



UPCOUNTRY

MARCH/APRIL 2023

CONNECTED

CABIN FEVER

Explore Table Rock
State Park

MAKING THE
GRADE

ADVENTUROUS
FUN



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Fresh opportunities

New funding supports rural broadband

Closing the digital divide is an ongoing effort and not a one-time mission. Every month the diligent work of NTCA members helps to bridge these gaps. Even in the most remote areas, telcos are building world-class broadband networks and enabling critical, life-altering technologies and applications.

Our leaders here in Washington, D.C., continue to notice the gains being made in communities like yours. While the 118th Congress is still getting its feet under it, so to speak, we are seeing interest in several broadband-related bills that could help our members and their customers, and federal agencies continue to implement and execute on various broadband funding programs.

As community-based providers with a long history of service and successful performance, telcos are in a good position to vie for critical financial support for broadband deployment, such as the \$42.5 billion Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program. This year, we expect the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to announce allocation of this money to the states and U.S. territories, and, eventually, grants could be given out to providers like yours to serve even more people.

In anticipation of these distributions, we spent much of 2022 on Capitol Hill and with local, state and federal agencies to urge them to work closely with NTCA members. We also brought key decision-makers to NTCA meetings, conferences and webinars, and we provided members-only tools to help position telcos.

Such efforts pay dividends. For example, NTCA member companies have already received more than \$1 billion in U.S. Department of Agriculture ReConnect loans and grants. Job one for NTCA and its members continues to be pursuing policies that will enable small rural providers to keep delivering on the promises of broadband connectivity every day and for decades to come. 📶

Fiber internet

It makes a difference



Fiber internet makes essential tools and services possible: commerce, education, entertainment, personal communication and more.

Here are a few examples, highlighted by the Fiber Broadband Association, offering a detailed look at how fiber networks make a difference:



1 FASTER INTERNET: Creating a network capable of keeping up with growing consumer demand for videos, music streaming and online gaming is no easy task. Fiber, however, consistently outpaces the fastest download and upload speeds of older technologies like cable, DSL and wireless.



2 INCREASED HOME VALUES: Studies have shown that fast, reliable broadband is rated as the single most important amenity for rented or multifamily homes. Access to fiber broadband increased rental and property values by as much as 8%.



3 FIBER NETWORKS HELP LOCAL ECONOMIES: There's growing evidence fiber connectivity not only encourages businesses to stay in their locations but also helps them grow and become more productive. It even attracts new businesses, particularly in high-tech industries.



4 SUSTAINABLE: The glass that makes fiber work so well is made from sand, which is plentiful and requires less energy and creates less pollution to acquire than older technologies.

This could have been an email

How digital literacy is shaping communication in the workplace

Story by DREW WOOLLEY



Clear communication can be a challenge at the best of times. But particularly for remote workers relying on digital chat and email tools, it's never been easier for wires to get crossed, even during simple exchanges.

ALWAYS ONLINE

In some cases, the generation gap can rear its head even before the first word has been typed or spoken. While baby boomers and members of Generation X tend to prefer doing business face-to-face or over the phone, younger generations are much more digitally inclined.

According to research from Purdue University, both millennials and Generation Z or Zoomers — people born between the mid-1990s and about 2010 — tend to prefer communicating by email, instant message, text and social media. Having grown up with access to high-speed internet, Zoomers expect a rapid response to messages, based on a survey by marketing company LeadSquared.

THANKS.

It's no secret periods at the end of lone sentences are falling by the wayside in texts, chats and social media. For some, it's a punctuational pet peeve. But for younger colleagues, the reappearance of that little dot can carry extra meaning.

For example, while some millennials and older generations might put a period after a short message like "Thanks" or "Good job," for Gen Z, that hard stop can imply coldness or sarcasm. Younger professionals are more likely to use exclamation points to express enthusiasm. So don't worry, they aren't yelling at you.

TBH, IDK

For those who came of age texting before phones could predict what you're trying to type, quick abbreviations for common phrases were a must. BTW (by the way), TBH (to be honest), IMO (in my opinion), JK (just kidding) and IDK (I don't know) are just a few examples.

While many of these abbreviations are now part of the internet's vocabulary, they can be a stumbling block for anyone who didn't grow up seeing them daily. When clarity is a priority, consider taking the extra few seconds to spell it out. 🗨️

A picture's worth a thousand words

As platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams become more popular, emoji are rapidly invading work chats. Many are self-explanatory and can help add some extra expression to a message. Others can be confusing or misinterpreted. So be sure you know what message you're sending.



