



UPCOUNTRY

# CONNECTED

MAY/JUNE 2023

## 'History in the making'

Darius Rucker concert  
benefits Upcountry  
Fiber Foundation





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

## Training broadband professionals

New NTCA partnership will make a difference

**A**s rural communities like yours experience the life-changing benefits of fast, reliable internet service, the NTCA is proud to expand its support of the professionals making these innovations possible.

We are partnering with Northwood Technical College, which will offer remote workforce training opportunities exclusively for NTCA members. This agreement is one example of how we are pulling out the stops to help providers like yours bridge the digital divide.

Building a robust internet network requires a range of skills, but the work doesn't end after the first connections are installed. Maintaining the systems that power work-from-home jobs, telehealth and so much more demands highly skilled workers.

This new initiative with Wisconsin-based Northwood Tech will help NTCA members secure the expertise needed to not only accelerate broadband deployment but also sustain future-proof technologies.

Northwood Tech has several decades of innovative telecommunications and broadband training experience, but its Broadband Academy's focus extends beyond network systems, hardware and software. The consumer experience, and how communications professionals can better serve their customers, is also a priority.

Northwood Tech President John Will says the partnership with NTCA allows the school to reach and train more students and upskill employees who will gain industry-recognized digital badging credentials.

Also, the remote classes mean NTCA members and Northwood Tech will use broadband technology for broadband training. It's just one more example showing how fast internet service can make a difference in the nation's rural communities. 📶

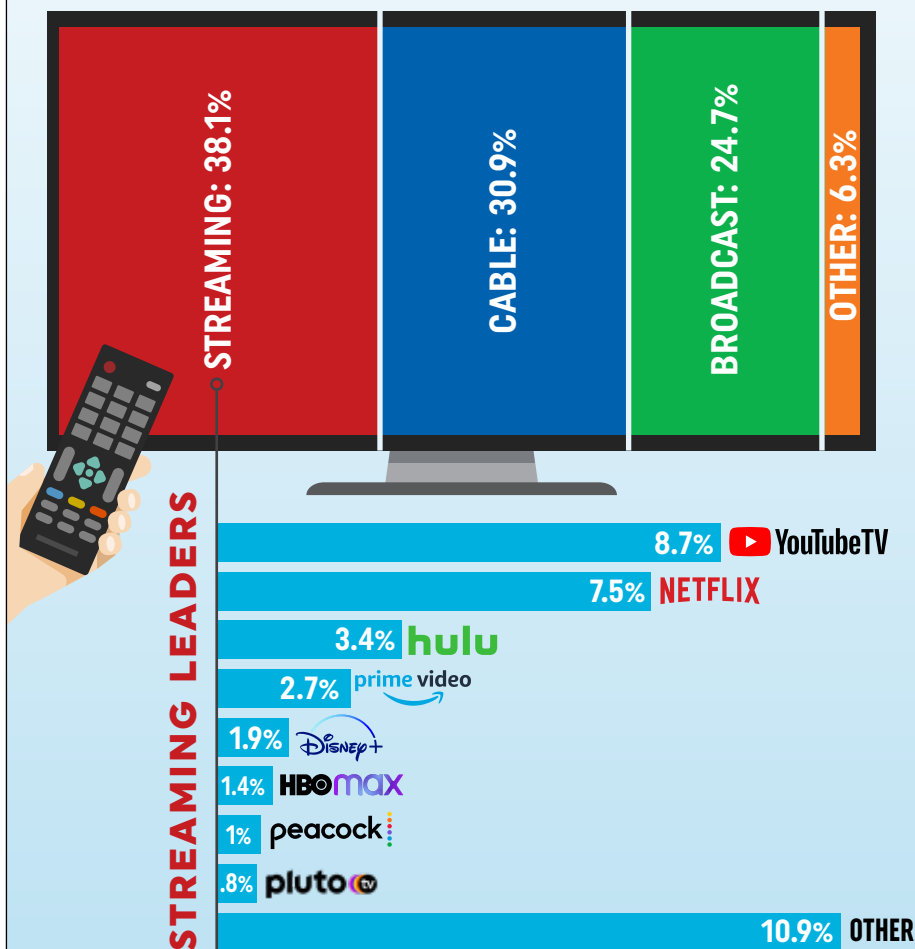
## Entertainment riches

Viewers match their interest to the service

**W**hether you enjoy the predictable pace of a baseball game, catching a 30-minute comedy viewed when your schedule allows, watching a movie from your favorite genre — or just about any other entertainment choice — there's a wealth of options.

