

west carolina

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026

CONNECTED

Sweet Twist

Charming Gourmet Sticks

CULTIVATION CLASSROOM

SMART HOME SOLUTIONS



Original photo by Mark Gilliland

5-4-3-2-1

Launch your smart home

Smart home devices can sometimes sound like science fiction. The truth is much more down-to-earth. Simply think of a smart home as a collection of devices that connect to your internet and are controlled by your phone, your voice or on a schedule you decide.

The possibilities seem as endless as a clear night sky, and that can feel intimidating. Fortunately, a little planning and knowledge go a long way. So, keep it simple at first.

START WITH THE BASICS

You don't need to outfit your entire home overnight. Begin with one or two devices that solve real needs. Smart speakers, which may include voice assistants, smart plugs and smart bulbs, are great entry points. They're affordable and easy to install. They can also show how everything works together.

PICK A HOME BASE

Most smart devices work through an app, and many people find it helpful to center their setup around a single ecosystem such as Amazon Alexa, Google Home or Apple Home. Adopting one system can make setup smoother and reduce compatibility headaches.

STRENGTHEN YOUR WI-FI

Your smart home runs on your internet connection, so a reliable Wi-Fi network is essential. If you notice slow speeds or dead zones, contact your broadband provider to learn about upgrading your router or other available options. A strong connection ensures your devices respond quickly and consistently.

NAME THINGS CLEARLY

It might sound mundane, but naming your devices thoughtfully makes a big difference. "Living Room Lamp" is much easier to remember and say out loud than "Plug 3." As your setup grows, clear names keep everything organized.

KEEP SECURITY IN MIND

Because these devices connect to the internet, it's important to protect them. Use strong, unique passwords and keep your apps and devices updated.

Before long, you'll find your home responding in quiet, helpful ways. And while there may not be an astronaut at your door, it might just feel like you've taken a small step into the future.

Near to the People

The holiday season is all about connection

In the South, fall never keeps a schedule. It shows up late, after the dog days finally let go. Acres of field corn turn that rich tan color, ready for the combine. Pumpkins and gourds show up on porches. The leaves turn almost every shade in the rainbow, and cool air refreshes an early-morning run or a quiet porch after a long day.



CHRIS TOWNSON
Chief Executive Officer

But then, fall slips away as quickly as it came. The leaves let go one at a time, and the trees settle in for winter. Friday night football fades into squeaking sneakers and the swish of a shot through the net. Wood smoke settles low in the hollows some mornings like it's in no hurry to go anywhere. And turkey and dressing and Thanksgiving pies turn to Nativity sets and Christmas lights.

I love that seasons change every year. But I love the things that don't change even more—the people who keep showing up, serving and loving on the folks around them.

That's the whole of Thanksgiving and Christmas both. Thanksgiving is what happens when you stop long enough to count the people, not the tasks. It's family gathered around a table just because you love each other, even in years there isn't much to put on it. Laughter. Tears. The same stories told again and again because somebody always asks to hear them one more time.

And Christmas is that same wonder, turned all the way up. In the middle of the lights and the busyness, I keep coming back to one simple truth: God came near. Not from a distance, not through a messenger. He came near to ordinary people as one of them. A baby in a manger, born to a couple who had nowhere else to lay Him. That's how close He came.

But He didn't come just to be near us. He came to save us. That baby grew up to be the man who went to a cross and gave His own life, because we couldn't fix what was broken in us. That's the whole of the Christmas story, if you strip away the lights and the wrapping paper. God with us, paying a debt none of us could pay, so we could receive the greatest gift ever given.

So as fall turns to winter, gather close. Notice the people around you. Be near to somebody who needs it. People still need that today, now more than ever.

And when you sit with someone, see it for what it is—just a small echo of a nearness that came first, long before we ever learned to show up for each other. Let's remember to trust the one that Christmas was always pointing to.

May the Lord bless you and yours this Thanksgiving and Christmas season.



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Photo courtesy of Charming Gourmet Sticks

Charming Gourmet Sticks founder Helena Wardlaw, her husband, Travis, and their daughter, Khloe, love dressing up for the holiday season.
See story Page 18.

CONNECTED KITCHENS

Smarten up the heart of your home

LEAK DETECTORS

These small sensors monitor sinks, dishwashers and refrigerators and send an alert to your phone if they detect moisture. When shopping for the perfect detector, look for loud alarms. Some even pair with systems that shut off water automatically.

SMART COFFEE MAKERS, GRINDERS

Start brewing your next cup from your phone, with a voice command or by setting a schedule. Some models can grind beans just moments before brewing. Choose one that fits your coffee preferences. Simpler machines are often easier for everyday use.

DIGITAL FAMILY CALENDAR

This wall-mounted digital calendar displays schedules, chores and reminders for the whole household. Sync it with your Google or Apple calendar, and put it somewhere everyone will see it, like the entrance to the kitchen.

SMART OVENS

Smart ovens connect to your phone to preheat, adjust settings and send alerts when dinner is done. Look for easy-to-use controls and features you'll actually use when selecting one.

SMART REFRIGERATORS

A smart fridge monitors temperature, sends maintenance alerts and sometimes shows what groceries are inside. These are a larger investment than other smart kitchen appliances, so prioritize practical features.

SMOKE, HEAT AND GAS DETECTORS

These detectors send alerts to your phone and identify different risks. Look for long battery life and clear notifications. Some can even trigger other devices, like turning on the lights.





Original photo by Mark Gilliland

Growing Smarter

High-tech greenhouse helps students cultivate skills

Story by LAZ DENES

On a chilly morning, outdoor temperatures hover near freezing, but inside the high-tech greenhouse at the South Carolina Governor's School for Agriculture at John de la Howe, students work among rows of plants in a warm, controlled environment designed to nurture crops and the next generation of agricultural professionals.

For horticulture instructor Kaitlyn Rhodes, the 34-by-75-foot greenhouse transformed what and how students can learn. "It's been really nice being able to grow more in a smaller space," she says. "We can grow more and feed more people."

Completed in spring 2024, the greenhouse replaced one from the 1970s. Its arrival marked a significant step forward for the school that was reimagined in 2020 as the South Carolina Governor's School for Agriculture.