While many people use the **smile emoji** to denote, well, a smile, some younger professionals interpret it more ironically. That may seem confusing, but just ask yourself if there's any warmth in that smile's cold, dead eyes.



By and large, the **thumbs up** should be saved as a response to a clear yes or no question, or to acknowledge that you've seen a comment that doesn't require a longer reply. Offering a thumbs up in conversations that are any more nuanced could cause confusion about whether any follow-up is needed or suggest you aren't giving the exchange your full attention.



This one is just a public service announcement. Despite — or maybe because — the **crying laughing emoji** is the world's most popular, according to Adobe, Gen Z has officially dubbed it cliché and uncool. If you're looking to stay up on the trends, consider changing things up with the skull emoji to let them know their joke really killed.



Your WiFi experience. Our mission. Your peace of mind. Our promise.

Greetings! We are inching our way toward warmer weather after a colder-than-usual winter. Many of you — our teams included — experienced burst pipes and power outages this past December during the extreme cold.



JEFF WILSON (L)
Chief Executive Officer
WCFIBER

JIM LOVINGGOOD (R)
Chief Executive Officer
Blue Ridge Electric

Times like these remind us of how fragile our homes are in comparison to Mother Nature's power. I know we all took action to fix the broken pipes and protect our homes from future extremes.

We can think of our home WiFi in much the same way. You may not realize it, but with all the WiFi-enabled devices in our homes, we are essentially running our own networks. In fact, the average home now has a minimum of 10 devices connected to WiFi.

These networks must be fortified, too. After all, we don't operate computers without antivirus software. We need to think about our total home WiFi network in the same way. Every device connected to your home WiFi represents access points for incoming threats. Cybercriminals are becoming more and more savvy, looking for any entryway into your home.

Think about the way you spray for insects around your house. What if you could put up a barrier around your home to keep threats from coming in before they even reach your devices? And better yet, what if you could take control over your home WiFi network, by noting every connected

device, setting up guest networks and even having enhanced parental controls and bandwidth prioritization? And, what if the backbone of this system was a commercial-grade, state-of-the-art router capable of WiFi 6 and so much more? We're excited to share that all of this is available through our new managed WiFi plan, WiFi X, the replacement for our previous WiFi Standard service.

Enabled by our GigaSpire routers, which many of you already enjoy, WiFi X brings you the ultimate WiFi experience. Enhanced protections optimize this experience by monitoring and stopping threats, intrusions and viruses on your network. WiFi controls regulate which devices can connect to the network and allow you to block entire internet categories, enable safe searches and prioritize selected devices' bandwidth action. The best part is that WiFi X literally puts the control in your hands through the WiFi X app, the new version of the managed WiFi app many of you already enjoy.

This service is an evolution of our commitment to you: to deliver a stellar internet experience that provides you peace of mind and seamless access to the world. All new customers signing up for service who choose our WiFi plan will be on our WiFi X service. Existing customers who are interested in switching to WiFi X can call us at (888) 760-2111 to sign up.

While we are proud of the quality and speed of our internet service, we are even prouder to be your internet partner. Your enhanced internet experience may be our mission, but your peace of mind is our promise. ☎

Jeff Wilson *Jim Lovingsgood*

The Upcountry Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by Upcountry Fiber, ©2023. 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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Produced for Upcountry Fiber by:



On the Cover:



Table Rock State Park visitors can disconnect on a trail or remain digitally connected in a cabin with Upcountry Fiber broadband. See story Page 8.

Photo by Matt Ledger

Think BIG *and* get the GIG!

Upcountry Fiber's symmetrical broadband provides balanced upload and download speeds.

Know what broadband speed will best serve your lifestyle?

Many homes now have 10 or more internet-connected devices:

- Smart lights, doorbells, TVs and thermostats
- Security camera systems
- Online gaming
- Cloud-based storage
- Streaming music and television



Our premier gig service is the best solution for all your internet needs, from remote workers' videoconferences to online gamers slaying their competition. Gig service provides a lightning-fast and uninterrupted connection that can handle whatever daily bandwidth demands you have.

Need help paying your internet bill?