And today, you can design the viewing experience you want.

Nielsen, a company that measures audiences to provide important research to advertisers, released a report earlier this year that gives a peek into our viewing habits:



## GAMING FAVORITES

For many people, a little screen time means something more interactive than a show or movie — they play video games. Nielsen identified some of the top games from recent months, so here are a few to consider if you're looking for fresh options.

- ▶ Hogwarts Legacy
- ▶ The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom
- ▶ Resident Evil 4
- ▶ Diablo IV
- ▶ Minecraft





# Home security

## KEEP YOUR DATA SAFE WHILE WORKING REMOTELY



Story by DREW WOOLLEY

**W**orking from home is no longer uncommon. As access to high-speed internet and tools for remote collaboration become more widespread, employers are increasingly warming to the idea of letting people get out of the office at least a few days a week.

The comfort and accessibility of remote work mean it isn't likely to go away anytime soon. But it can also introduce new challenges like security concerns. Whether you're taking your laptop to the nearby coffee shop or setting up a work station at home, keep these guidelines in mind to make sure your work is secure wherever you are.

### STAY UPDATED

When you see an alert about a new software update, don't wait to install it. Among other things, these updates often close security loopholes that malware can use to get access to your data. It's also important to have an antivirus program installed that can protect your devices from the latest viruses, spyware and phishing scams.

### DON'T TAKE THE BAIT

Speaking of phishing scams, it's important to be extra alert when working remotely. Bogus emails can hit an office just as easily as your home computer, but it's easier to spot a fake when the co-worker supposedly asking for sensitive information is in the same room as you. Always make sure your devices are secure outside the office, and be sure to double check any suspicious requests directly.

### PROTECT WORK DEVICES

Working from home often means exposing your work devices to kids or other family members who may not be as careful about security measures as you are. Take steps to make sure others

aren't using your work devices or accidentally seeing sensitive information. Also, try to avoid doing work on personal devices that may not be as well-secured.

### KEEP YOUR VPN ON

Many companies use virtual private networks, or VPNs, to help employees communicate securely via an encrypted network. If your employer does the same, it's important to stay connected for as long as you're working. Dropping that virtual defense could open the door for someone to steal important information.


### STAY IN THE CLOUD

Not only do cloud applications receive regular security updates, but saving your work to cloud storage creates a shared backup of all your work. That way, even if local files on your device are lost, corrupted or stolen, you'll still have access to everything.

### MAKE VIDEOCONFERENCES PRIVATE

The popularity of videoconferencing apps like Zoom has skyrocketed in recent years as more teams collaborate from afar. But a digital meeting space comes with additional security considerations. To prevent unwanted visitors from listening in or even trying to intimidate people, consider requiring a password for calls or keeping any new arrivals in a waiting room.

### UP YOUR PASSWORD GAME

Strong passwords are always important, but they're even more crucial when you're working remotely. A password manager can help you keep track of numerous strong passwords, which should generally be at least 12 characters and contain letters, numbers and symbols. If that's too much to keep up with, consider using favorite song lyrics, movie quotes or other phrases that are easy to remember but more complex than your dog's name. 



PARTNER OF



# Good things take time, but they do come

**G**reetings and happy spring! We've made it past the cold winter, through pollen season, and now we are reaping the rewards. Upstate Carolina is in full bloom. The sun is shining, and the heat is warming our skin as we step outside.

