



UPCOUNTRY

MAY/JUNE 2022

CONNECTED

**BUILDING
BUSINESS**

**FASTER
INTERNET**



Dynamic duo

Co-op collaboration
adding fiber in Upstate



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A partner to support RURAL AMERICA

The Foundation for Rural
Service makes a difference

Our members work hard to serve our nation's rural communities, but they do not do it alone. I'd like to shine a spotlight on an organization whose work I respect, appreciate and support.

The professionals of the Foundation for Rural Service, known as FRS, deserve praise for all the benefits they provide to thousands of people. Established as a nonprofit in 1994, they have made a positive difference for nearly 30 years.

Many of you may know their efforts to help educate young people in rural communities through scholarships and the popular Youth Tour trip to our nation's capital. FRS also annually takes key congressional staff out into our communities to see the challenges faced when deploying broadband.

In particular I want to give a special nod to the annual FRS Community Grant Program designed to benefit communities served by NTCA members. The goal is to support local efforts committed to improving and sustaining rural America. The grants have four areas of concentration: business and economic development, community development, education and telecommunications — the last is a chance to highlight a local plan to support broadband resources for telehealth, education and more. For more information about these programs, visit www.frs.org.

Just like the NTCA member serving you, a remarkable community partner where you live, FRS combines the resources and visibility of all NTCA members to benefit communities like yours across the country. 📞



Get your free annual credit report Spot scammers early

A free credit report is one of the quickest ways to spot identity theft — someone taking your name, date of birth, address, credit card or bank account information, Social Security or medical insurance numbers.

Scammers can quickly drain a bank account, run up charges on a credit card, get a new credit card in your name and more.

What is a credit report?

A credit report is a summary of your personal credit history, including identifying details such as an address, date of birth and information such as whether bills were paid on time or someone has filed for bankruptcy.

Three national credit bureaus — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — collect and update this information.

The credit bureaus must:

- ▶ Make sure the information they collect about you is accurate
- ▶ Give you a free copy of your report once every 12 months
- ▶ Give you a chance to fix any mistakes

How do I order my free annual credit reports? The simplest solution is to visit AnnualCreditReport.com. It's fast and easy.

Cryptocurrency 101

A beginner's guide to the new currency

For many people, the idea of cryptocurrency, or digital money, is downright mysterious. Still, cryptocurrency has been around more than a decade, and a growing number of people are starting to use and invest in the world of virtual coins and tokens.

But what, exactly, is it? How does it work? And how do you get it?

CRYPTO BASICS

Put simply, cryptocurrency is digital money. There are no physical coins or paper dollar bills you can pull out and put in a billfold. But it's also not backed up by any asset. According to [bitstamp.net](https://www.bitstamp.net), cryptocurrencies are a tradable asset in and of themselves. Their price is determined by demand and the supply available.

Like gold, cryptocurrency's value is in its scarcity and its uses — or potential uses in crypto's case, according to an Investopedia article in December 2021. Bitcoin, which is the most valuable of the different cryptocurrencies, is limited to a quantity of 21 million bitcoins. And while gold is often useful for industrial applications and in valuable jewelry, crypto might be of service in a number of retail transactions one day.

HOW TO GET IT

Most people buy it online and store it in a virtual wallet. The easiest way to buy cryptocurrency is through one of many centralized exchanges that come up on an online search. There are several types of cryptocurrencies, including the three top ones: Bitcoin, Ethereum and Tether.

CRYPTO AND TAXES

The banking system and the government do not oversee cryptocurrency transactions. Instead, these transactions are supported by blockchain, a technology that tracks who owns what. But that doesn't mean cryptocurrency isn't taxable. In fact,

the Internal Revenue Service taxes cryptocurrency as either property, investment or earned income. Because of this, crypto dabblers should keep careful records of all their transactions.

UPS AND DOWNS?

Cryptocurrency is known for its volatile market. In one day in 2021, Bitcoin dropped by 30% — a huge fluctuation in any other trading market. As a new currency that's not legal tender and which any government can issue, crypto can move wildly up or down based on just about anything — perceptions, news articles or, most notably, a tweet from tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

RESEARCH AND START SLOW

To find out more about cryptocurrency, make sure to do your research. Seek out sources crypto advertisers or others with vested interests in particular products aren't backing. Those determined to try it out should invest conservatively while learning more about the market along the way. 💬

Crypto lingo

Knowing more about cryptocurrencies requires learning new words and phrases. Here are a few that are sure to pop up frequently:

FUD — FUD is an acronym that stands for "fear, uncertainty, doubt." In the crypto world, FUD is negative information that can deter investors.

HODL — HODL is an acronym for "hold on for dear life," but internet lore jokes that its origins came from a typo for the word "hold." Either way, cryptocurrency investors use it to caution others against selling when the market is volatile.

NFT — NFT stands for non-fungible tokens. NFTs are pieces of digital content linked to the Ethereum blockchain. Non-fungible basically means that the digital content is unique and cannot be replaced. Because of this fact, NFTs make digital works of art and other items into one-of-a-kind assets.

