

WC west
carolina

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2026

CONNECTED



GREEN
Curtains
COMMUNITY THEATRE

LEAF-PEEPING
TRIPS

NEWBERRY'S
OKTOBERFEST

By Mike Romano, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

America at 250: Building Connections That Last

Every community has a story to tell, and at NTCA, we're honored to help our members tell theirs.

As we celebrate America's 250th anniversary, it's worth remembering that much of our nation's story started in rural America, and the heartbeat of our great country can often be heard most loudly in the spaces between the biggest cities. You can see this spirit clearly in small towns and rural communities where generations of Americans have come together to build the infrastructure, roads, bridges, and yes, communications networks, that provide a reliable foundation for civic engagement, commerce and connection.

For generations, local providers stepped forward to make sure rural America stayed connected with the rest of the country and the world when others wouldn't. They invested in the infrastructure their communities needed to grow and thrive. As technology evolved, so did those networks. Today, our nation's small, community-based broadband providers are delivering robust and reliable high-speed broadband that powers education, healthcare, agriculture, public safety, small businesses and countless opportunities.

Throughout that journey, NTCA has been proud to advocate for the policies that make those investments possible—and help them provide connections that last for generations.

As we think about what will help America thrive from coast to coast, far beyond the celebration of its 250th birthday, those will matter even more. Together, we'll continue building connections that will take us into the next 250 years. [🔗](#)



NATIONAL CYBER SECURITY AWARENESS MONTH OCTOBER

Protect the Keys, Not the House

When it comes to cybersecurity, do you become overwhelmed by the idea of protecting dozens of accounts? Online banking, shopping sites, streaming services, social media and more. It can seem daunting.

Try thinking about protecting the keys, not the whole house.

Just a handful of accounts unlocks nearly everything else in your digital life. If criminals gain access to one of these “master keys,” they may be able to reset passwords, impersonate you or access sensitive information.

The most important key is your email account. It's where password reset links are sent, making it the gateway to many of your other accounts. Your mobile phone number is another key, since it's often used to verify your identity. If you use a password manager, it deserves extra protection because it holds the credentials to many of your accounts. Finally, your financial accounts should always have the strongest safeguards available.

Start by creating a strong, unique password for each of these accounts and turning on multifactor authentication whenever it's offered. Then make sure your phone and computer stay updated with the latest security patches.

You don't have to secure every digital door at once. Protect the few keys that unlock everything else, and you've taken one of the biggest steps toward keeping your online life secure. [🔗](#)



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Sell More, Stress Less

Online alternatives to the Saturday yard sale

Story by LAURA MCGILL

Who looks forward to spending days planning a yard sale only to get up early on a Saturday morning to deal with the guy who arrives early to nose around the garage while you get everything set up or the lady determined to haggle over every price? All that hassle, and you'll still likely wind up with less money in your pocket than you hoped.

Step away from those headaches with convenient online options. You'll be in control, and you can spend your Saturday mornings sleeping in.

WHAT TO SELL

If you are trying to sell collectibles such as vintage records, trading cards and memorabilia, eBay and Etsy are good choices. To sell your grandmother's china, crystal and silverware, start with Replacements Ltd., where you can search by pattern. There are even sites specializing in items like coins and currency or specific brands.

To sell designer clothes and accessories, explore options like The RealReal, Poshmark and ThredUp. Seller beware, though, as these sites often charge high commission rates and have restrictions on which brands they will buy. For the option of shipping or local pickup, look to Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist or local buy/sell groups.

DETAILS MATTER

Think about all the possible questions someone could ask about

your item. Take photos from multiple angles using good lighting. Consider taking a video as well, especially if it helps show the item is in working order. Write a detailed description including all relevant information such as dimensions, weight, brand, color, size and condition.

State the terms in the listing, such as price, payment methods accepted and whether it will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. When considering what price to ask, research comparable items. Know what the item costs to buy new, and leave room for negotiation.

SELL SAFELY

Selling online isn't completely free of hassles. Be prepared for lowball offers and messages from people who never respond to your reply. Don't be surprised if someone says they want the item but never shows up or cancels at the last minute.

Be aware of fake payment emails or overpayment scams. Ignore suspicious messages. Choose a safe, public location to meet. Your town may even have designated areas such as police station parking lots.