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a Federal Communications Commission initiative helping connect households struggling to afford internet service. The ACP provides a discount of up to \$30 a month. To see if you qualify and to apply, call 877-384-2575 or visit affordableconnectivity.gov.



SPRING FORWARD!

Don't forget to set your clocks ahead! **Daylight saving time starts at 2 a.m. on Sunday, March 12.** Also, remember to change the batteries in your smoke detectors!

Celebrating Easter!

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Easter! Upcountry Fiber offices will be closed on April 7 in observance of Good Friday.



TIRED OF ROBOCALLS?

The Do Not Call Registry can help reduce the number of unwanted telemarketing calls you receive. Learn more at donotcall.gov, or call 888-382-1222. You must call from the telephone number you wish to register. For TTY, call 866-290-4236.

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OUTDOOR adventures

The Southeast is a treasure trove of thrilling nature excursions

Story by ANNE BRALY

Photo courtesy of Tennessee Department of Tourism

The Southeast harbors its own kind of magic when it comes to outdoor attractions among its ancient mountains and waterways.

“It’s no secret that the Southeast United States is a remarkable hot spot for adventure,” says Terri Chapin, program coordinator for Outdoor Chattanooga. “Thrill-seekers are cool with the variety of outdoor adventures in the abundant lakes, rivers and mountain streams.”

From the region’s national parks and forests to world-class whitewater and wind sports, there’s something for everyone. And when the day is done, Terri suggests balancing your nature fix with a little urban exploration. It’s not too far from the forest to good food. “Here is the secret sauce — the Southeast blends both urban and the wild to offer endless possibilities for multiple cool adventures in one day,” she says.



ABOVE: Kayaking along the Tennessee River is very popular.

LEFT: The South’s sandstone cliffs make for great rock climbing.

RUNNING THE RAPIDS

The Southeast is blessed with numerous rivers offering whitewater excitement. From the Nantahala and the Green River in North Carolina to Chattahoochie Whitewater Express in Georgia, you’re in for an adrenaline rush at every stroke of the paddle.

The **Ocoee River** in eastern Tennessee boasts some of the best freestyle kayaking in the U.S. It was once a dammed waterway, but the Tennessee Valley Authority has been releasing recreational flows since the 1970s, creating a 10-mile stretch of Class III whitewater.

Rapids like Grumpy, Broken Nose, Flipper and Tablesaw create challenges for even the most experienced paddlers. But if you have the skills, the Ocoee has thrills. And if you don’t? Consider rafting. There are several rafting enterprises that will give you the thrills in a more-protected type experience. For a complete list of outfitters, visit timetoraft.com.

The **Chattooga River** begins in the mountains of North Carolina before



Photo courtesy of Outdoor Chattanooga

heading south to form a natural border between South Carolina and Georgia. Though it has a reputation of being one of the most unforgettable whitewater experiences in the South — thanks, in part, to its inclusion in the film “Deliverance” — the Chattooga is actually a river for all, from families to experienced paddlers.

There are two distinct sections. The calmest, Section III, is recommended for kayakers ages 8 and older and has numerous swimming holes. Leave Section IV for those with more experience. It has heart-stopping, Class IV rapids. For a list of rafting outfitters and guides, log onto visitoconeesc.com.

PEDAL POWER

Whether you want a strenuous mountain ride or prefer to pedal through flatter terrain, great cycling trails snake through the forests of the Southeast.

The trail running through Alabama’s **Chewacla State Park** takes you along some of the most beautiful parts of the Southern Appalachian Trail — 696 acres of it, to be exact. Some of it is good for beginners, while other parts add more thrills for experienced cyclists. There are some hand-built trails, as well as the state’s only

wall ride — a 15-foot-high arc wall known as the Great Wall of Chewacla. For more information, visit aotourism.com.

With terrain ranging from flatlands to challenging mountain climbs, some of Kentucky’s best cycling trails are found in **Mammoth Cave National Park**. Mammoth Cave Railroad Bike and Hike Trail is one of those rails-to-trails experiences that offers a choice of adventures. Ride or hike the 9-mile graveled trail that, back in the 1880s, was the rail line of the Mammoth Cave Railroad. The trail offers scenic overlooks, historic sites and interpretive displays along the way. Find more excitement at kygetaway.com.