Sats — Short for Satoshi, sats are the smallest fraction of a bitcoin that you can send — 0.00000001 of a bitcoin. Hardcore bitcoin traders look at sats, not the dollar amount of bitcoin. Note: Satoshi Nakamoto is the made-up name of the person or people who created bitcoin.





PARTNER OF



Upcountry Fiber

Connecting you to the world

A digital divide exists. Many rural communities like the Blue Ridge area and part of the Upstate lack the fast internet service essential to accessing resources that can provide better medical care, education, communication, entertainment and much more. Help, however, is here.

**JEFF WILSON**

Chief Executive Officer
WCFIBER

**JIM LOVINGGOOD**

Chief Executive Officer
Blue Ridge Electric

This story begins when Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative recognized this critical need. High-speed internet for many of our neighbors was either nonexistent or challenging to receive.

Solving this problem is, obviously, daunting. Expanding a modern communications network throughout a rural and largely mountainous area creates unique challenges. Fiber optic cable must extend to every home and business that will receive service. We must complete a complex link to the global network of computers that is the internet, and we also have to maintain it. Similarly, we'll have to refine the services the system will offer and train customer service representatives to better assist you.

Fortunately, we've found a partner in WCFIBER. Capable of making this network a reality, they have a long and successful history of creating such systems. They brought gigabit-speed service to the city of Newberry and Greenwood County, providing internet performance rivaling that in many metropolitan areas. WCFIBER's fiber network is capable of serving everyone from businesses to homes with multiple devices connected simultaneously.

The power of our two performance-driven and community-focused organizations created Upcountry Fiber. Over the coming months, we'll be creating a network competitive with any in our nation. In fact, the work has already begun. Construction began on the Upcountry Fiber pilot project in 2021, and more than 500 miles of fiber optic cable — thin glass wires capable of moving data as light — now extend through parts of the BREC service area.

This is a long-term commitment consistent with our service to the Blue Ridge area. In order to share the stories of those communities and our role within them, we've developed this magazine.

Our goal is to help educate you about new industry trends, inform you of community activities and bring you news about Upcountry Fiber's development. We will publish magazines like this six times a year, and our mission is to provide you with as much information as possible.

Through these pages, we'll update you on network upgrades, share information about our services and shine a spotlight on how local citizens and organizations are using technology to create something special. You'll also find helpful tips, industry news and interesting feature stories.

We have so much good news to share, and we can't wait to show how your neighbors are using this new service.

Upcountry Fiber is committed to these investments. We know building our infrastructure and making upgrades to our services are good investments because our communities are counting on us to pave the way for the future. We're working diligently to ensure our customers have access to the necessity of high-speed reliable internet — and we're doing so as quickly as our resources allow.

For updates on Upcountry Fiber's construction progress, please visit UpcountryFiber.com/updates.

The Upcountry Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by Upcountry Fiber, ©2022. It is distributed without charge to all its customers.



is a high-speed fiber internet provider to the five counties of Anderson, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens and Spartanburg. Founded by Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER, Upcountry Fiber was created to bridge the digital divide across rural areas of South Carolina. Offering symmetrical internet speeds up to 1 Gbps over a fiber network, Upcountry Fiber offers the fastest and most reliable high-speed internet in the area.

UpcountryFiber.com

888-760-2111

Email us at info@UpcountryFiber.com

Construction Updates & FAQs:

UpcountryFiber.com/Updates

24/7 Repair Line:

888-760-2111 – select option for repair

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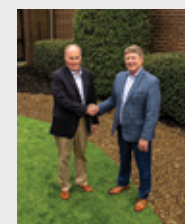
Broadband Deployment Manager

Carter.Burton@wctel.com

Produced for West Carolina Tel by:



On the Cover:



BREC CEO Jim Lovinggood and WCFIBER CEO Jeff Wilson are collaborating on Upcountry Fiber to bring broadband to the Upstate. See story Page 8.

Benefits of fiber

At Upcountry Fiber, we've been committed to bringing local businesses and residents the best in communications technologies. Today, we are proud to bring you the best in internet technologies with a fast, reliable, fiber-based network.

Why fiber? Here are a few of the reasons companies like ours are building fiber networks all across rural America.

FIBER IS FAST

Simply put, fiber is the fastest technology available. Traditional internet connections range from 10 to 25 Mbps, but fiber internet can be as fast as 1 "Gig" — that's 1,000 Mbps!

FIBER IS RELIABLE

Unlike other internet technologies, fiber internet is not slowed down by weather, physical obstructions or electromagnetic interference. That means less downtime and a more reliable connection for businesses and individuals alike.

FIBER IS FUTURE-PROOF

While copper and cable have limits, society is nowhere near inventing technologies that will outpace the speeds fiber can provide. Even as the needed bandwidths increase over time, fiber internet will continue providing sufficient speeds for years to come.

FIBER IS SCALABLE

As companies like Upcountry Fiber build out fiber networks, it's easy to lay more fiber strands than an area currently needs. This allows us to quickly increase capacity later, as the demands of technology call for it, without having to go back and build another new network for our community.