Today, the residential public high school occupies roughly 1,300 acres in McCormick, where a little more than 100 students study agriculture through hands-on experience. Kaitlyn joined the school in 2023 after earning a degree in agricultural education from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia.

The greenhouse uses an internet-connected system that allows remote management of irrigation and fertilizing. Kaitlyn can adjust irrigation lines from her smartphone, while automatic shade cloths and climate controls maintain ideal conditions. If a heater fails, a cooling system malfunctions or a leak is detected, Kaitlyn receives a notification and problems can be addressed quickly. It's a welcome departure from the previous greenhouse, which Kaitlyn visited every weekend to water plants.

When Kaitlyn and her husband Philip had their son, Jensen, in August 2025, this connection became even more important. It allows her peace of mind and the ability to focus her time at home on family.

TECHNOLOGY AT WORK

Eric McCall, the school's director of agricultural and forestry operations, says that connectivity gives students a glimpse of the technology they will encounter in modern agriculture.

"It's really representative of what they're going to see out in industry," Eric says. "You can control every variable that you can think of within this greenhouse, and you instill that management approach. Then, you go out into the field where you can control maybe two of 1,000 variables."

The controlled environment creates opportunities for research and experimentation. Students transplant seedlings, monitor growth, manage irrigation, pinch plants to encourage fuller growth and even pressure-wash the concrete floor. Technology does not eliminate the need for daily responsibility.

"You can't just plant your stuff and walk away and come back six months later, and you've got a good end result," says Eric, who has served on the West Carolina Board of Directors since 2021.

LEARNING BY DOING

Students grow roughly 700 to 1,000 mums for a fall sale. In spring, they produce annuals, perennials, hanging baskets, fruits, vegetables and other bedding plants. Sales typically generate $12,000 to $15,000 annually, with proceeds benefiting the school system.



Director of Agricultural and Forestry Operations Eric McCall talks with students in the greenhouse at the South Carolina Governor's School for Agriculture.

Eric says that business component can be especially eye-opening. Students experience an entire agricultural business cycle in a relatively short period. "The kids get involved and actually see it from an enterprise perspective," he says. "You can kind of see the hamster starting to turn the wheel up there."

John de la Howe currently produces about 10% of what is consumed in the cafeteria and is targeting 50% by 2030. Students help produce fruits and vegetables, while eggs, meat and other agricultural products also originate on campus.

With classes typically numbering just six to 12 students, Kaitlyn can spend much of the year outside the traditional classroom. "I spend maybe 20% of my year in my classroom," she says. "The rest of it, we're in the greenhouse, we're outside landscaping."

AGRICULTURE EVOLVES

That hands-on approach reflects the changing face of agriculture itself. Kaitlyn, a third-generation farmer, has seen firsthand how data, analysis and technology have become increasingly important. "It's not just hands-on," she says. "It's a lot of math and a lot of analysis, as well."





The program takes students through all phases of plant care from transplanting seedlings to monitoring growth and eventually selling or harvesting the final results.

That same spirit extends to the school's relationship with West Carolina. The cooperative provides the connectivity that allows the greenhouse systems to communicate with Kaitlyn's phone. "Having internet in the greenhouse has changed everything," she says. "That literally makes all of our systems work."

Eric says West Carolina helps infuse technology at the school in almost every area.

"When you're at a place that's so rural," he says, "most of your workforce is driving at least 30 minutes to and from. Having that access to technology in the hours that you can't be here, you still can actively manipulate things and make decisions in real time, and that's been really good for us."

Inside the greenhouse, that connection is helping students see agriculture not simply as a tradition, but as a technologically advanced, data-driven and increasingly efficient industry.

School officials say students are gaining a firsthand look at what modern agriculture demands. They're also discovering that, even in a high-tech greenhouse, growth still depends on attention, responsibility and a willingness to get their hands dirty.



Photos courtesy of John de la Howe

Ag educator Kaitlyn Rhodes, front row, in red, receives a grant as a finalist for South Carolina Teacher of the Year in 2026.





Adobe Stock photo by ppa5

RELAXATION STATIONS

Bring the spa experience to your bed and bath

FRAGRANCE SYSTEM

Release your favorite scent on a schedule or whenever the device detects motion, keeping your space fresh without constant spraying. Look for adjustable intensity and simple app controls. Avoid placing it directly near vents.

SMART SHOWER EXHAUST

These fans clear steam and odors, and some feature voice control and automation. Models with built-in humidity sensors are especially helpful. They activate when steam rises. Check compatibility with your favorite voice assistant.

SMART BEDS

A smart bed can help shape how you feel when you start and end your day. Popular features include sleep data tracking and temperature control for optimal comfort. These systems often rely on a companion app for full functionality.

SMART CURTAINS

Automated curtains can gently let in natural light as you wake up. Look for quiet motors and check that the curtains fit your existing curtain rods. Battery-powered models are easier to install, but wired versions offer longer-term convenience.

SMART TOOTHBRUSHES

These high-tech dental devices build better daily habits by tracking how long and how well you brush. Look for an app that's easy to understand. Most connect via Bluetooth rather than Wi-Fi, and battery life varies by model.

AIR PURIFIERS

Compact air purifiers reduce moisture-related odors and airborne particles, keeping the bathroom feeling clean. Choose one suited for small spaces and look for an automatic mode that adjusts as air quality changes. Place it near, but not too close, to moisture sources.

NOW-THIS-IS-LIVING ROOMS

Level up your favorite gathering space

SMART SPEAKERS

These voice-controlled devices play music, answer questions and control other smart products. Place them where you love to lounge, near a couch or on a side table. Look for devices with clear voice recognition, which matters more than extra features. Google and Amazon offer solid options.

SMART DISPLAYS

Enhance the smart home experience with a screen. These convenient displays show video calls, recipes or camera feeds. They work best in spots where you glance often, like a media console. Check privacy settings and camera controls to stay confident about your security.

SMART TVs

Smart TVs connect directly to streaming apps and your home network, eliminating that clunky cable box. Look for an easy-to-navigate menu and reliable app support. A world of endless entertainment awaits.