If the buyer is coming to your house, be cautious. Choose a safe time of day. Do not allow someone into your home. Instead, have the item sitting on your front porch or in the driveway. If you are alone, tell a neighbor what you are doing, and ask them to keep an eye on you when the buyer is there. 📞

When Neighbors Build Together

In 1952, if you lived across much of Abbeville or McCormick counties, or around Starr or Iva, you couldn't count on having a telephone. The large telephone companies built where the numbers made sense. Rural communities didn't.



CHRIS TOWNSON
Chief Executive Officer

So, our neighbors did something remarkable. They stopped waiting. They organized West Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative, elected a board from among themselves and began building a network one mile at a time, because they believed their neighbors and communities mattered.

October is National Cooperative Month, the perfect time to remember those who made that decision. That first board of directors included John McAllister and other local leaders willing to invest their time, their reputations and their vision so their neighbors could be connected. Over the decades, families like the Hesters, McGills and many others carried that responsibility forward. Because of their leadership, generations have enjoyed the benefits of a cooperative built by neighbors, for neighbors.

That spirit has always felt familiar to me.

I grew up in rural North Alabama, where both our electricity and telephone came from cooperatives, and I started my career climbing poles and installing and repairing telephone lines for one. Those experiences taught me that a cooperative isn't just another business model. It's neighbors solving problems together.

Few have lived out that calling more fully than Lee Logan. Since joining our board in 1984, Mr. Logan served our members for more than 40 years before retiring this summer. Through every season of change, from party lines to fiber optics and Gigabit internet, he never lost sight of what mattered most—our members and our employees. He leaves behind a stronger cooperative because of his steady leadership. On behalf of all of us, Mr. Logan, thank you for your faithful service.

That legacy continues today. At this year's Annual Meeting, our members reelected Aimee Gray (Area 1, Starr), Robert Hester (Area 6, Calhoun Falls) and Tag Bussey (Area 9, South McCormick). They serve alongside Board President Wes McAllister, Vice President Mike Thomas, Secretary Jane Stone and directors Eric McCall and Darren Lewis, carrying forward a tradition of local leadership that began more than 70 years ago.

That's the cooperative difference. Our board doesn't answer to distant investors or Wall Street shareholders. Instead, it answers to the members it serves, because in a cooperative, the members are the owners.

Technology will keep changing. But one thing won't—we'll keep connecting people to what they love. And we'll do it simply because people matter. That conviction has guided this cooperative since our neighbors first came together in 1952, and it's how we'll keep working to set the standard for what a cooperative can be, one connection at a time.

Happy National Cooperative Month, West Carolina.

Thank you for allowing us to serve you. 📞

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

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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



The Green Curtains Community Theatre troupe found a creative outlet to perform in Savannah Lakes Village. See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of Green Curtains Community Theatre



WITCH PHOTO WILL WIN?

West Carolina is ready for another boo-tiful Halloween!

We enjoy seeing all of the creative costumes each year. Enter our photo contest, if you dare.

The entry with the most Facebook likes will win a prize. Local residents can enter images of their kids, ages 12 and under.

For a complete list of rules and details on how to enter, visit westcarolina.com/halloween.



This Calhoun Falls postal worker suited up to make deliveries and had the most popular photo in our 2025 contest.



An adorable lobster in a Low Country boil took second place last year.



In third place, this haunting version of Pennywise the clown from Stephen King's "It."

WIFI X GUEST NETWORK

The season for fall football watch parties has arrived, and it won't be long before your guests are asking for the WiFi password.

With West Carolina's WiFi X service, sharing internet access with guests is simple, secure and completely in your control. Through the WiFi X app, you can create a separate guest network with its own custom name and password, making it easy for visitors to connect without accessing the home's main network.

Whether you're hosting family for the weekend or friends for an evening cookout, WiFi X helps keep everyone connected while adding an extra layer of security to your main network.

It's one more way West Carolina is helping you enjoy smarter, safer and more convenient connectivity. To learn more about the capabilities of WiFi X, visit westcarolina.com/wifi-x.

COME LEARN WITH US

Technology should work for you, not the other way around. That's why we're keeping our free classes going strong this season—real people, plain talk, no question too small.

Come sit in on a session and get comfortable with the things you use every day. We'll walk through streaming so you can finally cut the cord without the headache, digital security to keep the bad guys out of your home, and how to get the most out of your home WiFi network with your WiFi X app. And that's just the start.