FIBER IS IDEAL FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Delivering a strong internet connection to rural areas can be a challenge. Because fiber is unparalleled in its ability to maintain fast speeds over long distances, it is an ideal solution for communities like ours. We are committed to bringing rural customers the same speed and reliability enjoyed by many homes and businesses in larger cities, and fiber helps us do exactly that.

With our advanced fiber network, Upcountry Fiber is providing fast, reliable internet that enables access to cutting-edge technologies for improved health care, education, agriculture, business and much more.



Memorial Day

In observation of Memorial Day, Upcountry Fiber offices will be closed on May 30.

Relaxing

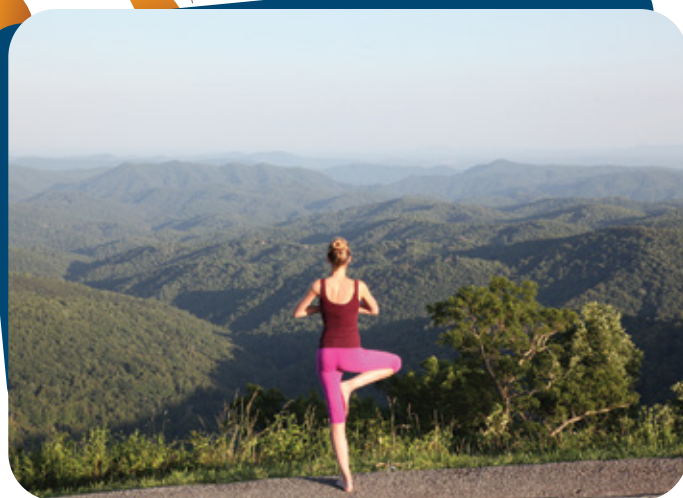
DESTINATIONS

Yoga retreats offer an escape from daily realities

Story by ANNE BRALY

When thermometers begin to rise, it's natural to think about a beach vacation, but during summer months, crowds are less than ideal. Instead, head toward the country and the mountains where you can get away from it all and reconnect with nature.

Here are five picturesque properties around the South to consider, each one far from your noisy neighbors and the stresses of everyday life. Some offer yoga, others a chance to hike new paths, while one is ideal for sitting back to catch up on your quilting or scrapbooking.



GRAND OAK RETREAT • SCOTTSBORO, ALABAMA

Grand Oak Retreat is located on a large stretch of land overlooking Lake Guntersville, cradled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. It's open to all, but caters to scrapbookers, quilters and other crafty folks.

The large lodge with a beautiful, wraparound porch has five bedrooms with multiple beds to accommodate most families or groups. There's a large work area where crafters can spread out and work while enjoying panoramic views of the lake. Snacks and drinks are available 24 hours a day in a well-stocked kitchen, and guests get three home-cooked meals with a menu that uses local ingredients depending on the season.

For a fully relaxed retreat, guests may arrange massages at an extra cost.

For reservations or more information, visit grandoakretreat.com.

TENNESSEE FITNESS SPA • WAYNESBORO, TENNESSEE

Think of a retreat to Tennessee Fitness Spa along historic Natchez Trace as a summer camp for adults. There's swimming, racquetball, a gym, sauna, hot tub and hiking trails around the picturesque Natural Bridge, a geologic formation thought to be the only double span natural bridge formation in the world. It's a short walk from the spa's dining hall and makes for a beautiful meditative experience.

The center places a strong focus on getting guests back in shape, whatever their goals: losing weight, quitting smoking, detoxing or simply relaxing by the pool. It's a good opportunity to shed that excess weight, whether it be physical or mental, through fitness training, yoga, meditation, water aerobics and more. Just let the staff know what you want, and they'll tailor a routine to meet your needs.

Accommodations range from standard rooms to penthouse suites and private cottages. Most people stay for one week, but guests can arrange for shorter stays, depending on availability.

For more information, visit tennesseefitnessspa.com.

THE RED HORSE INN LANDRUM, SOUTH CAROLINA

This hidden gem tucked into South Carolina's Blue Ridge mountains is an adults-only getaway offering an elegant escape from everyday routines. It's a chance to relax, recover and rejuvenate — all the things you want from a resort vacation. Leave the cooking, cleaning, kids and work behind. Disconnect from everyday life and reconnect with your partner.

Reserve a room in the inn or in one of a half dozen cottages, all with luxury bedding and other appointments. Breakfast is served daily, and afternoons can be spent on the terrace with a glass of wine from the award-winning wine bar.

The inn is located just north of Greenville, South Carolina, a town known for its food scene, and also an area folks looking for majestic waterfalls and nature trails visit.

For more information, visit theredhorseinn.com.

ART OF LIVING RETREAT BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA

Meditation and yoga are two powerful tools for bringing on health and happiness, and at Art of Living Retreat, high in the Blue Ridge Mountains overlooking Boone, North Carolina, you'll rediscover yourself. The center offers getaways focused on happiness and meditation, along with silent retreats. There's also Sri Sri yoga, an ancient, holistic method that integrates body, mind and spirit, targeting internal organs, circulation and body alignment.