SMART THERMOSTATS

A smart thermostat learns your schedule and preferences, adjusting temperatures automatically. It's an effortless way to control energy costs. Before buying, be sure to check the device's compatibility with your heating and cooling system.

GAMING CONSOLES

Modern consoles aren't just about online gaming. They also double as entertainment hubs that stream movies and shows, play music and connect to other devices like smart speakers.

PET FEEDERS AND CAMERAS

Automatic feeders and pet cameras keep you connected with your best buddies when you're away from home. Look for simple controls and reliable notifications.

ROBOT VACUUMS AND MOPS

Put your cleaning on a schedule. Robot vacuums and mops only need clear floor space to get to work. Mapping features help them learn the layout of your home, so efficiency improves over time.



Adobe Stock image by James S. Cowan


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KEEPING TABS ON YOUNG EXPLORERS

Tools designed with child safety in mind

Designed for children of all ages, from infants to teens, smart home devices can help ensure a safe environment even when the kids are not in.

IN-ROOM MONITORS

Smart monitors stream live video to smartphones. Some models can notify parents when their little one is moving around more than normal. Others double as sleep trackers and even play lullabies and white noise to soothe the baby back to sleep.

SMART LOCKS TO THE RESCUE

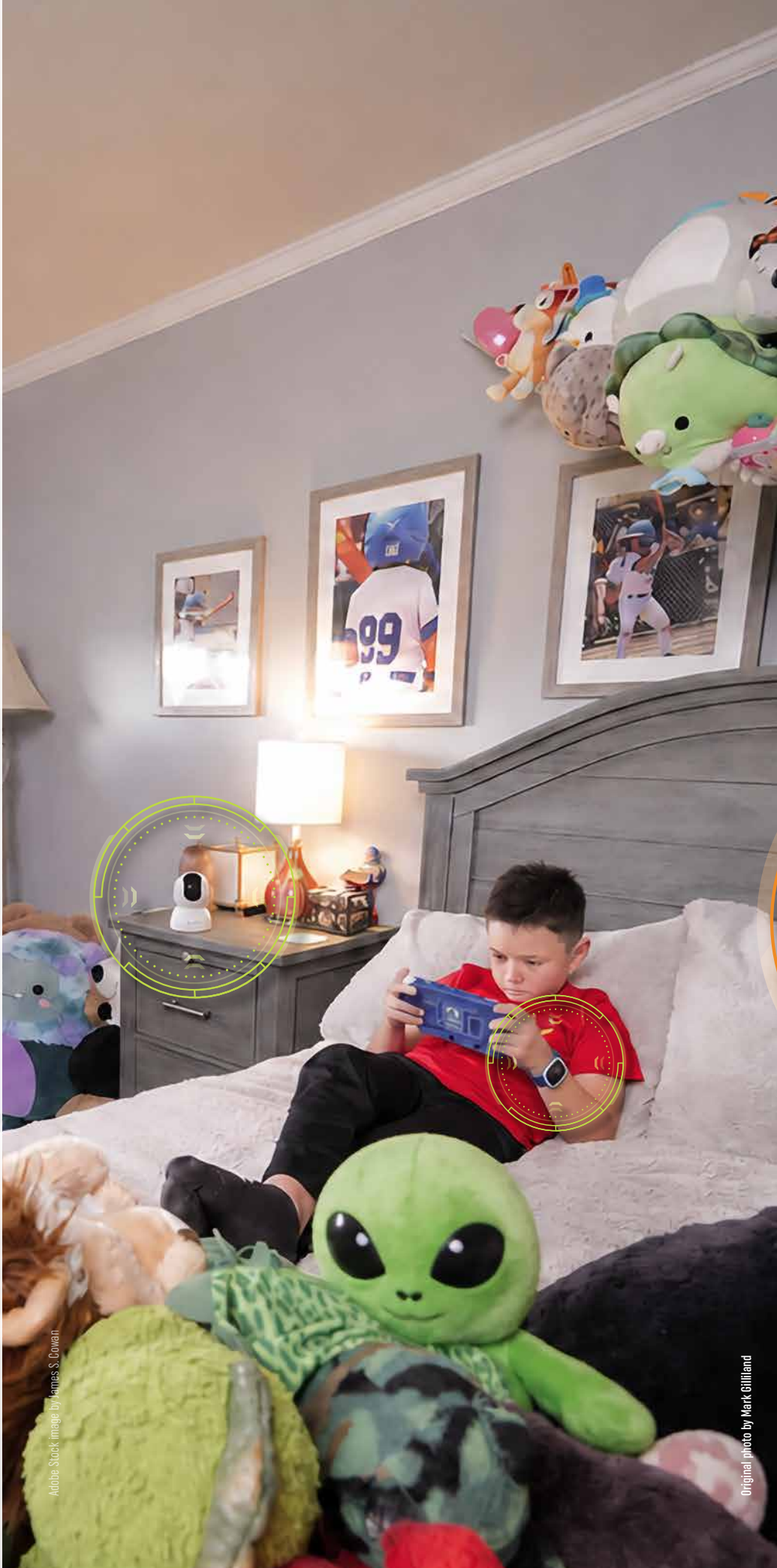
Avoid that moment of panic when a busy child locks himself in his room. Modern smart locks are considered “invisible” due to their slimline looks. App compatibility, remote access and door status detection complete the package.

WATCH THIS!

Sure, they tell time, but today’s smartwatches also include two-way calling, limited texting to preapproved contacts, GPS tracking and school-mode settings to reduce distractions. Some even provide video calling and voice memos.