**JEFF WILSON (L)**Chief Executive Officer  
WCFIBER**JIM LOVINGGOOD (R)**Chief Executive Officer  
Blue Ridge Electric

Spring brings the promise of new life and a new day. For Upcountry Fiber, it is also bringing a whirlwind of construction and the promise of a more connected Upstate. We were so pleased to be awarded a \$24 million grant from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Appropriation Bill to help bridge the digital divide where little to no access exists.

What does that mean for you? Approximately 8,200 new customers in rural and underserved areas of Oconee and Pickens counties will have access to high-speed fiber internet service by the end of 2023.

Specifically, Upcountry Fiber is building out our network in these areas:

- **Oconee County** — Coneross, Fair Play, Long Creek, Mountain Rest, Oakway and Toccoa Highway in Westminster
- **Pickens County** — Rocky Bottom area in northern Pickens County above Highway 11 and Shady Grove area in Pickens

We are very thankful that our legislators have ensured rural and underserved communities in Oconee and Pickens

counties have even more potential for competitive growth by allocating funds to build out this necessary utility service. This is a win for everyone. This not only benefits people in their homes, but makes it possible for our residents to have access to better health care, education and job opportunities.

Separate from the ARPA grant, Upcountry Fiber is also continuing to build out its network in portions of Salem in Oconee County and northern Greenville County.

Since our public launch in June 2021, we have completed more than 1,600 miles of high-speed fiber in Pickens and Oconee counties, with 8,000 households, businesses and schools served. The majority of these are in rural and underserved rural areas.

We are averaging a build-out of 100 miles per month, a faster pace than any of our past projects.

It's a new season indeed, and we are looking forward to welcoming many of you into the Upcountry Fiber family in 2023. Together, we're going far — from the comfort of our own homes. 📶

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](mailto:info@UpcountryFiber.com)

Construction Updates & FAQs:  
[UpcountryFiber.com/Updates](http://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:



South Carolina native Darius Rucker will headline the Southern Fried Circuit, a charity concert benefiting the Upcountry Fiber Foundation. See story Page 12.

Photo courtesy of Jim Wright

# Introducing WiFi X

The need for a managed WiFi service is always evolving. Upcountry Fiber is introducing WiFi X to let you take control of your internet experience. WiFi X enables a seamless home WiFi connection that gives you peace of mind and hands-on control for only \$7.95 per month.

## With WiFi X you get:

- Installation of a commercial-grade WiFi 6 wireless router
- Password protection of your wireless network
- Set up of select devices at the time of installation
- A single point of contact for tech support, available 24/7

WiFi X also comes with a mobile app that connects directly to your router and puts control of your WiFi network in your hands.

## The WiFi X app allows you to:

- Troubleshoot with ease
- Monitor all WiFi connections
- Automatically block threats, intrusions and viruses
- Set up enhanced parental controls



**SAY HELLO TO WiFi X**  
Your total home WiFi experience

- Protect your network
- Run speed tests
- Prioritize access by device
- Update passwords
- Set time limits
- Create guest networks

Visit [wcfiber.net/wifx](http://wcfiber.net/wifx) to download the app

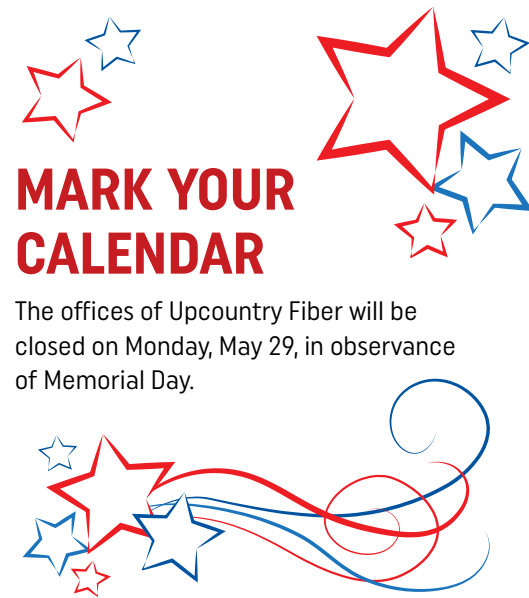
Call or visit (888) 760-2111 | [UpcountryFiber.com](http://UpcountryFiber.com)  
Some restrictions apply. Residential only. One-year agreement.