Weekend retreats might also include artmaking and journaling or a girls-only time with nature trails, meditation and yoga. Packages at Art of Living include

accommodations at the center's Shankara Wellness hotel with meditation and yoga classes daily, along with one treatment like massage or relaxation therapy, and three meals a day. Snag a seat outside with views of the mountains if the weather allows.

For more information, visit artoflivingretreatcenter.org.

CLIFFVIEW RESORT CAMPTON, KENTUCKY

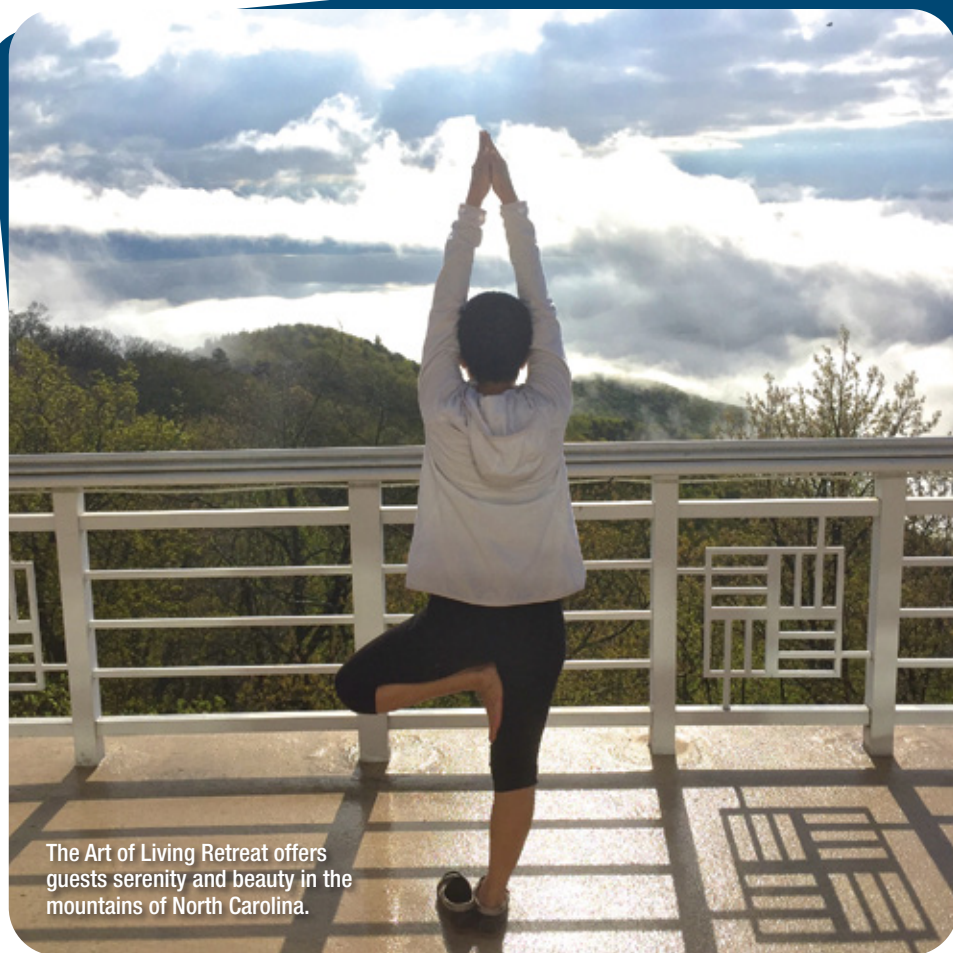
Come for stunning views of the Red River Gorge, and stay for the adventure you'll experience at Cliffview Resort.

There's plenty to do off the beaten track — a chance to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and connect with nature on a grand scale. Go rock climbing on the cliff high above, take a kayak and explore life in an underground cave beneath the gorge, or zip line above it to experience the magnificent Red River Gorge from a different perspective.

For a more relaxing retreat, take a leisurely walk on well-traveled paths, or wet a line and fish for your dinner from a stocked pond located on the resort property. Or venture over to the Red River and test your skill against smallmouth bass and sunfish.

Book a room in the lodge where you'll find a comfortable place to rest your head with breakfast the next morning. There are 16 rooms in the lodge, plus two cabins, each with 11 to 12 bedrooms and full kitchens to cook your own meals. Don't want to cook? You're on vacation, after all. Red River Gorge and nearby Daniel Boone National Forest have a number of restaurants with offerings ranging from pizza to hot dogs and barbecue to brew pubs.

For information, log onto cliffviewresort.com or call 606-668-5204. 📞



The Art of Living Retreat offers guests serenity and beauty in the mountains of North Carolina.

Perfect pa perfect timing for



Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photos by MATT LEDGER

It may not quite be a partnership made in heaven, but with the Blue Ridge Mountains standing watch over the Upcountry Fiber project, it seems awfully close.

Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and Abbeville-based WCFIBER announced in 2020 a partnership that would help deliver high-speed, broadband internet and telecommunications to some 65,000 residential, industrial and business customers across the BREC service area. The joint project will cover around 7,200 miles and stretch across five Upstate South Carolina counties, including Anderson, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens and a bit of Spartanburg.