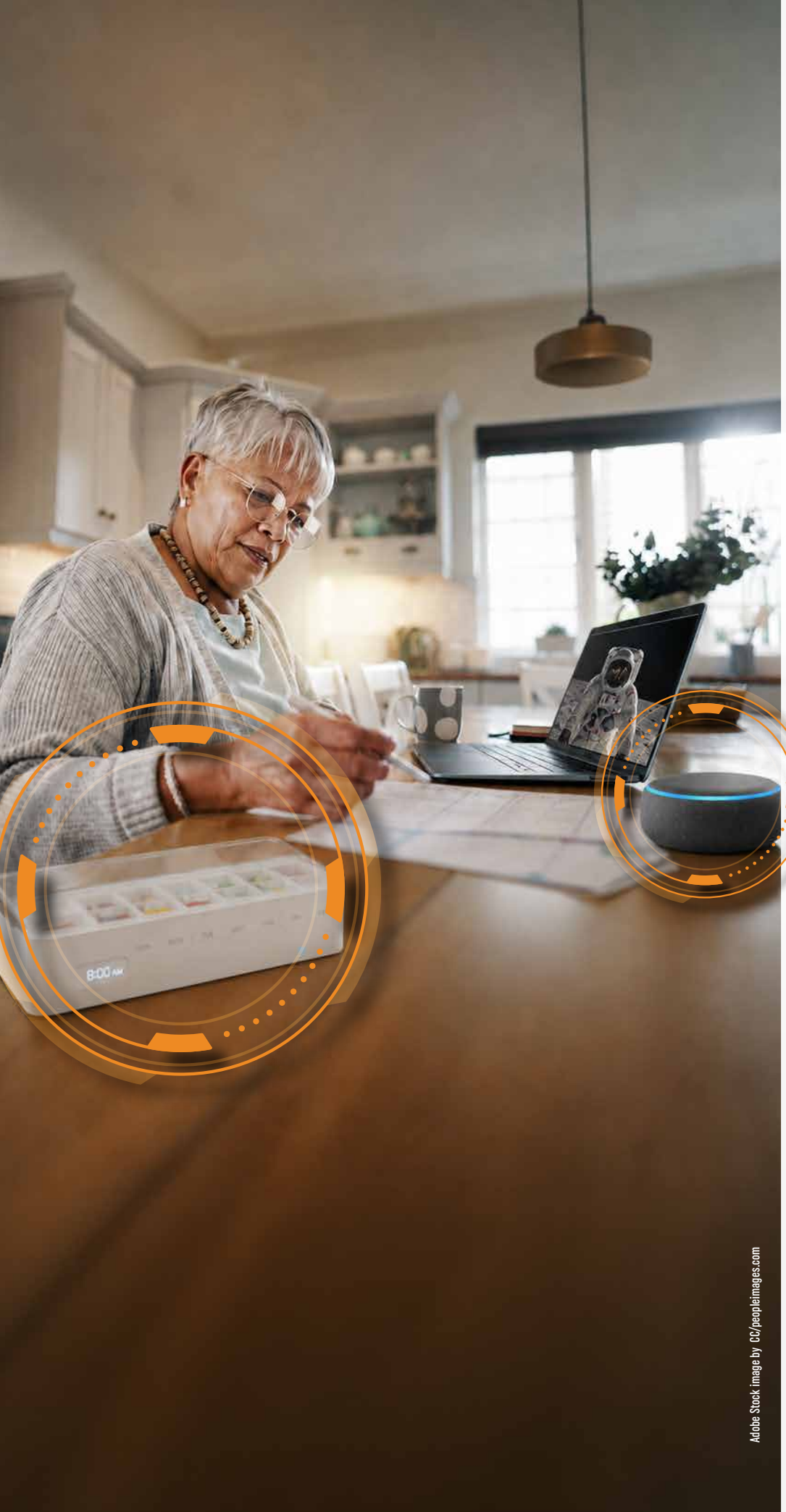
ALWAYS IN TOUCH

Infants and toddlers are not ready for advanced wearables, but a GPS tracker offers real-time location data and can even alert parents when their child leaves a preset safe zone. Small and lightweight, they can be attached to a backpack, belt loop or shoe. Many come with an SOS button to send a location alert.



Adobe Stock image by James S. Cowan

Original photo by Mark Gilliland



Adobe Stock image by CC/peopleimages.com

SAFE SIGNALS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Smart tools help enable independent living

Wi-Fi-enabled tech tools can provide safety and peace of mind for loved ones of older adults who want to stay in their own homes.

SMART SPEAKERS

Smart speakers can remind someone to exercise, take medications and ease feelings of isolation. They can also be an important lifeline in the event of a fall or injury, with voice prompts to call emergency contacts.

PILL ORGANIZERS

Multiple medications with different dosing schedules can be hard to keep track of. A smart pill container organizes them by time and day of the week. You can also set reminders and controls to release only the needed pills at the required time to avoid accidental overdosing.

APPLIANCES

At some point just about everyone forgets to turn off the lights or oven. Smart appliances can automatically turn off after a period of inactivity. Smart plugs and outlets can control other devices from a phone or tablet and even connect with a smart speaker to allow voice commands.

STAY ALERT

Even with safety features in place, accidents and health emergencies happen. Stand-alone medical alert systems can be placed in a central location, or a wearable device can call for help with the push of a button. Some can detect falls, even if the person is unable to press the button, or monitor medical conditions like diabetes.

BRING YOUR SMART HOME TO LIFE

Once your smart home is up and running, dial it in to operate as smoothly as possible.

MATCH THE DEVICE TO THE JOB

Not every smart option is interchangeable. For example, smart bulbs are great for lamps and fixtures. Smart switches make more sense for built-in ceiling lights. Trying to use both on the same circuit may mean you can't control the lights at all. So, pick the right type of device for the job to create predictability.

PAY ATTENTION TO POWER

Device behavior may change based on how it's powered.

Battery-powered devices are easier to install but may respond slower to preserve battery life. Plug-in devices tend to be faster and more reliable, but they need a nearby outlet. So, choose plug-in options for devices like security cameras or doorbells.

KNOW YOUR WI-FI BANDS

Many newer routers offer two Wi-Fi bands, 2.4 GHz and 5 GHz. The distinction matters.

Many devices are built to work on the 2.4 GHz band because it travels farther and handles walls better. When setting up devices, check the instructions to verify the correct Wi-Fi band.

SENSOR STRATEGY

Motion sensors can feel magical or mildly annoying, depending on how they're placed.