HANG TIME

Hang gliding is a heart-stopping thrill ride that gives you a bird’s-eye view of the landscape. And the mountains around the Southeast offer the perfect opportunity to take a flying leap.

If you want a beautiful hang gliding location that offers stunning views of the Tennessee Valley, **Lookout Mountain Flight Park** is where you can see the “Grand Canyon of Tennessee” spread out before you.

Experienced guides offer extensive lessons with beginners starting out in the valley below. Altitude and speed on these tandem flights are gained by a tow line attached to a small aircraft. Jumping off the mountain above is only for rated pilots. For more information, visit flylookout.com.

The Wright Brothers took to the air first in **Kitty Hawk, North Carolina**, and now you can, too. There are no mountains, but there is wind, dunes and lots of room to run and land in soft sand. There are schools to teach you how, and it’s a good way to learn the art of hang gliding. Fly on over to kittyhawk.com for more information.

ROCK OUT

When your adventurous spirit calls out to let you know it’s time to hit the rocks, the Southeast’s sandstone cliffs are made for the sport.

The Red River Gorge occupies 29,000 acres within the beauty of Kentucky’s

Daniel Boone National Forest. Its climbing routes are a favorite with some of the best climbs and bouldering options in the world. Log on to redrivergorge.com for more information.

Climbers flock to the **Tennessee Wall** just north of downtown Chattanooga for hundreds of routes for climbing and bouldering. The Tennessee Wall is about 2 miles of cracks, overhanging walls, roofs and other features in a beautiful setting overlooking the Tennessee River in the Tennessee River Gorge. Visit trgt.org for more information.

Go bouldering at **Horse Pens 40**, a privately owned recreation area near Steele, Alabama. It’s home to a highly concentrated boulder field scattered among deciduous trees and grasslands, and it’s been attracting boulderers for decades. There’s a small fee to enter, \$8-\$10, and camping is available for a few dollars more. Check it out at hp40.com. 📍

BELOW: Running the rapids on the Ocoee River.



Photo courtesy of Outdoor Chattanooga

FIBER MODERNIZING THE EXPERIENCE AT TABLE ROCK STATE PARK FOOTPRINT

Story by MORGAN SIMMONS

Reaching the summit of Table Rock Mountain was never meant to be easy. The shortest route is a steep, rocky trail that ascends 3.6 miles from the park's Nature Center to the top of the iconic, 3,124-foot granite dome for which the park is named.

It's a hike Bart Joy knows well. As assistant manager of Table Rock State Park, Bart has seen visitors from far and wide flock to this corner of the Blue Ridge Mountains to test their legs and lungs against the steep-sided Table Rock and its neighboring peak, Pinnacle Mountain. "The pain is part of the reward," Bart says. "From the exposed rock outcroppings on Table Rock, it feels like you can see forever. You know how some places seem to take your breath away? The summit of Table Rock is one of those places."

Built during the Great Depression, Table Rock State Park covers 3,083 acres and welcomes all kinds of outdoor

enthusiasts. The 10-mile trail circuit that connects Table Rock and Pinnacle mountains is a legendary hiking route, but that fact doesn't overshadow the shorter, lower-elevation trails that lead visitors to the park's mountain streams and waterfalls. The park marks the eastern terminus of the Foothills Trail that stretches 80 miles between Oconee State Park and Table Rock State Park.

Anglers can rent a boat and ply the waters of Lake Pinnacle, or they can launch their own boats and enjoy stunning views of Table Rock Mountain from the park's second lake, Lake Oolenoy. In terms of overnight accommodations, the park offers a wide range of creature comforts that include 14 renovated cabins and a campground with 94 sites suitable for tents and RVs.

Table Rock State Park officially opened on April 4, 1938. Native plants from the Pinnacle Lake bed were used to landscape the grounds, and the

combination of hiking trails and rustic cabins enabled the park to serve its dual mission of preserving natural resources while serving the public.

On the second Saturday of each month bluegrass musicians come to the park for an acoustic jam session. The music takes place in a historic lodge, which the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built in the 1930s as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Other prominent examples of the CCC's handiwork at Table Rock State Park are the dam, spillway and stone boat landing located along the 1.9-mile Lakeside Loop around Pinnacle Lake. "This park was built for people to make connections with their surroundings," Bart says. "The young people who joined the CCC built our dams and made our lakes so that people could fish and swim. They cleared trails up the mountain. They wanted to build a park people could experience."