"It's fair to say that Blue Ridge Electric would not have ultimately made the decision to get into this space and offer this service had it not been for our friends at WCFIBER," says Zach Hinton, BREC's vice president of economic development and support services. "Our partnership is such a good fit for so many reasons — we both place our members first and have a collective spirit of service. Additionally, each cooperative brings mutual expertise in our industries to the project. It's a partnership that will bring tremendous benefit to our members."

Likewise, Shannon Sears, WCFIBER's director of commercial operations, says WCFIBER couldn't have expanded its footprint beyond the southern tip of Anderson County without BREC. "If it weren't for our fiber buildout with

Blue Ridge, this partnership would be unattainable because of the terrain and other things," Sears says. "BREC had a vision for their members, and they partnered with a cooperative they knew would provide really, really good service over that network."

HARD AT WORK

At the beginning of 2021 and soon after the announcement of the partnership, crews began working to install the fiber optic cables that will bring world-class internet speeds and an array of business and residential services to the northwestern South Carolina foothills. For WCFIBER, the partnership and the project just made sense as the need for broadband became accentuated with classrooms going online and workers moving out of the office and into the virtual sphere more often.

Sears says WCFIBER's goal is to continue to provide services to underserved areas, just as the cooperative has in and around Abbeville County since 1952. "The Blue Ridge Electric area was underserved, and we felt like this was a great opportunity to partner with BREC, which had already built a very strong brand for 80-plus years that is known for providing great service just like we've been doing with telephone and broadband," Sears says.

In just a few months of work, Hinton estimates, around 20% of the buildout is complete with miles and miles to go. Even with the progress that was made in 2021,

the two companies have estimated that the entire project will take five to seven years to complete. However, given the importance of connectivity in today's world, they are hopeful that an influx in federal funding to the state from COVID-19 relief bills and the federal infrastructure bill will speed up the process.

According to South Carolina Senate President Thomas Alexander, "The legislature has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with this federal funding to invest in critical infrastructure. We see broadband as a critical need in infrastructure, and I've been pleased with the overwhelming and bipartisan support to reach this goal. I hope that we will use this federal money for transformative projects, such as connecting rural areas with broadband that will serve our citizens for future generations."

Upcountry Fiber is working diligently with the South Carolina Legislature to make broadband funding a priority this legislative session.

Max Crawford, area district manager for Upcountry Fiber, moved from WCFIBER to oversee the project as crews began work and marketing teams started to spread the word among BREC customers and beyond.

A team of contractors and employees is hard at work, and they're making an economic impact of their own in the area, Crawford says. Some, like Crawford and his family, have relocated to the foothills from Abbeville. "We've got approximately 200 people working on this, whether it be

Partnership

Upcountry Fiber



contractors or employees, so there's already been an economic impact," he says. "We've got a strong team working in the area."

As a matter of fact, crews are working in different areas at the same time. They initially got started in Anderson, Pickens and Oconee counties. And it's just the beginning. By early March, crews had added about 300 miles of fiber optic cable with another 200 miles under construction. "This is a big project for BREC, and it's certainly a big project for WCFIBER," Sears says. "There are a lot of contractors, and the business team has added people to be able to serve businesses in the BREC area."

WHAT IT MEANS

The need for reliable internet connectivity has gained such momentum over the past decade that it has become known as the fourth utility along with electricity, water and gas. In rural areas, for instance, it has been a necessary tool for telemedicine, helping doctors meet the needs of their patients. In the recent past, virtual classrooms and business meetings have become the norm. More workers are asked to work remotely, making reliable home internet connectivity a necessity.

"Our society has changed," Sears

says. "More devices are out there. The demand for broadband is out there, and next year it will be the same and even more."

Hinton says the subject of connectivity comes up at every meeting with potential industries and businesses looking to make a move to the Upstate. "I handle all the economic development projects that BREC is involved in, and that's always a big question from industries looking to settle in South Carolina," he says. "Do we have accessibility to quality internet service? So, the fact that we're able to say, 'Yes' to those people and work with them is a big deal. We're able to say we're with them."

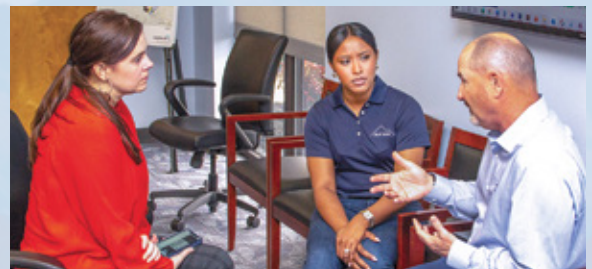
Connectivity can also be a deciding factor in the competitive world of economic development when companies are bringing in people they need to work for them. "When you think about attracting a quality labor force to work in those industries, folks want to live where there's high-speed, quality internet. We've heard this plenty of times — people are making their living decisions, where they move to, build and raise their families based on where good internet services are available," Hinton says. "It touches economic development on many fronts for us." 🗨️



SC Senate President Thomas Alexander, left, is briefed on the scope of the Upcountry Fiber project.



WCFIBER CEO Jeff Wilson, left, and BREC President Jim Lovinggood are guiding their teams in the cooperative approach to the new Upcountry Fiber project that will bring high-speed internet to the Upstate.