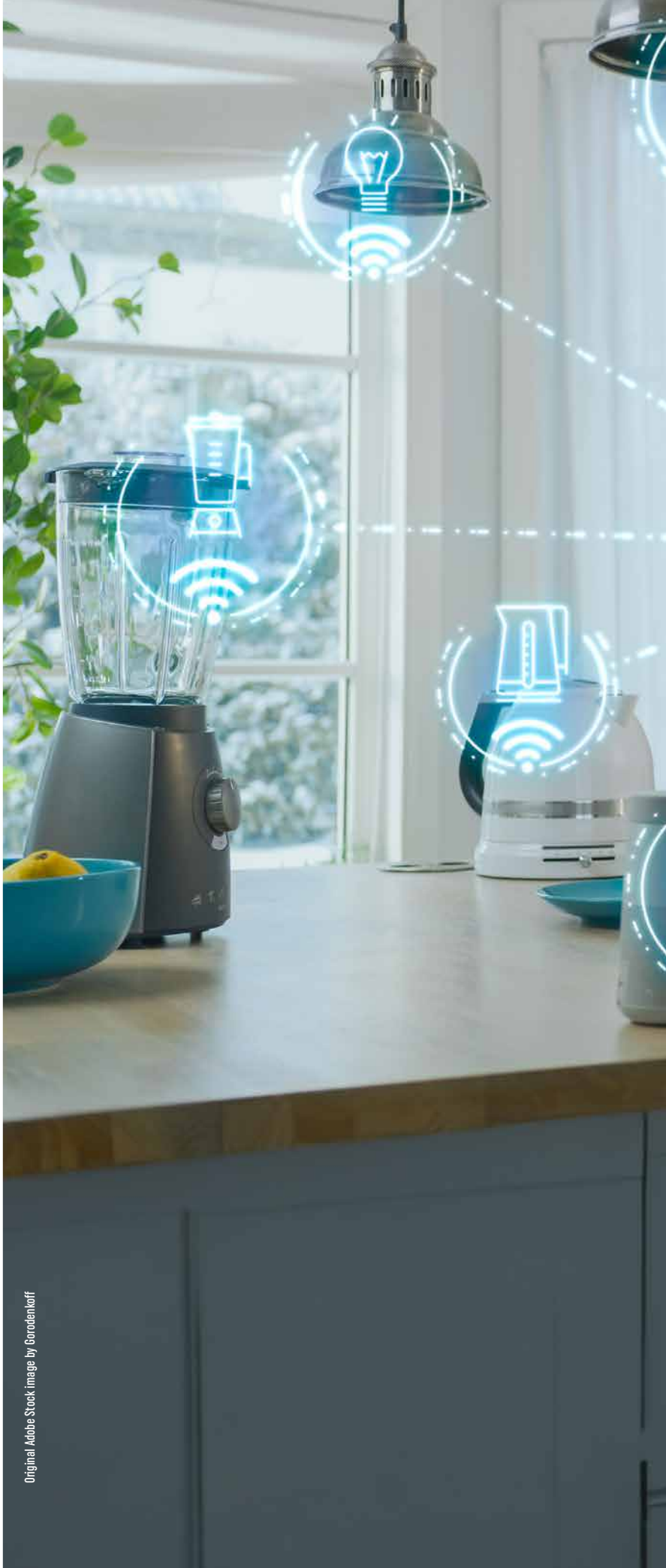
Shifting sunlight or passing cars can trigger a window-facing sensor. Also, if a sensor is aimed too high or too low, it may miss movement altogether.

For best results, place sensors where people naturally cross their path, and avoid direct exposure to windows or heat sources.

UNDERSTAND DELAY AND 'LAG'

If a smart device doesn't respond instantly, it's usually doing extra work behind the scenes. A voice command travels to your speaker, to remote servers and finally back to your device. If your internet connection is busy, each step is more noticeable.

When timing matters, like turning on lights when you enter a room, consider using local controls, such as motion sensors or switches, instead of voice commands.



Original Adobe Stock image by Gorodenkoff



BACKYARD BLISS

Let gadgets take the chores out of the outdoors

SMART WATERING SYSTEMS

No need to remember to water the lawn or garden ever again. These systems automatically handle it based on schedules, weather or soil conditions. Look for options that adjust to rainfall and connect easily to your existing sprinkler setup. Placement matters—zones should match the needs of different plants.

SMART GRILLS

Use connected thermometers and apps to cook with precision. You can even check temperatures from your smartphone without lifting the lid. Look for clear readouts and reliable alerts.

SMART BIRDHOUSES AND FEEDERS

These devices include small cameras, letting you watch birds visit and even identify species in real time. Choose a model with weather resistance and a simple app. Placement should balance visibility with a bit of privacy for your feathered friends.

SMART CHICKEN COOPS

A smart coop door opens and closes automatically, usually based on light or a schedule, protecting your chickens at night. Battery life and durability are important, especially in changing weather.

ROBOT MOWERS

Robot mowers quietly trim your lawn on a schedule. They are best in yards with clear boundaries and minimal obstacles. Setup can take a little time, but once mapped, they keep yards tidy with little effort.

WEATHER STATIONS

A home weather station tracks conditions like temperature, rainfall, wind and humidity right where you live, giving you more precise insight than a general forecast. Look for easy-to-read displays and app integration. Sensors should be in open areas, away from buildings or trees that could skew readings.



AI-generated image by Brandon Pomienke



Under the Mistle-Dough

Charming Gourmet Sticks crafts joy through chocolate

Story by BRANDI DIXON

Helena Wardlaw routinely made sweet treats for classroom parties at school when her three children, Nehemiahus, Landen and Khloe, were young.

"Other parents and friends were always telling me how much they loved my treats and that I should start a business," she recalls. "I just thought I didn't have time, working the typical 12-hour graveyard nurse schedule."

Helena, a registered nurse, started thinking about the idea so much that it entered her dreams. With some convincing from her family, she decided to go for it, launching Charming Gourmet Sticks in 2019.

"I told myself I would start small with just two or three orders a week," she says. "After my first post, I had 15 orders. It was like other people could see my vision before I did."

MINT TO BE

Today, Charming Gourmet Sticks, named for Helena's original gourmet chocolate-coated pretzel sticks, now ships treats nationwide.

"I started perfecting my craft and got into chocolate-covered strawberries, turtles, peanut clusters and more," Helena says.