Got a topic you wish we'd cover? We're all ears. Email us at Marketing@wctel.com with your request.

See the full class lineup and sign up at www.westcarolina.com/classes. We'll save you a seat.

Autumn Advent

Hit the road for fabulous fall foliage

Maple, aspen, birch, oak, hickory, dogwood and gum trees are known for vivid fall colors, ranging from bright reds and oranges to golden yellows and browns. Those vibrant colors are always present. They just need a little seasonal help getting to the surface.

As temperatures drop and sunny days begin to shorten, trees stop producing chlorophyll, the substance that makes leaves

green. As it fades, the brilliant red, orange and yellow pigments obscured by the green begin to shine through.

Cool, crisp days and frost-free nights produce the sharpest fall colors. Drought conditions in early fall can trigger a premature chlorophyll shutdown, causing leaves to wither and fall without reaching their full color potential. And too much rain or an early frost can dull the leaves' colors. 🍂

Know Your Colors

YELLOW—Aspen, beech, birch, cottonwood, elm, ginkgo, hickory, sugar maple, tulip poplar, sassafras, sycamore

ORANGE—Bigtooth maple, Rocky Mountain maple, sugar maple, sweetgum

RED—Black gum, cypress, dogwood, oak, red maple, sourwood, sumac



Where to Look

Our expansive and ecologically diverse region offers ample leaf-peeping options beginning around mid-September and peaking in mid-October. Whether you're hiking forested ridgelines, driving scenic byways, floating a river or camping beneath golden canopies, unforgettable fall colors await you.

Chances are you can find plenty of color right in your own backyard. For fall excursions farther afield, consider these options:

- **Daniel Boone National Forest, Kentucky:** The Red River Gorge and Natural Bridge State Resort Park feature brilliant foliage from maple, beech and sycamore trees with sandstone arches and cliffs adding to the drama.
- **Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, North Carolina:** The Blue Ridge Parkway, Craggy Gardens and Linville Gorge showcase fiery displays of sugar maples, red maples and hickories, framed by sweeping mountain views.
- **Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, Georgia:** Leaf peepers flock to Brasstown Bald, Tallulah Gorge and Anna Ruby Falls to see the golden hickories, scarlet oaks and tulip poplars.

ures Await

Don't Leaf Home Without a Plan

No matter the season's conditions, finding fall colors by car, boat or on foot is an autumn joy. Planning a leaf-peeping excursion has never been easier.

Founded in 1875, American Forests is the nation's oldest non-profit conservation organization. Its fall foliage map offers a clear look at where leaves are peaking throughout the United States with tips and suggestions. Visit americanforests.org/fall-foliage-map.

With the tried-and-true The Old Farmer's Almanac, both the yellow-bound classic booklet and online version, arboreal enthusiasts can easily find the best spots near and far. The website features an animated map showing the progression and historical presence of fall colors. The print version includes tables of expected peak dates, regional weather trends and travel features. Visit almanac.com.

Get tips from the folks at Find Fall, "the best place for fall foliage information, destinations, adventures and activities for an autumn you'll never forget." Visit findfall.com.



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More Than a Show

Green Curtains Community Theatre shares performances

Story by SARA DIAMOND PATTERSON

People moving to Savannah Lakes Village, along the shores of McCormick's 71,000-acre Lake Thurmond, know they're joining a community with plenty to offer. They have access to three lakefront championship golf courses, two pools, 10 pickleball courts, hundreds of miles of nature trails and 2,500 homes prewired for West Carolina's fiber internet.

It's what they'll find periodically inside the recreation center that might surprise

them. There they'll discover members of the Green Curtains Community Theatre group rehearsing, building sets and bringing a variety of productions to life.

"It's a great organization doing some wonderful work, and I think the production quality of what we're doing is strong," group chairman Ted Varner says. "We're doing really good work, and it has a strong following."

The group's "good work" isn't limited to its strong stage performances. From

the beginning, the idea was not to just entertain but to provide a way to teach others the different aspects of theater and promote the arts.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

After a previous Savannah Lakes Village theater group disbanded, some of its former members and a few new prospective thespians got together in 2016 to form a troupe of players who wanted to learn more about theater and teach others in the process.



Photos courtesy of Green Curtains Community Theatre

The Green Curtains Community Theatre presentation of "Songs of America" includes 19 songs with a patriotic set and dramatic lighting.

