



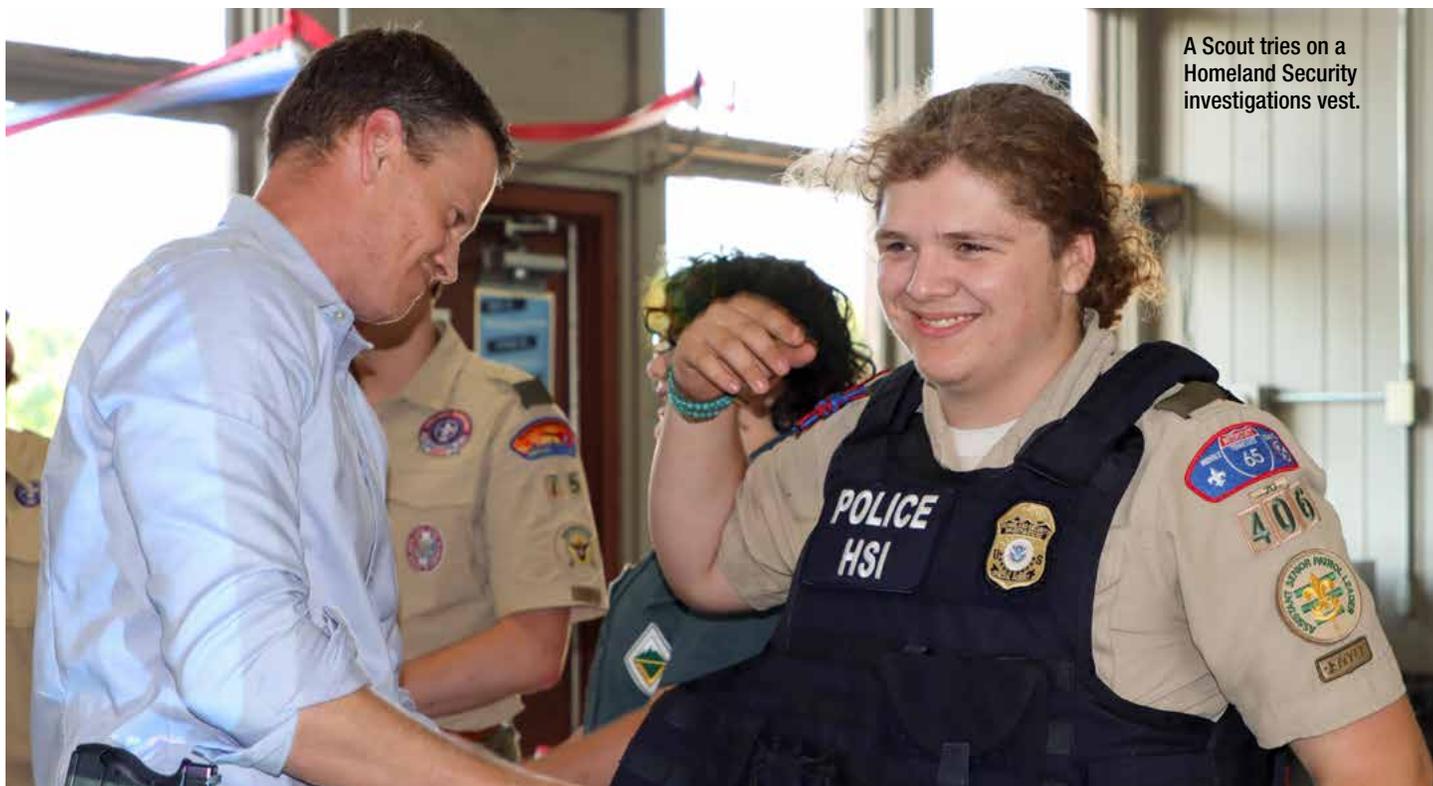
Artificial Intelligence Merit Badge

Helps Scouts explore what AI is, different types of AI and how to use it in everyday life. They are also challenged to discuss issues around data privacy, bias in AI systems and the ethics of this new technology.



Know2Protect Patch

Serves as a symbol of the Scout’s commitment to online safety and digital citizenship through participation in the Department of Homeland Security’s Project iGuardian training. The training provides knowledge and skills to protect themselves against online abuse.



A Scout tries on a Homeland Security investigations vest.