Some of her best ideas come from dreams that she decides to create. Her husband, Travis, and their children help bring them all to life. "I'm so grateful we are family-owned," she says. "It's teaching my children you can have a trade and business of your own that no one can take away from you."

SWEET NOSTALGIA

The family's favorite time of year is, not surprisingly, the Christmas season. Helena says she brings the spirit of the season and joy into everything she makes. "I try to bring back all of the old-school Christmas favorites that remind me of my childhood," she says.

Thanks to social media, the Charming Gourmet Sticks community is vast and continuing to grow.

"We meet people out at our pop-ups who we don't even know but tell us how much our treats mean to them," Helena says. "One customer told us how after her mother passed, the entire family ordered our turtles because they were her mother's favorite treat. It's moments like that that let us know we are spreading joy and creating memories through what we do."

Happiness and joy truly are the heartbeat of Charming Gourmet Sticks that Helena and her family aim to spread through every post, treat and customer interaction.



The original Charming Gourmet Sticks started the Wardlaw family's chocolate empire.

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES

To support Helena and her family's local business, visit one of their partner stores in town to pick up your favorite treats or stop by a pop-up event to experience the magic firsthand.

While Charming Gourmet Sticks may not have a brick-and-mortar storefront of its own, the treats are available at select Greenwood stores, including The Pantry Shoppe, Aromas Village Coffee and Aromas Uptown, and Fountain Foods Market in Fountain Inn.

CHARMING GOURMET STICKS

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etsy.com/shop/charmedgourmetsticks

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Photo courtesy of Charming Gourmet Sticks

The Love of Artisan Chocolate sampler box mixes in berries and nuts.

Smart Sleuthing

Solving the case for energy savings and security at home

Story by LAURA MCGILL

Zac Campbell, West Carolina's vice president of technology & cybersecurity, moonlights as a detective, using the latest smart home technology to find devices around the house that are stealing energy.

One of the first energy thieves Zac found with his whole-home power monitor was the standard electric tank water heater. "The power monitor shows me what is actually pulling the most electricity instead of me guessing," Zac says. "I switched to a propane tankless unit, and it cut roughly $100 a month off the power bill with our family of four."

He acknowledges the propane expense eats into that savings, but says the family still comes out ahead on overall energy costs.

The next culprit on Zac's list was his air conditioning unit. "I put in mini-split AC units, which use about half the power of what they replaced," he says. "They run variable-speed compressors and fan motors, so they aren't cycling full blast all the time."

Seeing the savings adding up, Zac turned his attention to the pool pump. "It's a variable-speed pump and it's on a schedule, so it only runs when it needs to," he says.

To catch the small-time pickpockets, Zac relies on his smart thermostat and light schedulers. "They allow me to keep things from being used when nobody needs them," he says.

PROTECTING THE PEACE

Zac's smart home devices are for more than energy savings. "The smart door locks and cameras are probably the biggest quality-of-life pieces for us," he says. "Being able to lock up, let someone in or just check on the house while we're away gives us real peace of mind."

Older camera systems were known for sending too many alerts because they couldn't fully recognize what was happening. Zac says that today's security systems are more advanced. "The newer camera systems have AI built in now so, instead of getting blown up with alerts every time a bug flies past the lens, it tells me whether it's a vehicle, a person or an animal," he says. "That's the difference between actually paying attention to your alerts and ignoring them."

ASKING FOR ADVICE

Zac considers himself an early adopter of technology. "I've just always found it fascinating to have this stuff in my home." His job and his own use of technology at home have made him the go-to person for friends and family seeking advice.

He always stresses the importance of a reliable network. "All of this only works if the network underneath it is solid," Zac says. "A reliable WiFi setup and a fiber connection are what make the rest of it possible."

He knows that with power costs going up and everybody adding more electronics and gadgets to their homes, doing some smart sleuthing can lead to savings as well as peace of mind. "The tech is what lets you add all that and still keep the bill in check," Zac says.



Photo courtesy of Jess Bowie

West Carolina's Vice President of Technology & Cybersecurity, Zac Campbell, relies on his home monitoring system to be more energy efficient.

GARAGE GLOW-UP

Storage solutions get smarter

SMART GARAGE DOOR OPENER

Open and close the garage door from your phone, no matter where you are. These devices also can send alerts if you leave the door open. Look for models that work with your existing opener, or consider a full replacement if yours is older.

SMART TOOL CONTROLLERS

A smart tool controller connects to outlets or power strips, letting you turn tools on or off remotely or on a schedule. This can add a layer of safety—especially for devices you don't want left running.