BREc vice president of government and community relations Elizabeth Edwards Martin, left, meets with BREc marketing specialist Daja Davidson and WCFIBER director of commercial operations Shannon Sears.

GAMING on the GO

Sure, mobile games may be a distraction many of us turn to while waiting in line or during a slow episode of our favorite TV binge. But that doesn't mean they have to be bad. As our mobile devices have evolved into tiny computers in our pockets, the visuals and clever design of mobile games have grown right along with them. If you're burned out on Angry Birds and Candy Crush, try one of these games to keep your idle thumbs busy.

Good Sudoku

There are plenty of sudoku apps available but only one that puts goodness right in the name. The game's designers set out with the goal of helping players fall in love with the familiar Japanese logic puzzles. Clear difficulty levels, helpful hints and coaching for new techniques at each level make it the perfect entry for the sudoku-curious out there. If you're already a logic master, it also has more than 70,000 puzzles to be conquered and a global leaderboard to chase.

THREES

You'd be hard-pressed to find a better puzzle game than Threes. It's easy to pick up since there are only four directions a player can swipe. But the task of pairing numbers into ever greater multiples of three can quickly become a challenge requiring players to think at least three moves ahead. Whether you're looking to pass 5 minutes or chase high scores on the leaderboard, Threes is worth checking out.

Among Us

Among Us became wildly popular in 2020 in part because it's easy to understand. A group of players attempts to prep their spaceship for takeoff while one imposter tries to pick the others off while no one is looking. It's a simple premise that can lead to chaotic hijinks as players try to smoke out the saboteur. Lying to your friends has never been so fun.

DEVICE 6

Who knew your phone could be the perfect platform for a clever noir story? Device 6 puts players in the role of Anna, a woman with amnesia trying to figure out how she woke up on a mysterious island. The game infuses the classic text adventure genre with modern style and engaging visuals as words move around the screen in unexpected ways. If you're looking for something a little different from the typical mobile experience, Device 6 is bound to have a few welcome surprises in store.

NYT CROSSWORD

Sure, you could pull out the newspaper and pen to fill out your crossword the old-school way. Or you could save yourself the ink stains and errors by tackling the daily crossword on your phone. The app offers Mini and Midi puzzles for a challenge you can knock out in minutes. Or take on the full crossword each day, along with the archive of over 10,000 puzzles. Now there's no excuse not to stay sharp.





Make the CONNECTION

The video game industry remains scorching hot, and not just because people turned to a virtual distraction during the pandemic. Certainly, they did. However, the trajectory of the gaming industry continues a yearslong trend of increased popularity.

Nielsen, a company tracking how various audiences use media, provided some insight last year into video game usage.

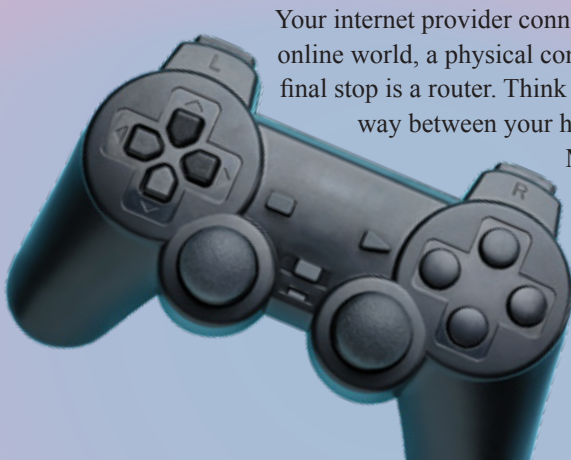
At one point during the pandemic, 55% of U.S. consumers reported playing video games. In fact, people were buying games at a fast clip, with sales rising about 14% during 2020.

There's a twist with modern gaming, too. People use it to connect with each other. The game Fortnite became famous for in-game live events, and more and more people began using services like Twitch to watch others play games, according to Nielsen.

Simply, gaming goes beyond, well, just a game. It's an experience, one made possible by fast, reliable internet.

But are you maximizing your connection for how you experience gaming?

THE CONNECTION



Your internet provider connects your home to the online world, a physical connection where the final stop is a router. Think of this as the gateway between your home and the internet.

Most modern routers allow two types of connections: Wi-Fi and Ethernet.

BENEFITS OF WI-FI

Wi-Fi uses radio waves to connect the router to your devices, eliminating the clutter of cables. Devices ranging from televisions to refrigerators can use this technology to connect online.

Gaming-related benefits of Wi-Fi include:

- Convenient for mobile games on phones and iPads.
- The ability to connect multiple devices without cables.
- Most devices, including computers, set-top boxes and more, have Wi-Fi connectivity. The same can't be said for wired Ethernet connections. Even some laptops lack the option for an Ethernet connection.
- For watching streaming content such as Twitch, Wi-Fi wirelessly takes devices ranging from TVs to tablets online.

BENEFITS OF ETHERNET — WHEN GAMING GETS SERIOUS

An Ethernet connection is a physical link between your device and router. With modern online gaming, success can depend upon how fast the twitch of a finger on a controller can be translated into actions in an online world living on a faraway computer server.