When settling on a name, they chose one in line with groups already active in the greater McCormick area.

"In the community, there are Green Tee Golfers, who aren't really golfers yet but are learning the game. And we have the Green Netters, who are the same but with tennis," says founding member David McKloskey. "Since we were learning to find our way in the theater, we chose the name Green Curtains."

Starting from the ground up, the group found creative ways to convert a room in the SLV rec center into a theater. Using three 4-by-8-foot plywood sheets to form an 8-foot-tall triangle, set designers painted each side differently and spun around the pieces to make different backgrounds.

"We used those in the very early years quite a few times before we fully got a set-construction crew where the guys and gals can now build and paint just about anything," David says.

The troupe members have come so far, in fact, they were able to share their design expertise with another theater group, furthering the mission to promote the arts.

"Our crew came up with such a complex stage design for our most recent production, 'Nana's Naughty Knickers,' that we loaned the entire set to the community theater group in Columbia," Ted says.

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

By its third production, the group was able to begin donating funds to a cancer foundation and other community charities, David says. In April 2023, the Green Curtains Community Theatre joined the McCormick Arts Council at the Keturah, also known as the MACK, since their missions of promoting the arts align. Now, the theater troupe donates a portion of its proceeds to the school system.

"It's rewarding enough to participate in a show and produce art, but then when you can see our efforts are rolling into supporting kids, it really makes it worthwhile," Ted says.

Above all, the group brings a little humor and an escape in a time when both are needed, Ted says. The recent production of "Songs of America," a patriotic musical based on the book of the same

name by historian Jon Meacham and songwriter Tim McGraw, took its audience on an emotional journey.

"When I came off stage, I was amazed by how many people were weeping," he says. "I think people were craving a departure and something different. The unity message was very timely."

That sense of unity bonds Green Curtains and makes it a home for anyone interested in the theater, not just residents of Savannah Lakes, group member Scott Crane says.

"We have people from all over," he says. "It's interesting, and one of the beautiful things about the theater is that we're very inclusive and open and accepting and we tend to create family."

Want to join the Green Curtains family? The best way to reach Ted is by email at greencurtains.savannahlakes@gmail.com. 



The cast and crew, including Green Curtains Chairman Ted Varner, left, wait backstage for the start of another show.

Scan to purchase tickets and find more information about "Nunsense."

WHERE THE HABITS ARE HILARIOUS

Holy humor hits the stage as the Green Curtains players present "Nunsense," Oct. 16-18.

The musical, first produced in 1985, focuses on a fundraising talent show by a group of nuns at a convent. The lively tunes, clever wordplay and fun storyline are sure to resonate with audiences.

"We have a lot of engagement with the audience, breaking the fourth wall with cast members coming out and telling jokes and things before it begins," director Scott Crane says. "I think it will be a lot of fun."

Scott has a doctorate in spirituality but says his background had nothing to do with the production choice. "This particular community likes things light, and several people wanted to do this one. I've not directed a musical before, but I'm always game to jump in and try things."

To buy tickets, visit savannahlakes.com/greencurtains or scan the QR code.



Join the Circle

Bluegrass music grows far beyond its Appalachian roots

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

For many bluegrass musicians, the genre is steeped in tradition. Born with an instrument in their hand, they come of age listening to Bill Monroe, the Osborne Brothers and Jim and Jesse, learning the patterns of old-time folk music before eventually adding their own voices to the mix.

The members of The Last Revel took a different path. Hailing from Minnesota and Wisconsin, far north of bluegrass music's Appalachian roots, banjo player Ryan Acker, fiddler Vinnie Donatelle, guitarist Lee Henke and bass player Ryan Krauss came to the genre a bit later in life.

"My first introduction to bluegrass was probably in college," Ryan Acker says. "I was really drawn to it as the energetic side of the folk singer-songwriter music that I was already pretty fond of. It just seemed like a really great outlet for reckless-abandon youth."

Formed in Minneapolis in 2011, the band started out playing

music based more in blues-rock style, but quickly found the people they met in that space were not as welcoming as they hoped. Around that time, Lee remembers seeing bluegrass-influenced bands like Trampled by Turtles and Pert Near Sandstone and thinking they looked like they were having a pretty good time.

"That was the moment when we were like, 'Instead of trying to turn an acoustic song into something else, what if we just kept it acoustic?'" he says. "If it weren't for all those bands in Minnesota kind of showing us the ropes, I don't know if I would have ever gotten this steeped in it. But the genre itself has just been so heartwarming and embracing."