MOTION SENSORS

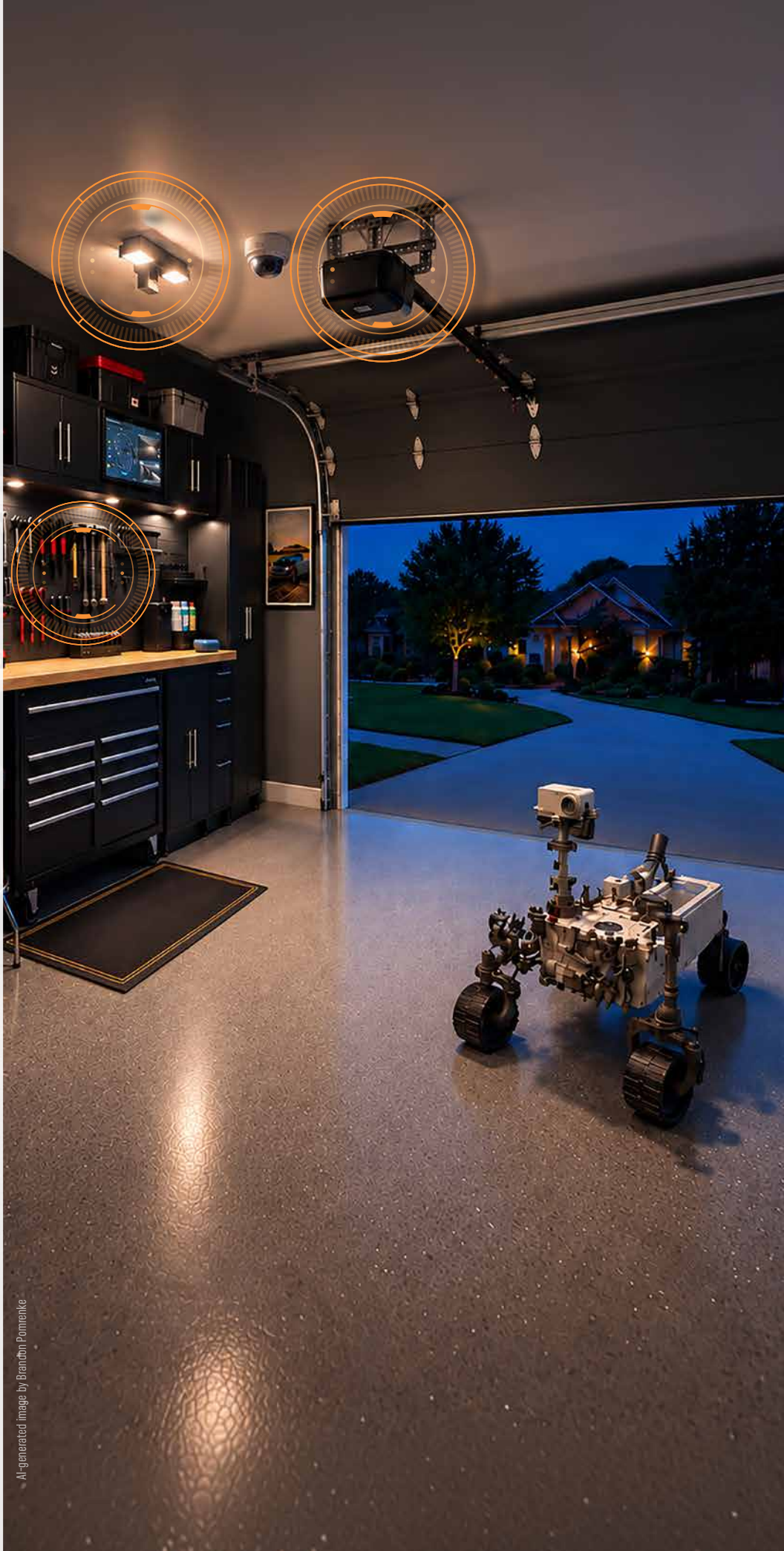
Triggering lights by detecting movement, these devices mean no more fumbling for switches when your hands are full. Place them in your home where you naturally enter or move through, and adjust sensitivity to avoid false alerts.

TOOL TRACKING SYSTEMS

Keep tabs on valuable equipment. These systems often use small tags paired with an app to show where tools are—especially useful for those that move between the garage, yard and other workspaces. Look for long battery life and simple setup.

TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY SENSORS

These sensors monitor conditions inside your garage, which can affect tools, stored items and even your car. They send updates to your phone so you can catch issues earlier, like excess moisture. Place them away from doors or direct drafts for more accurate readings.



AI-generated image by Brandon Pomrenke



Original Adobe Stock image by Ranju

SHARE YOUR SOUNDTRACK

Take your tunes to every room

MULTIROOM LINKED SPEAKERS

Play the same music throughout your home or different songs in different rooms. Simply put, these speakers keep everything in sync. Look for systems with easy grouping controls and reliable connections. Placement matters: Spread them evenly so sound feels balanced, not crowded.

WI-FI TURNTABLE

A Wi-Fi turntable blends classic vinyl with modern streaming. It spins tunes while also sending the audio to wireless speakers, a great option for record fans who don't want to be tied to one room. Check compatibility with your speaker system, and keep the turntable on a stable, vibration-free surface.

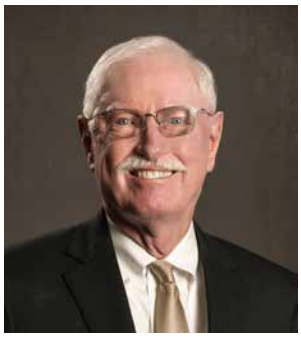
A SMART DISPLAY FOR MUSIC CONTROL

A smart display, like a Nest Hub, acts as a visual control center. It can show lyrics, album art and playlists while letting you control playback with your voice or a quick tap. Place it someplace convenient, like a kitchen counter or side table, and review privacy settings so it fits your comfort level.

SMART GUITAR AMP

Devices like smart guitar amps and connected apps let musicians adjust tones, save presets and even record, making it easier to experiment without extra gear. Look for intuitive controls and headphone options if you want to keep your compositions to yourself.

2026 ENDS WITH BOARD TRANSITION AND STEADY GROWTH



Lee Logan

As West Carolina closes out 2026 and looks toward its 75th anniversary in 2027, the cooperative marked a significant leadership transition.

Lee Logan retired after 41 years of board service representing Area 4, Due West. He championed extending fiber to every member and served the community well beyond the boardroom, including as mayor of Due West. "It is no overstatement to say that so much of what West Carolina is today carries his fingerprints," said Board President Wes McAllister. Filling Logan's seat, Dennis Stoll now represents Area 4, Due West.

West Carolina grew to more than 61,000 customers in 2026, adding over 9,000 new sign-ups since last June, while WiFi X cybersecurity blocked more than 750,000 web threats monthly. The network expanded by roughly 1,000 miles of new fiber, bringing the total to more than 8,800 miles and adding nearly 12,000 addresses.

Upcountry Fiber, West Carolina's partnership with Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative, continued its commitment to build fiber to roughly 9,900 homes and businesses under the American Rescue Plan by year's end.

The cooperative returned $1.8 million in capital credits to members this year, bringing the total returned since its founding to nearly $64 million.

A SEASON OF GIVING RETURNS

This season, West Carolina invites members to Give Big and help neighbors in need. Donate five or more nonperishable food items at any West Carolina office and receive a signature holiday mug as a thank-you. All donations will go directly to food pantries serving communities across West Carolina's footprint.

From canned soup to peanut butter, every contribution can make the holidays a little brighter for local families. Join West Carolina and Give Big this holiday season.