When speed matters, an Ethernet is often the right option.

- Consistency: Unlike Wi-Fi signals, which can be affected by walls or even signals from other devices, the wired connection's speed should remain consistent with that provided by your internet service.
- Lower latency, which is the time it takes a bit of data to leave your device, reach its online destination and then complete the round trip. With gaming, lower latency is critical, and Ethernet is a difference-maker.
- Simple and secure: Connect an Ethernet cable to your device and to your router and get playing. It's that simple. Unlike with Wi-Fi routers, you typically do not need to enter a password to connect.
- The downside is that cable clutter is real. Serious gamers in particular, though, will benefit from devices connected via Ethernet.

Broadband benefits

Upcountry Fiber offers new solutions to old problems for area businesses

Story by JOHN CLAYTON | Photos by MATT LEDGER

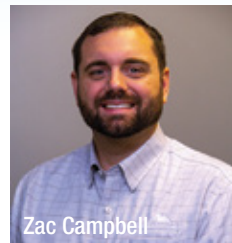
The folks at Upcountry Fiber are looking forward to serving customers in five northwestern counties in Upstate South Carolina as the partnership between Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER begins to take hold in the foothills.

When the project, which spans over 7,000 miles, is complete, high-speed broadband internet services will be available to some 65,000 residents in Anderson, Oconee, Pickens, Greenville and Spartanburg counties. The arrival of Upcountry Fiber also brings with it notable advantages for business owners that go beyond internet connectivity. These benefits can be as simple as analog telephone lines or as complex as broadband internet-based phone with managed IT services and business consulting.

Zac Campbell, business solutions

manager for WCFIBER and Upcountry Fiber, says finding the right fit for each business customer is imperative and a large part of the customer service that Upcountry Fiber, like WCFIBER, prides itself on. “What really makes our business solutions unique is our exemplary customer service and unprecedented reliable fiber network,”

Campbell says. “Every business has different internet service needs, depending on their scope and reach. We’re committed to working with area businesses to build a plan that fits their day-to-day needs, backed by a local presence where, together, we’re invested



in making our communities connected and vibrant.”

Packages available through Upcountry Fiber Business Solutions include managed network services, hosted telephone solutions, high-speed business internet, business camera security systems, free business consultation and IP high-definition television.

Residents and business owners who will soon be able to use Upcountry Fiber have been underserved even as the need and demands for reliable high-speed internet have risen dramatically over the past decade. They will no longer have to turn to less reliable and more expensive alternatives like satellite internet, and they won’t have to contact a large call center thousands of miles away to solve problems. “When you call, you’re going to get somebody in your town or in the next town over,” Campbell says.

While Upcountry Fiber is new to the Upstate, the business solutions team is not new to introducing improvements in other geographical areas. WCFIBER expanded services into Greenwood County over the past few years, bringing with them the customer service, knowledge and one-on-one attention business owners often require.

Brandon Smith, Upcountry Fiber business solutions consultant, said the Greenwood business community soon embraced the new kid in town — and he says he expects potential Upcountry Fiber customers to do the same as they learn more about everything the business solutions team has to offer. “Once the brand got going in Greenwood, word of mouth really drove that project, and I think it’s going to do the same up here,” Smith says. “We already have the advantage of the Blue Ridge Electric brand, and that’s a positive. I really think as brand awareness for Upcountry Fiber gets out and people experience our customer service, word of mouth is going to help us spread quickly.”

◀ The Upcountry Fiber Business team includes business solutions project manager Lana Botts, left. She teams up with business solution consultants Brandon Smith and Kristen Booth to assist companies seeking broadband solutions.



Building broadband in the Blue Ridge

Upcountry Fiber will span the digital divide, providing high-speed internet access to underserved areas. The company combines the expertise of Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER. Together, they will grow Upcountry Fiber to provide the services you need and deserve. The new service launched with a pilot project in 2021 and has continued to grow in 2022.



A “stitching” crew digs dozens of pits, then pneumatically bores holes connecting them along the street. Then, the crews pull the orange fiber optic conduit to create the circuit. Another crew will follow with the fiber optic cable, and a third crew will splice the lines to complete each circuit.

Construction Updates & FAQs
UpcountryFiber.com/Updates



Fiber construction projects underway or completed:

Upcountry Fiber crews are deploying to several areas.

Here are the total miles of fiber completed by May 1st, or in active construction:

- ▶ North Pickens - 270 miles
- ▶ Central/Anderson/Pickens - 130 miles
- ▶ Echo Hills - 20 miles
- ▶ Port Bass - 95 miles
- ▶ Friendship - 24 miles
- ▶ Six Mile - 21 miles

Pardon our mess

Our crews are hard at work bringing incredibly fast fiber internet to the area. Please slow down or move over when passing through our construction zones.

So *fresh* and so

A unique technique locks more flavor in your veggies

The profusion of fresh vegetables coming our way this spring means it's time to learn a bit about blanching, a technique that brings out the beautiful flavors that only fresh produce can bring — a taste explosion.