TIME TO SHOW OUT

As someone who grew up in Kentucky's bluegrass tradition, Ken White finds the community to be as defining a feature as the music itself. A multi-instrumentalist who has played in



Alabama-based band Mountain Grass Unit performs at the World of Bluegrass.



Sierra Hull joins The Wood Brothers, from left, Chris Wood, Oliver Wood and Jano Rix, on the Bluegrass Live! stage.

several bands, Ken now serves as the executive director for the International Bluegrass Music Association. This October, he'll be welcoming musicians from across the globe to the World of Bluegrass in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

"The thing I love about bluegrass is that you don't have to know anybody in the jam circle to walk up and start making music," he says. "From beginners all the way up to the best professionals, people are welcoming. And that's something that transcends language."

The same is true for the music itself. Ken compares being part of a traditional bluegrass band to a jazz ensemble, where each musician has mastery of his or her instrument. They all make an essential contribution to the group's sound but also have moments to shine individually.

"In a lot of old-time folk traditions, the instrumentalist will just play the melody or an accompaniment. They don't really show out," he says. "Part of what makes bluegrass unique is the emphasis on virtuosity. I think that resonates with a lot of people around the globe and is a big part of why bluegrass takes root in other cultures."

Here in the United States, musicians in different parts of the country have found ways to take that sound and make it their own. Texas bluegrass often incorporates elements of Western swing and contest fiddling that are popular in folk music throughout the Lone Star State. For the members of The Last Revel, the earnestness that comes through in their songwriting follows the tradition of other Midwestern bluegrass musicians.

"It's all very songwriter based. That's kind of the main focus

and the bluegrass aspect around it is almost secondary," Ryan Acker says. "The music aspect is more like the vehicle for the song. And I think that is different from other subgenres around the country."

BRIDGING THE GAP

That distinction has, at times, left bands like The Last Revel on the fringes of the traditional bluegrass scene. Early in the band's run, as the members incorporated their blues and indie rock influences alongside traditional bluegrass instrumentation, figuring out where they fit into the genre could be a source of frustration.

"It used to be something we were worried about, and now we kind of pride ourselves on being a little different," Lee says.

"I have so much respect for traditional bluegrass. But I also like that we can lean into our own thing. There are so many variations on bluegrass and roots music. Maybe we can show a different side of it."

As the band tours in support of its 2025 album "Gone for Good," those moments have become some of Ryan's favorites. Whether it's working the merch booth or meeting people at shows, fans regularly tell him they had never listened to bluegrass music until they discovered The Last Revel.

"We're like the gateway to this whole other genre of music that people maybe didn't think they would like," he says. "And I think that's great. With Spotify and other streaming services, it's easy for genres to blend together. If we can be a tiny little bridge for somebody's musical tastes, I really get a kick out of that." 🗨️



The members of The Last Revel came to bluegrass in a nontraditional way and enjoy sharing the genre with new audiences.

Raise a Stein!

Oktoberfest celebration pours on the fun



Story by MELANIE JONES

Oktoberfest conjures up images of beer, accordions and lederhosen. Oktoberfest in Newberry has the beer and a little something for everyone else, including kids.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Newberry's Oktoberfest celebration, and it always draws crowds. Averaging about 30,000 attendees, the festival nearly triples the town's population each year.

"It's grown a lot, which is super great for our small town," Christy Blaney, Newberry events and marketing manager, says. "We can't believe that we host this many people."

To accommodate the crowds and participants, the city is expanding the festival footprint to cover downtown.

There will be live bands, and three or four beer gardens, or biergartens, to fit the German theme, will be set up around downtown.

FAMILY FUN

But Oktoberfest in Newberry isn't just about the beer. There will be a kids' area, also known as Kindertown Family Zone. Artisan Alley is a huge draw, Christy says, with more than 40 artisan venues lining Main Street, and there will be food ranging from authentic German fare to local sweets and treats.

There's also a contest for the best German attire.

One thing changing this year is the result of the opening of the Newberry Arts Center.

"The new arts center on one end of Main Street is going to be a big anchor and a big destination," Christy says. "We're turning the arts center into the kids zone this year, which is really exciting."