For every five items donated, receive an entry for a chance to win a bag of Thru the Flame coffee with a winner drawn each week.



HOLIDAY OFFICE CLOSURES

All West Carolina offices will be closed on the following days:

Thanksgiving: Thursday, Nov. 26, and Friday, Nov. 27

Christmas Eve: Thursday, Dec. 24

Christmas Day: Friday, Dec. 25

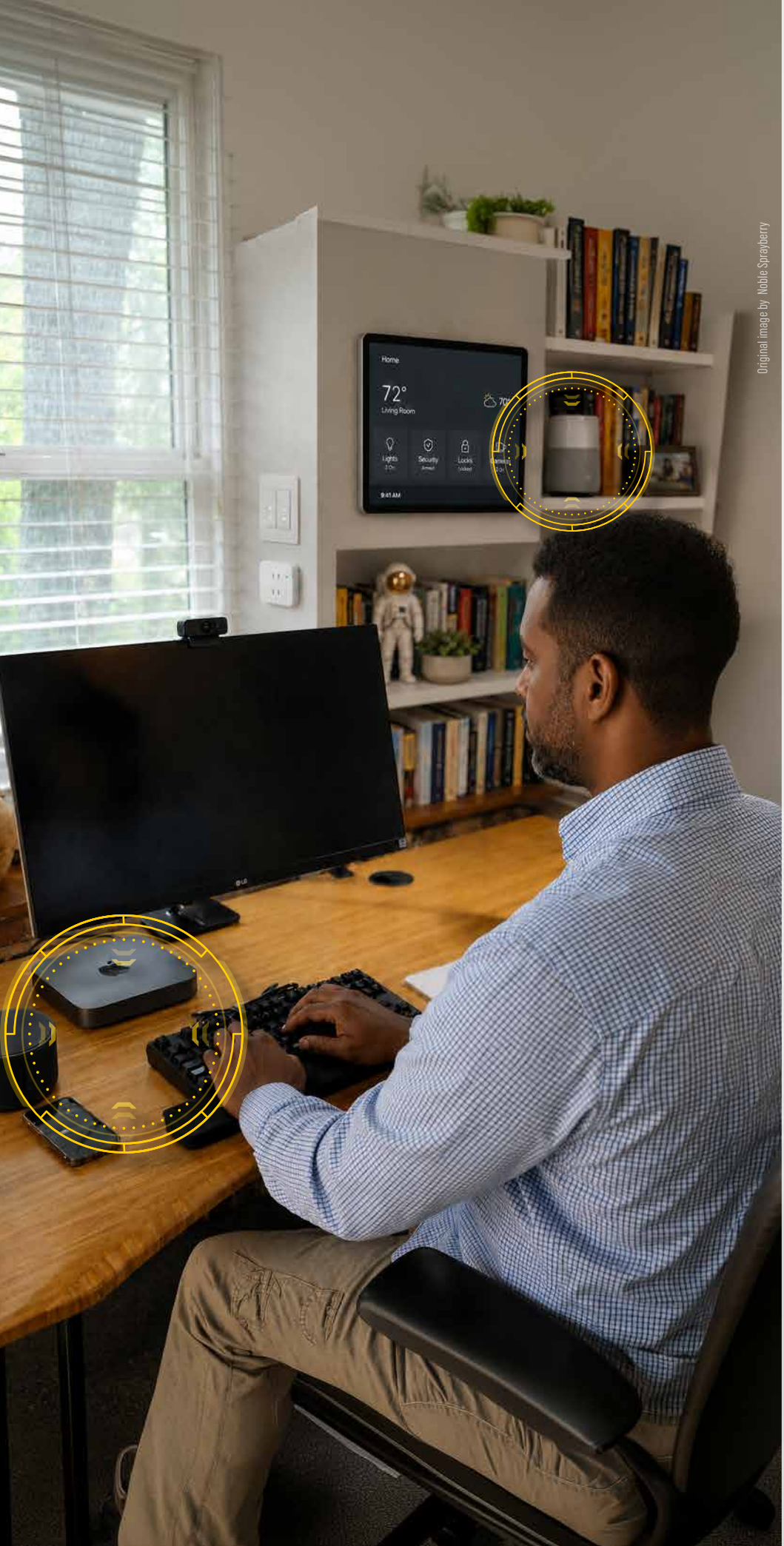
New Year's Day: Friday, Jan. 1



WEST CAROLINA WINS NTCA 2026 SMART RURAL COMMUNITY SHOWCASE AWARD

At the NTCA Fall Conference, West Carolina's community education program earned honors. Designed to meet residents where they are—both geographically and in their technology journey—the classes focus on topics ranging from streaming and cybersecurity to artificial intelligence. The program helps community members build skills and confidence to make the most of their broadband connections.





Original image by Noble Sprayberry

PRIORITIZE PRODUCTIVITY

Customize your work-from-home setup

Working from home is now a way of life for many people. And while a kitchen table and laptop may get the job done, having the right setup can make a big difference in comfort, focus and productivity.

A smart workspace takes advantage of connected technology to simplify tasks, reduce distractions and help you stay on course throughout the day. Consider thoughtful additions that make a difference in creating a more efficient and comfortable work environment.

IMPROVE YOUR CONNECTION

A reliable internet connection is crucial for any part of your smart home setup, but you really don't want to worry about interruptions during important video calls or in the middle of uploading a large file. If your connection feels slow or inconsistent, consider the location of your router or whether your work may require more bandwidth.

CREATE A FOCUSED SPACE

Begin with devices that support your daily routine. With a smart speaker or display, you can help manage your schedule, set reminders and answer quick questions without interrupting your workflow.

Add smart plugs and lighting to turn on lights at the start of your day or adjust brightness and temperature with a simple voice command when you're in the zone.

Noise-canceling headphones or even app-controlled white noise machines create a more focused atmosphere. You can also use smart assistants to set timers for focused work sessions or breaks, helping you stay productive throughout the day.

KEEP SECURITY IN MIND

Because your work may involve sensitive information, it's important to protect your devices and network. Use strong passwords, enable two-factor authentication when available and keep your software up to date. Be sure to review the privacy settings on your devices, too.

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WC customer for 18 years

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