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A group of hikers explore one of the trails in the park.

Carrick Creek Falls gently flows into Carrick Creek and trickles toward Pinnacle Lake.

Table Rock State Park Assistant Manager Bart Joy welcomes visitors to the park.

Upcountry Fiber Business Solutions Consultant Brandon Smith connects an optical network terminal on a cabin at Table Rock State Park.



Photos by Matt Ledger

HIGH-TECH OVERHAUL

Last summer, Upcountry Fiber installed high-speed broadband that reaches practically every corner of Table Rock State Park. Bart says the new fiber optic network represents one of the most significant changes the park has seen since the CCC days when rural electrification was relatively new.

“Switching to high-speed internet has been a huge deal for us,” he says. “Before, everything operated off cell-phones, and where we are, the cellphone signal is not always great. Switching to fiber has not only given us more speed, but much greater reliability as well.”

The park’s rustic cabins now have their own high-speed internet. The general store and visitor center are also connected to the network, and campers staying in tents or RVs can hook up to WiFi at campground bathhouses that also have fiber connections. “With our old internet, there were times when we couldn’t



do business out of our retail store or do reservations,” Bart says. “It’s a pretty serious business problem when your internet keeps going down. During the worst of the COVID pandemic, we saw a huge influx of visitors who wanted to enjoy the outdoors but needed to stay connected. State parks have a role to play as more and more people do their jobs over the internet.”

Inside the park, fiber optic strands have been pulled from a mainline cable and connected to routers inside the cabins

and other service points. Upcountry Fiber partnered with Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative to hang the fiber cable on local power poles just outside the park.

Brandon Smith, business sales consultant with Upcountry Fiber, says an increasing number of state parks are considering fiber as a high-speed, reliable option for visitors who have come to expect access to online conveniences while roughing it outdoors.

Brandon says the several months it took to install the fiber at Table Rock State Park were well worth it. “We ran into a lot of rock. Sometimes we had to dig manually. Staying underground gives the project a cleaner look, and visitors at Table Rock obviously value the views.” 📶

Family TV night

Great family binges for all ages

With the wealth of streaming services available today, there have never been so many viewing options available at the tap of a few buttons. But the constant barrage of new TV shows and movies can make it difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff, especially if you're looking for something the whole family can enjoy.

While services like Disney+ come ready with a huge catalog of family classics, other major streamers are still building up their libraries of kid-friendly content. Here are a few suggestions to help your family start exploring the latest offerings.





AGES 4+

“Bluey,” Disney+ — Inexhaustible Blue Heeler dog Bluey turns everyday life into amazing adventures that stimulate her imagination and emotional resilience. Broken up into short, nine-minute episodes, the Australian animated show has garnered praise for providing constructive messages while remaining engaging for adults.

“Motown Magic,” Netflix — This feel-good series celebrates music, has colorful, eye-catching visuals and instills positive messages about self-confidence. For lovers of oldies, the soundtrack is also a great introduction to Motown and soul classics.

“Sesame Street,” HBO Max — Starting with the show’s 51st season in 2020, HBO Max became the official home of “Sesame Street.” Get access to new episodes immediately so your kids can experience the fun and entertaining brand of education that “Sesame Street” has offered for decades.

“Madagascar: A Little Wild,” Hulu — Drawing on the humor and animation that made the Madagascar movies popular, this musical comedy series follows four young animals in a rescue habitat in Central Park. The show celebrates being yourself and pursuing your dreams, no matter how wild.

“Shaun the Sheep,” Netflix — Adults and young kids alike can enjoy a laugh in this clay-mation series from the makers of “Wallace and Gromit.” Shaun’s barnyard misadventures with his cousin Timmy, sheepdog Bitzer, cat Pidsley and fellow sheep Shirley have even spun off into several movies available exclusively on Netflix.

AGES 7+

“Just Add Magic,” Amazon Prime Video — When Kelly discovers her grandmother’s mysterious cookbook in the attic, she and her best friends, Darbie and Hannah, find out there’s more magic to the recipes than just a secret ingredient. Loosely based on Cindy Callaghan’s popular book by the same name, the show offers magical fun for the whole family.

“Pokemon Journeys,” Netflix — This Netflix series is action-packed enough to grab the attention of new viewers and based on the anime series some parents may have watched when they were kids. Follow young trainer Ash as he travels the world learning about new Pokemon.