Christy says the goal is to have a lot of children's entertainment on the stage at the arts center. "There will be a petting

area/adoption area that we created with a partner organization that comes with dogs and cats that people can adopt on-site, so that's pretty exciting," she says.

BEYOND THE FESTIVAL

The brick-and-mortar businesses also get in on the act. "All of our downtown merchants are open, and they usually offer some very exciting things, too," Christy says.

Not everyone who goes to Oktoberfest is local. "We have people traveling from all over the surrounding areas. We get people from all over South Carolina that travel in for this," Christy says. "That's the goal. We really want people outside our community to know that this is a place that they can drive to and make a day or a weekend out of it."

An Oktoberfest celebration makes sense in Newberry, where 17% of the Newberry County population is of German heritage. There are even occasional visits from delegates of Newberry's German sister city, Hamm.

Oktoberfest will kick off from 4-8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 2, in Memorial Park with live

music, food and beverages before the big day. The main event is from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 3. Admission is free both days.

For information on music acts and other entertainment, please scan the QR code. 

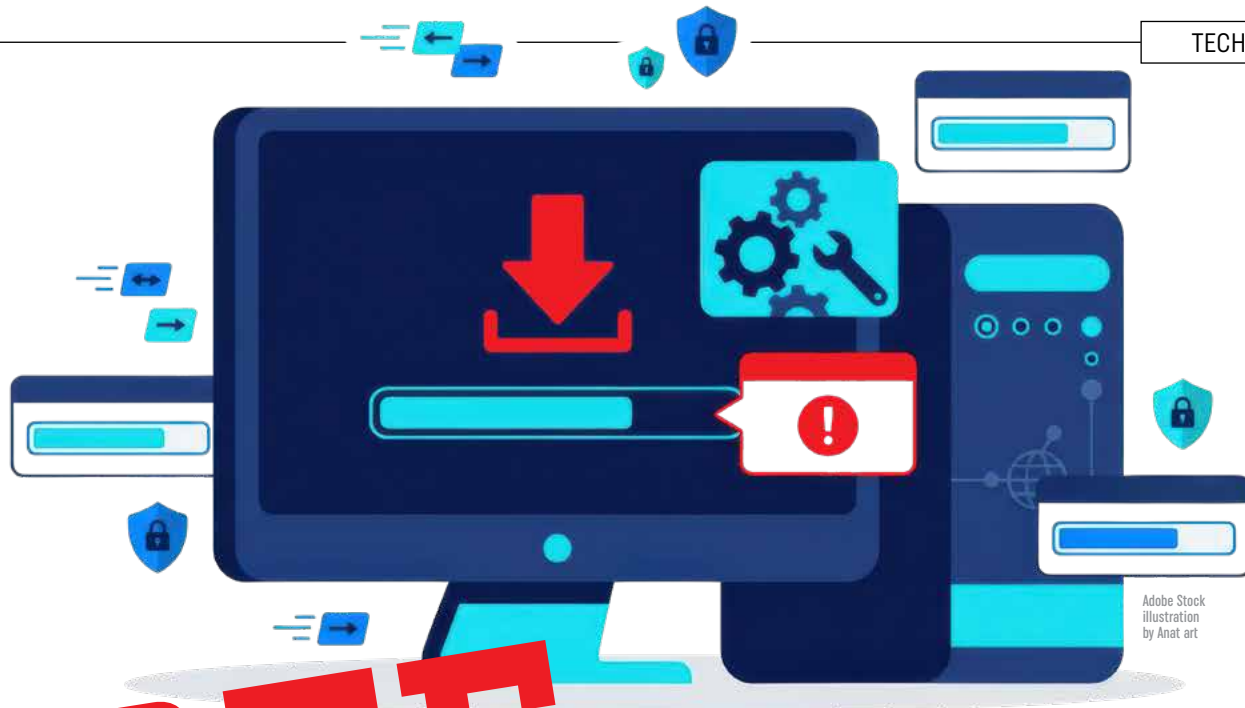


Oktoberfest organizers hold a best-dressed competition each year, fitting the German theme.



The architecture downtown makes it the perfect setting for the event.

Photos courtesy of Newberry Events Department



Adobe Stock
Illustration
by Anat art

FREE to Download

The hidden cost of free apps

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Whether it's a game, social media platform, weather app or photo editor, most of us use free apps every day.

While these downloads may cost nothing up front, many of them generate revenue in ways that may not be obvious. Understanding how these apps generate money from users can help you make more informed decisions about the apps you use and the information you share.