UPCOUNTRYFIBER  
A STRONGER CONNECTION

PARTNER OF  
BLUE RIDGE ELECTRIC COOP

**Congratulations!**  
2023 GRADUATES

You accomplished so much to reach this milestone. Upcountry Fiber wishes you all the best in your future endeavors!





# ROAD TRIP

*Revival*

YOU'LL GET THERE, EVENT-UALLY!

Story by ANNE BRALY

**F**rom a celebration of Moon Pies in Tennessee to glorifying okra pods in South Carolina, the South is famous for the funk it puts in festivals.

“Funky festivals allow folks to do a deep dive into niche interests in a way that generalized, traditional festivals don’t allow,” says Jamie McCormick, operations manager for the Southeast Festivals &

Events Association. “Maybe you can get lucky and find shrimp and grits or banana pudding at your standard festival, but can you compare 14 different recipes and flavor profiles, or find strawberry banana pudding or shrimp and grits pizza? Offbeat festivals allow us to celebrate the weirdest things about ourselves — the things we think only we like — and in the process,

find out that quite a lot of other people like them, too!”

Here’s a look at festivals across the South that celebrate the love of offbeat fun.

Hula hooping is hard enough on its own, but have you ever tried it while eating a MoonPie and drinking an RC Cola? It’s not as easy as it looks, but you can give it a try at the annual **RC Cola-MoonPie Festival Festival** held the third week of June in the charming, historic town of Bell Buckle, Tennessee.

Folks have come from near and far — England and Australia and up to 17 states — to sample small-town life and see what this quirky festival is all about, says Jenny Hunt, public relations director for festival sponsor Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce. The event kicks off with marathons on certified courses before transitioning into a full day of fun for all, with a grand parade and the crowning of the RC Cola-MoonPie Festival King and Queen; hula-hooping; and a test of skill to see just how many cans of RC Cola



**ABOVE:** The RC Cola-MoonPie festival features a can-balancing contest.

**LEFT:** Hula hooping while eating a MoonPie and drinking an RC Cola isn’t as easy as it may look.

Photos courtesy of Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce



you can stack on your head and walk across the festival stage.

The festival culminates with the cutting of the world's largest Moon Pie to be shared with all.

► Date: June 17

► Information: [bellbucklechamber.com](http://bellbucklechamber.com)

**The Original Gullah Festival** in Beaufort, South Carolina, celebrates the history, customs, cultures and accomplishments of African Americans who carved remarkable lives in the Lowcountry. The festival is like none other, highlighting the culture and history of the Gullah people — their art, crafts, music, dance and yes, their food. This isn't your typical festival fare — it's platters of fried catfish, bowls of shrimp and grits and soul food by the plateful. It's a family-friendly weekend that brings in travelers from around the world.

► Date: May 26-28.

► Information: [originalgullahfestival.org](http://originalgullahfestival.org).



Don't want to commit to an entire day or week of festival fun, but still want to experience the unusual? Here are some places around the South that offer something a little different from your typical sightseeing experience.

It's not often a restroom is a major attraction, but such is the case for the men's room at **Nashville's historic Hermitage Hotel**. The restroom features a spectacular and memorable design, with lime green and black glass tiles, lime green fixtures and a shoe-shine



Photo courtesy of Town of Irmo

No town celebrates okra the way Irmo, South Carolina, does. In fact, there's no other okra festival in the world, other than **Irmo Okra Strut**, a chance for townsfolk and others to showcase the often-unappreciated pods. The festival has been growing strong for more than 50 years and commences with live bands on Friday night. Then the fun begins Saturday morning with a parade — the largest in the state — before opening up to thousands of festivalgoers who come for magic shows, demonstrations and the okra-eating contest.