Blanching can be a cook's best friend. It destroys enzymes that make green veggies turn brown and mushy, so it's ideal when you want to add green vegetables, such as peas and asparagus, to your risotto. Blanching also removes bitterness from some of our more bitter vegetables, like broccoli rabe. It's also a great way to skin tomatoes, as blanching loosens the skins without cooking the fruit, something that also works for peaches and plums. And if you're planning to prepare and serve a veggie platter, blanch the carrots, broccoli, pea pods and cauliflower. The veggies will retain their color, but your guests will find them much easier to chew.

Blanching is nothing more than boiling vegetables until they're just crisp-tender, then plunging them in an icy bath. It sounds like a simple process, and it is, but there are just a few steps to follow to bring out the best of spring and summer's bounties.

If you're a vegetable gardener, think ahead for the cold days of winter when the flavor of fresh vegetables is just a memory, that is, unless you've blanched in advance of freezing them. Not only does blanching preserve the color and texture of your vegetables, it will also preserve their nutrient content.

Now that you know why you should blanch, here's how:

In order to stop the enzyme action that breaks vegetables down, the food must reach 180 degrees.

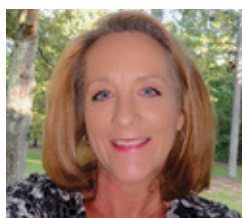
The time spent in boiling water and time spent in ice water should be roughly equal. If you're not able to prepare a cold immersion for your vegetables, putting them in a colander under cold running water will work.

Adding salt to your boiling water will help make green vegetables even greener. Steer clear of lemon juice or other acids, though; these will react with the

chlorophyll and turn your greens brown. And don't use baking soda — it will damage the nutrients found in vegetables.

Use 1 gallon of water for each pound of food to be blanched. If you overload the water with vegetables, it will lower the water's temperature and slow the cooking process, defeating the purpose.

Once the vegetables are crisp-tender, move them from the boiling water and into a large container of ice water. This will stop the cooking process. Then you're ready to bag them for freezing or use them right away in your spring and summer meals. 🍷



FOOD EDITOR
ANNE P. BRALY
IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.

clean

SALAD NICOISE

- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- 1/2 pound of small potatoes
- 1/2 pound of green beans, blanched
- 1/2 head of green lettuce, washed and torn into bite-sized pieces
- 1 (7-ounce) can of tuna fish
- 4 ounces of tomatoes, diced, or cherry tomatoes
- 10 black olives
- 2 tablespoons of capers
- 1/2 cup of vinaigrette dressing (your favorite)

Cook the potatoes until tender and let cool.

Build each salad starting with a layer of lettuce, then add half the vegetables, including potatoes, tuna, eggs and olives to each plate. Sprinkle with capers. Serve with vinaigrette dressing. Makes 2 servings.



RISOTTO WITH BLANCHED ASPARAGUS

- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed, cut into 2-inch lengths
- 5 cups canned or homemade chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1 1/2 cups arborio rice
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 3/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (about 3 ounces)

Blanch asparagus pieces in a large pot of boiling, salted water for 2 minutes. Drain. Rinse asparagus under cold water. Drain asparagus well.

Bring chicken broth to a simmer in a small saucepan. Reduce heat to low and keep broth hot. Heat olive oil in a heavy large saucepan over medium heat. Add chopped onion and saute until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add rice and stir for 3 minutes. Add dry white wine and cook until liquid evaporates. Continue cooking until rice is tender but still slightly firm in center and mixture is creamy, adding chicken broth 1 cup at a time and stirring almost constantly, about 20 minutes. Add blanched asparagus pieces and stir until heated through, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Add 6 tablespoons butter and stir until incorporated. Stir in grated Parmesan cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Makes 4-6 servings.

WALNUT BROCCOLI SALAD

- 2 pounds broccoli florets
- 1/2 cup toasted walnuts
- 1/2 cup jumbo mixed raisins
- 8 strips bacon cooked and crumbled
- 1/2 red onion thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Bring a big pot of water to a boil and season it liberally with salt. It should taste like the ocean. Add the broccoli florets to the water and cook for 60 seconds, until they're bright green in color. Immediately drain the broccoli florets, then rinse with cold water for 2 minutes or place in an ice-water bath until the broccoli has cooled down.

Transfer the broccoli to a salad spinner, and spin the broccoli dry or drain well if you don't have a spinner. Then blot dry further with a kitchen towel to prevent any excess water from diluting the dressing.

Combine the broccoli with the toasted walnuts, raisins, bacon, onion, mayonnaise, vinegar and salt and black pepper, to taste. Stir well. Chill for at least 30 minutes, preferably an hour, before serving to allow the flavors to marry. Makes 6 servings.



AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

WHAT IS IT?

The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC program that helps connect families and households struggling to afford internet service. You could be eligible for a discount of up to \$30/month toward broadband service.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

A household is eligible if one member of the household meets at least one of the criteria below:

- Has an income that is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines
- Participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC, or Lifeline
- Is approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating broadband provider's existing low-income program



**Get Internet
for as low as
\$20/month!**



Learn more at:
UpcountryFiber.com/acp