DATA COLLECTION AND TRACKING

Many free apps collect information about users, including location data, browsing habits, app usage and other personal details. This information can be used to build advertising profiles or shared with third-party marketing and analytics companies to deliver targeted ads. While this practice is often disclosed in lengthy privacy policies, many users never realize just how much information they provide.

IN-APP PURCHASES

Many apps offer free basic features but charge for additional content or services. Mobile games may sell in-game currency, special characters or cosmetic upgrades. Productivity apps may lock premium tools behind paid upgrades. These small purchases can add up quickly and often generate far more revenue than a one-time purchase.

LOOT BOXES AND RANDOMIZED REWARDS

Some games sell virtual items known as loot boxes, which contain randomized rewards. This means players spend real money without knowing exactly what they will receive. Because the outcome is based on chance, critics often compare loot boxes to gambling. While not every game includes them, they have become a major source of revenue in the mobile gaming industry.

IN-APP ADVERTISING

One of the most common ways free apps make money is through advertisements. Banner ads, video ads and sponsored content generate revenue each time users view or interact with them. The more time people spend in an app, the more opportunities there are to display ads and earn income.

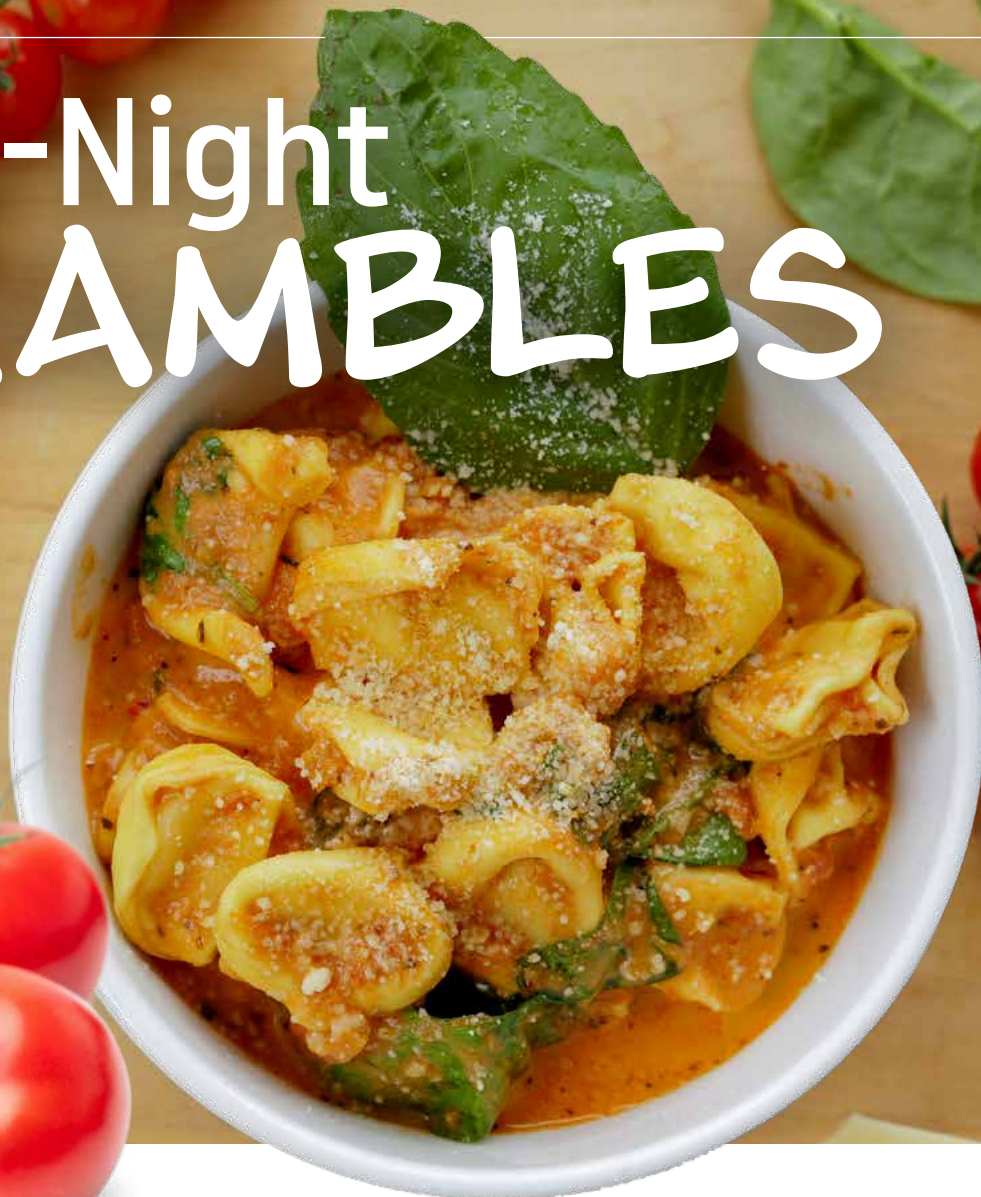
SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