Photos courtesy of Scouting America



Niria Abadia Juarez, right, and her mother, Maria Juarez, showcase some of the most popular items they serve at Buenavista Latin Cafe during a community event.

Photo courtesy of Buenavista Latin Cafe

A Taste of Caribbean Culture

Authenticity is key for Buenavista Latin Cafe

Story by BRANDI DIXON

Niria Abadia Juarez and her family opened Buenavista Latin Cafe 10 years ago to bring the vibrance and joy of Cuban culture to Greenwood.

“Our mission is to bring Greenwood the fun ambiance of the Caribbean,” Niria says. “We want our food to transport people to something warm and inviting—no plane ticket needed.”

The family cafe began with five menu items and grew with community support. Now, Buenavista offers a diverse menu, from warm Cuban sandwiches with rice and beans to Cuban coffee, empanadas and sweet plantains. “Our Cuban sampler is a favorite, featuring a mix of our beloved street foods,” Niria says.

For something unique, she recommends the ropa vieja—seasoned, shredded beef with bell peppers.

“My favorite is our yuca fries,” Niria

says. “Boiled, fried and seasoned yuca. It’s comfort food, and I love it.”

SHARING HERITAGE

As a first-generation immigrant, Niria’s long-term vision is for her children to grow up immersed in their culture and inherit a legacy in the cafe. She has four children, ranging in age from 10 months to 16.

“Growing up, my grandmother ran a Mexican taco shop, and my mom had a bakery,” Niria says. “When I met my children’s Cuban father, the food and ambiance reminded me of my Mexican roots. Combining both became a wonderful legacy for our kids.”

Niria treats customers like family, welcoming them into the inviting atmosphere.

“Order a meal, read or work,” Niria

says, noting the restaurant offers free WiFi.

Her long-term vision is to bring in some interactive events for the community to further enhance the cultural experience including salsa lessons, musical acts and more.

“We’re currently in a rebranding phase of sorts and getting feedback from our locals to find out what they want most,” she says, adding she is also revisiting the menu in hopes of adding more crowd favorites. 📍

BUENAVISTA LATIN CAFE

322 Main St., Greenwood

864-223-5990

Find the restaurant on Facebook at Buenavista Latin Cafe.

Southern Cuisine With Flair

The Gray House blends culture and comfort food

Story by BRANDI DIXON

Growing up with a passion for farming, Kathy Stone wanted to bring something unique to her hometown of Starr. She bought what she describes as “an almost-abandoned house right across from where I lived,” and opened a restaurant she named The Gray House.

Now, nearly 40 years later, Kathy’s place is home away from home for her lunchtime regulars. It’s become the local event hub for weddings, rehearsal dinners, corporate parties, bridal showers and more.

“People ask all the time about wedding packages, but I customize each event to suit the needs of the client and their families,” Kathy says. She can accommodate any dietary needs and restrictions her guests may have. “I get to know them and just take it from there,” she says

Forging those relationships is what Kathy cherishes most about her work. Founding The Gray House came after a great loss in her life, and she discovered it filled an aching void, allowing her to be wrapped up in the community she loves so dearly. “It all just intertwines with each other,” she shares. “I’ve even had brides come back and do their children’s weddings here. It’s really special.”

BRINGING MORE TO THE TABLE

The menu at The Gray House is unique and varied, featuring traditional favorites like beef pot roast and Kathy’s signature hand-cut steaks, grilled to perfection. For those looking to try something created by Kathy’s love of travel, she offers dishes like vegetable burgoo soup, inspired by her travels in Europe, or her Amish-baked chicken. “I got that recipe from my trip to the Amish country to purchase a carriage for my weddings,” Kathy says.

When it comes to her favorite dish, Kathy says it has to be steak. As president of the South Carolina Cattlewomen’s Association for more than a decade,

Kathy is a seasoned beef producer and takes great care and effort selecting her cuts for customers.

Kathy uses social media to reach over 8,000 followers, sharing her latest lunch creations, special event menus and a great sense of appreciation for her customers. She posts a weekly list of the daily entrees that she will create, which includes many of her most popular dishes. 🗨️

THE GRAY HOUSE

111 Stone’s Throw Ave., Starr
thegrayhousesc.com

The Gray house is also a bed-and-breakfast, offering cozy suites.

864-352-6778

Follow The Gray House on Facebook.