“Gravity Falls,” Disney+ — If your little

ones aren’t quite ready for shows like “Stranger Things” or sci-fi classics like “The X-Files,” “Gravity Falls” might be just the ticket. This show offers Pacific Northwest weirdness for the whole family as twins Mabel and Dipper Pines spend the summer with their great-uncle Stan investigating strange mysteries in Oregon.

“Star Wars: The Clone Wars,” Disney+ — Before there was a Disney series for every character in the Star Wars universe, “The Clone Wars” was filling in the gaps between the canonical Star Wars movies. The continuing adventures of Obi Wan, Anakin and young Palawan Ahsoka Tano feature enough surprisingly deep storytelling that parents might be as eager as their kids to hit play on the next episode.

“TrollsTopia,” Hulu — Picking up after the movie “Trolls: World Tour,” “TrollsTopia” follows Poppy as she attempts to unite delegates from the Country Western, Classical, Funk, Techno and Hard Rock tribes in one harmonious city. Watch as they learn to celebrate their differences with a variety of catchy tunes.

AGES 11+

“Raising Dion,” Netflix — Second grader Dion learns to balance super powers and villain battles with the everyday challenges of growing up. The mild violence and portrayals of bullying might be a little much for younger viewers, but tween audiences will find plenty to enjoy.

“The Hardy Boys,” Hulu — Based on the popular book series, this show follows Frank and Joe Hardy when they move from the city to their parents’ hometown of Bridgeport. When their dad takes on a secret investigation, it doesn’t take long for the Hardy boys to get drawn into the mystery.

“The Quest,” Disney+ — A new take on the reality competition series from the team behind “The Amazing Race,” “The Quest” drops eight teens into an immersive fantasy world where it’s their job to save the kingdom. Find out which contestant is The One while scratching that old “Legends of the Hidden Temple” itch.

“The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance,” Netflix — This prequel to the 1982 dark fantasy movie from Jim Henson follows a group of Gelflings as they seek to stop power-hungry overlords from draining the life from their world. Parents who enjoyed the original will enjoy the shot of nostalgia, while younger viewers marvel at the stunning visuals. 📺

Making the grade

Davis Brothers Grading grows from small-business roots

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Pickens-based Davis Brothers Grading & Septic Tank Service was supposed to be a small family business run by two brothers who wanted to strike out on their own. But Joe and Tom Davis ended up getting much more than they bargained for.

It all started back in January 2018. Joe and Tom rented the equipment they needed to do the work and figured they'd eventually hire one employee. But a residential construction boom across the westernmost counties in the Upstate threw a wrench into those plans. "All of our profits have been put back into the business so we can grow," Tom says.

And grow they have. "We didn't like how the people we were working for did things as far as how they treated vendors and treating people equally and fairly," Joe says. "So, we came up with the idea to start our own company. We intended to stay small. That didn't happen."

BUSINESS IS BOOMING

Davis Brothers now employs 24 people and has a fleet of heavy equipment and vehicles that includes three excavators, three compactors, three bulldozers, a couple of dump trucks, a pump truck and seven new pickups — all purchased over the past couple of years as the brothers' investment



Photography by Matt Leiger



ABOVE Joe Davis, left, and his brother, Tom, have reinvested in their business to meet the local need.

BELOW: Tom and Joe review upcoming projects using a WiFi signal and a laptop.

in their business paid dividends. The pair divvied up responsibilities — Joe handles most of the day-to-day office duties, working out of his home for the first 20 months of operation, and Tom oversees the mechanical fleet and works on job sites.

In addition to a fleet of vehicles, the company has added iPads for drivers. Internet connectivity from Upcountry Fiber has streamlined communications among crew members and the office, and it's allowed for storage of records that used to occupy overflowing file cabinets. "Probably 90% of everything is done online," Joe says. "We've just implemented iPads for our business, so we're able to email information from our job sites to the home office now so we can create invoices even quicker."

While the company's growth has been steady, it has not been without its challenges.

Joe says finding and keeping employees has been tough. And so has Mother Nature at times. An EF-3 tornado struck the area in April 2020, damaging the Borg Warner Plant in Seneca, destroying several homes and killing one man. While no one on the Davises' staff was injured, the company didn't escape the storm unscathed. A vital piece of heavy equipment sustained damage. "We had a \$30,000 bill to get that piece of equipment repaired," Joe says. "That was tough for a small company just getting started to swallow."