A growing number of apps offer monthly or annual subscriptions. Streaming services, fitness apps and cloud storage platforms often use this model. While subscriptions may start with a free trial, users are charged regularly once the trial period ends unless they cancel.

The next time you download a “free” app, remember that someone is paying the bill. By understanding how apps generate revenue, you can make smarter choices about your privacy, spending habits and the digital services you use every day. 📱

School-Night SCRAMBLES

Quick and satisfying recipes for family dinner time



For many families, September means fresh school supplies, the morning rush to get everyone to class on time and, of course, the dreaded question—what’s for dinner?

Between carving out time to cook and navigating pantry options, finding the right answer isn’t always easy. These quick and easy recipes will keep everyone at the table happy, even on a busy school night. 🗨

Photography by
Mark Gilliland

Food Styling by
Rhonda Gilliland

CREAMY TOMATO TORTELLINI WITH SPINACH

- 1 20-ounce package refrigerated cheese tortellini
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 24-ounce jar marinara sauce
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 4 cups fresh spinach
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste

Cook the tortellini according to the package directions. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat and cook the garlic for about 30 seconds until fragrant. Stir in the marinara sauce and heavy cream and bring to a gentle simmer. Add the spinach and cook until wilted. Drain the tortellini and add it to the skillet, tossing until coated in the sauce. Stir in the Parmesan cheese, season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

This recipe offers a nice contrast to the other dishes in the lineup—it’s meatless, family-friendly and has a rich, comforting flavor while still taking less than 30 minutes from start to finish.

TERIYAKI MEATBALL BOWLS

- 1 24- to 26-ounce package frozen fully cooked meatballs
- 1 cup teriyaki sauce
- 3 cups broccoli florets
- 2 cups cooked white or brown rice
- 2 green onions, sliced
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds (optional)

Prepare the rice according to package directions if it is not already cooked. Meanwhile, place the frozen meatballs in a large skillet over medium heat with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water. Cover and cook for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until heated through.

Add the teriyaki sauce and simmer for 3 to 5 minutes, stirring until the meatballs are evenly coated and the sauce has thickened slightly. Steam the broccoli until tender. Divide the rice among serving bowls and top with the teriyaki meatballs and broccoli. Garnish with sliced green onions and sesame seeds, if desired. Serve immediately.



HONEY MUSTARD CHICKEN WITH ROASTED POTATOES AND CARROTS

- 4 boneless chicken thighs
 - 1 pound baby potatoes, halved
 - 4 medium carrots, sliced
 - 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
 - 1 tablespoon honey
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil
 - 1 teaspoon garlic powder
 - Salt and pepper to taste
- the Dijon mustard and honey. Toss the potatoes and carrots with olive oil, garlic powder, salt and pepper on a sheet pan. Arrange the chicken thighs among the vegetables and brush them with the honey mustard mixture. Roast for about 30 minutes or until the chicken reaches 165 F and the vegetables are tender. Serve immediately.

Preheat the oven to 425 F. In a small bowl, whisk together



CHEESY BLACK BEAN AND RICE SKILLET

- Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat and cook the onion and bell pepper until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in the black beans, rice, salsa, chili powder, salt and pepper. Cook for several minutes until heated through. Sprinkle the cheese over the top, cover the skillet and cook until the cheese is melted. Serve on its own or with tortilla chips.
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
 - 1 small onion, diced
 - 1 bell pepper, diced
 - 2 cans black beans, drained and rinsed
 - 2 cups cooked rice
 - 1 cup salsa
 - 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
 - 1 teaspoon chili powder
 - Salt and pepper to taste



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