ABOVE: Baked chicken and a few homemade sides make for a hearty lunch at The Gray House.

INSET: Business has bloomed for Kathy Stone, much like the garden she has nurtured around her restaurant.

Treat Yourself

WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK

Rich desserts shouldn't cost a fortune

For many Americans, going to the grocery store can be stressful since prices don't seem to be coming down. But we still want to have our cake and eat it too. So, it's nice—and entirely possible—to treat ourselves to something sweet at the end of the meal without breaking the bank.

There are some tricks to keep in mind to help you stay on budget while still satisfying your sweet tooth. For example, if a recipe calls for pecans, walnuts, a less expensive alternative, can be substituted. And use store brands whenever possible—a cost-saving practice that always saves pennies.



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

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

CHOCOLATE BANANA BARS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1/2 cup butter | 1 teaspoon baking powder |
| 1 cup sugar | 1 teaspoon baking soda |
| 1 egg | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla | 1/4 cup baking cocoa powder |
| 1 1/2 cups mashed banana | 1 cup chocolate chips |
| 1 1/2 cups flour | |

Preheat oven to 350 F.

Mix the butter, sugar, egg, vanilla and banana. Then add the flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Put half of the mixture into a separate bowl and add the cocoa powder.

Grease the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch pan and pour in the cocoa mixture. The mixture will be thick, just try and spread a thin layer across the bottom. It will rise and make a beautiful, thin bar. Use a smaller pan if you want a thicker bar, however, it will need to bake longer to get the middle done.

Spread the rest of the batter on top of the cocoa mixture. Sprinkle the top with as many or as few chocolate chips as you like.

Bake for about 30 minutes or until the top is browned and a toothpick comes out clean.



BLUEBERRY COFFEECAKE

- 2 cups white sugar
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup plus 10 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup pecans
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon powdered sugar for dusting

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease and flour a 9-inch Bundt pan.

Beat sugar and butter together in a large bowl with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in sour cream and vanilla extract. In another bowl, combine flour, baking powder and salt. Stir into butter mixture until just blended. Fold in blueberries.

Spoon half of the batter into the prepared pan. Combine brown sugar, pecans and cinnamon in a small bowl. Sprinkle half of the mixture over the batter in the pan.

Spoon remaining batter on top, then sprinkle on remaining pecan mixture. Use a knife or thin spatula to swirl the mixture into the cake.

Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes. Let cake cool in the pan for 15 minutes before inverting. Invert carefully onto a serving plate. Dust with powdered sugar just before serving.



TROPICAL TWISTER

- 2 cups frozen pineapple chunks
- 4 ounces pineapple juice
- 2 scoops vanilla ice cream

Combine all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. If it's too thick, add a bit more pineapple juice. Scoop into bowls and, if desired, garnish with additional chopped pineapple and a dollop of whipped cream. Serve immediately. Makes 3 servings.

STRAWBERRIES AND CREAM PIE

- 1 prepared 9-inch pie shell, graham cracker or pastry crust, baked and cooled
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- 1 cup whipped topping, thawed
- 4 cups fresh strawberries, washed, hulled and halved
- 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 tablespoon shortening

Bake crust at 350 F for 15 minutes or until light golden brown. Cool completely.

In a large bowl, beat the softened cream cheese until it is fluffy. Gradually add the sugar and almond extract, beating until fully combined. Gently fold the whipped topping into the cream cheese mixture until smooth.

Spread the cream cheese mixture evenly into the cooled pie crust. Arrange the strawberry halves, cut side down or pointed side up, over the filling.

In a small, microwave-safe bowl, combine the chocolate chips and shortening. Microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring in between, until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Drizzle the melted chocolate over the top of the strawberries and cream filling.

Refrigerate the pie for at least 1-2 hours or until it is set and chilled before serving.

WC west carolina

Let's be best friends

*Here for you,
through thick and thin*

**My internet provider thinks I'm cool.
Does yours?**



MEET DEE MORTON

Friend and Account Service Representative for 9 years

We've got your back

From the little things like family movie night, to the big things like getting your online degree, you need a connection you can count on. And we can deliver, with super-reliable speeds and a local team that's here for you 24/7.

AFTER ALL—THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR!



Besties?

- OF COURSE
- ABSOLUTELY

WESTCAROLINA.COM/CONNECT