But the company survived that storm and has thrived ever since. Joe and Tom say the only advertising they've done has been through the company's Facebook page, along with the signage in front of their Gentry Memorial Highway office and on their equipment. "Almost any new customer says that they've been referred by someone that knows us and wants us to come do their work because we take pride in what we do and we treat people fairly," Joe says. 📶

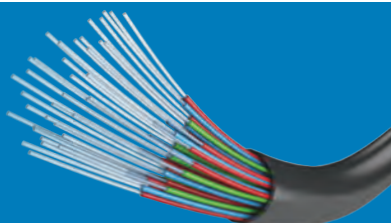
BUILDING BROADBAND in the Upstate

Since launching in 2021, Upcountry Fiber has, on average, deployed more than 100 miles of fiber optic cable each month. We are committed to expanding the reach of our high-speed internet to underserved and unserved areas. The collaboration of teams at Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER will continue as we deploy this vital utility to our neighbors and businesses.



Upcountry Fiber service is available in the green areas shown on our network map. The yellow areas represent places where crews are currently working or where construction was recently completed.

►► To learn more about Upcountry Fiber, and to register your interest in signing up for service, go to UpcountryFiber.com.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Mary Miller



A year ago, **Mary Miller** became the marketing and communications manager for WCFIBER and Upcountry Fiber. She supports both with brand development, marketing, events and overall communications efforts, working closely with Blue Ridge Electric's marketing team to jointly strengthen Upcountry Fiber's marketing efforts.

"We are providing a life-changing service — one that is enabling schoolwork, telecommuting, online shopping and all the daily conveniences that high-speed internet provides," she says.

Mary moved to South Carolina two years ago when her husband, Brady, took a position with a concrete company based in Lexington.

She graduated from Minnesota State University Moorhead with a degree in mass communications. "I spent 18 years within the electric cooperative family, working for Basin Electric Cooperative in Bismarck, North Dakota," she says.

Mary has worked for cooperatives nearly her entire career, first on the electric side, then on the software side, and now broadband. "Cooperative employees are some of the finest humans I've had the pleasure to work with and know," she says. "They embody cooperative values both on and off the job."

Mary and Brady have been married for nearly 10 years. They have a blended family with her son, Jack Green, 17, and Brady's daughters, Grace, 18, and Kate, 16, and two mini dachshunds, Dempsey and Dermot. Mary loves bringing friends and family together to share a meal. Her hobbies include cooking, riding her Peloton, long walks and hikes while listening to audiobooks and podcasts. 📞

MEALS

that will make you

SQUEAL



Ham-bitious ways to use your leftovers

While much of the rest of the world celebrates the arrival of spring with lamb, in the U.S. pink, salty-sweet slices of cured pork, slathered in a sugary glaze, will fill many tables.

The problem, however, is that unless you buy a boneless ham by the pound or one of those small canned hams, you'll probably bring home a large bone-in ham from the market or treat yourself to one from the honey ham store. And more likely than not, after you serve dinner with a couple of side dishes, you're going to have a lot of leftovers.

There are so many ways to use up that ham that go beyond deviling or as a salad topper.

Here are three ideas to make the most of your leftover ham. They're wonderful by themselves, or just make a day of it and make them all, using up most, if not all, of that leftover ham. There's nothing better than a bowl of creamy ham soup with cheesy ham-studded biscuits and a delicious ham sandwich — with a twist.



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Photography by MARK GILLILAND | Food Styling by RHONDA GILLILAND

CREAMY POTATO HAM SOUP

- 4 strips of bacon
- 1/2 cup onion, finely chopped
- 3-4 medium potatoes, peeled and diced (2-3 cups)
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 4 cups chicken broth, preferably homemade (see note)
- 1 1/2 cups cooked ham, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 cup corn, canned (drained) or frozen (no need to thaw)
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- Salt (to taste)
- 1 teaspoon fresh parsley, finely chopped

Saute bacon in a large stockpot over medium-high heat until crisp. Chop the bacon and set it aside on a plate, reserving bacon drippings in the pot. Add onion and potatoes to the pot and saute for 1-2 minutes until fragrant. Stir in flour and mix well until the flour is fully incorporated. Stir in chicken broth and mix until the soup is smooth and uniform. Bring the soup to a boil over medium-high heat. Cover and let it continue to boil for 10-15 minutes until the potatoes are fork tender.

Mash half of the potatoes in the



pot with a potato masher to help thicken the soup.

Stir in ham, corn, heavy cream and black pepper. Let the soup simmer over medium heat and whisk occasionally until thickened to a desired consistency, 5-10 minutes. If the chowder gets too thick, add a little water to dilute it. Add salt to taste. Serve topped with reserved crispy bacon and fresh parsley. Makes about 4 servings.

Note: To make homemade chicken stock, boil a whole chicken in water to cover with some chunks of onion and celery added. Simmer the chicken until tender. You can tell if it's tender by pulling on the leg. If the leg comes out easily, the chicken is ready. Save the chicken for chicken salad or a chicken casserole. But save the stock, too. Salt it, to taste, and use it right away for this soup, or let it cool, pour it into a gallon-size freezer bag and freeze it.



CHEESY HAM BISCUITS

These biscuits pull double duty as a side to soup or cut them in half, add a fried egg and make a breakfast biscuit.

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 cup salted butter (1 stick)
- 1 1/4 cups buttermilk
- 1/2 cup chopped ham
- 1 cup shredded extra sharp cheddar cheese

Preheat the oven to 450 F.
Mix dry ingredients. Cut butter into thin slices and then cut it into the flour

until pieces of butter are small. Add in the buttermilk slowly and incorporate with the flour mixture. Don't overmix.

Sprinkle a small amount of flour on a work surface and place dough on top of it. Press down to make flat and then add the ham and cheddar cheese to the top. Knead dough a few times to incorporate the ham and cheese.

Press or roll out into 1/2-inch thickness. Use a biscuit cutter or rim of a glass to cut out biscuits.

Place biscuits on a baking sheet and bake for 10-12 minutes. Makes about a dozen biscuits.



BAKED HAM SANDWICHES

This is a favorite vintage recipe from Encore! Nashville, a Junior League of Nashville publication from the 1970s. Prepare ahead: These sandwiches are best made early in the morning or the day before to give time for the "custard" to soak into the bread.

- 8 slices bread
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 4 slices ham
- 4 slices sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 3 eggs, slightly beaten
- 2 cups evaporated milk or whole milk
- 1 teaspoon grated onion
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- Dash of Worcestershire sauce
- Dash of cayenne pepper

Trim crusts from bread and butter both sides well. Place 4 slices of bread

in a buttered baking dish. Place a piece of ham on each piece and cover with cheese, then top with remaining bread slices.

Combine remaining ingredients and pour over bread. Refrigerate all day or overnight. When ready to bake, spoon sauce over bread again and bake at 300 F, uncovered, until sandwiches are bubbly and golden brown on top, about 1 hour. Makes 4 servings.

Note: For a heartier sandwich, slices of tomato, avocado or bacon may be layered between the ham and cheese. 🍷



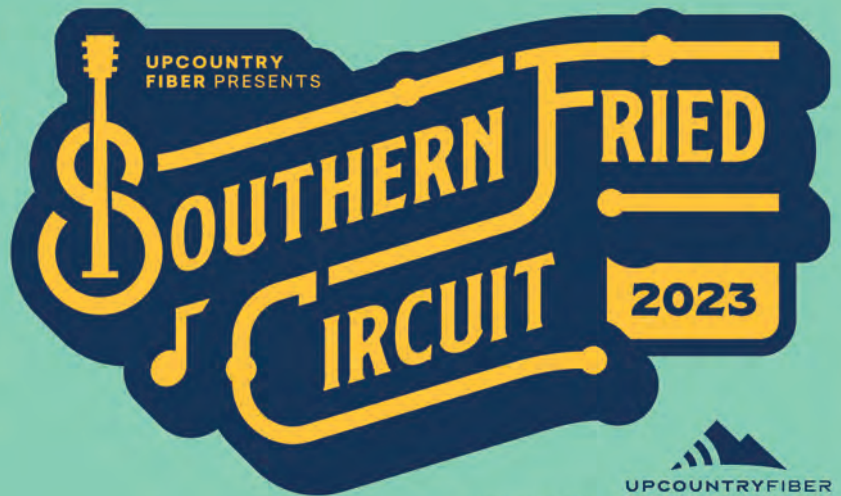


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