► Date: Sept. 29-30.

► Information: [okrastrut.com](http://okrastrut.com).

Whether you call him Bigfoot, Sasquatch or Yeti, the **Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival** in Townsend, Tennessee, is the



Photo courtesy of Blount Partnership

**ABOVE LEFT:** Celebrate okra at the annual Irmo Okra Strut.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Live music is part of the fun at Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival.

place to celebrate the big guy. There's Bigfoot wrestling, Bigfoot calling, a wood-carving challenge and other Squatchy competitions. Visitors will also find food vendors and live music, along with Bigfoot hunters and researchers. Do you believe?

► Date: May 6.

► Information: [exploretownsend.com/event/smoky-mountain-bigfoot-festival-2023](http://exploretownsend.com/event/smoky-mountain-bigfoot-festival-2023). 🗨️

station right in the middle of the room. The men's room has been the setting of many business deals in the past, as well as movies and music videos in current times. Note to families: Have a man check it out first to make sure the room is empty.

► Information: [thehermitagehotel.com](http://thehermitagehotel.com)

**Clayton City Cemetery** in Clayton, Alabama, is home to a tombstone with a story. Both the headstone and footstone are shaped like whiskey bottles, designed by an extremely frustrated woman who reportedly told her husband, William T. Mullen, that she'd make him a tombstone shaped like a whiskey bottle if he didn't stop drinking. It seems as though she kept her word.

► Address: 41 N. Midway St.

Read my lips. Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, is home to the world's only museum

dedicated to the art of ventriloquism, the **Vent Haven Museum**. If you love little wooden people, this museum is a must-see. Renovations to the museum are near completion, and it will reopen on May 9.

► Information: [venthaven.org](http://venthaven.org)

**The Harry and Harry Too restaurant** in Bishopville, South Carolina, takes most of its interior decor cues from pop culture — The Three Stooges, Elvis and Tomb Raider, among others. What sets it apart is its colorful handmade outdoor sign promoting its connection to a local monster, the terrifying, car-chomping Lizard Man. The restaurant displays replicas of the monster's footprint casts — the originals are in the town museum — and serves Lizard Man sandwiches.

► Online: Check out the menu and more on Harry and Harry Too's Facebook page.





# WONDERING HOW TO HELP *Mother Nature?*

Extension Service offices offer information and conservation tips

Story by LAZ DENES

**S**outh Carolina agriculture is a \$52 billion industry, one supported by Clemson Extension, a service that does far more than provide unbiased, research-based agriculture information. Each of the state's 46 counties has an extension office to offer everything from advice about bees and trees to 4-H programs and home gardening tips.

## PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

One of every three bites we eat exists because of animal pollinators, like bees, butterflies, moths, birds, bats, beetles and other insects, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. About 75% of the world's flowering plants and about 35% of the world's food crops depend on animal pollinators.

By making just a few changes on and around their property, homeowners can do their part to help the cause, says Mallory Maher, 4-H youth development agent at the Oconee County Extension Office.

"The way to be a friend to pollinators is to provide food, shelter, water and space," she says. "It could start by simply planting native flowering plants, and leaving leaves and other dead stems in your backyards to help them."



A large honey bee gathers pollen on a coreopsis flower.

**Food** — Native trees, shrubs, vines and flowering plants, edible herbs and vegetable plants provide year-round nourishment.

**Shelter** — Dead plant stems, leaves, twigs, mulch or even a pile of sticks offer pollinators somewhere to rest and raise their young.

**Water** — A simple birdbath, garden fountain or a shallow dish filled with water are great hydration sources.

**Space** — Minimize mowing in sections of yards or small areas to create a pollinator paradise.

## TREATING AND SAVING HEMLOCKS

Hemlock trees are under siege in the eastern half of the United States, including the Upstate, by a microscopic insect called the hemlock wooly adelgid.

The aphid-like bug kills trees slowly, affixing itself to the base of the hemlock needle where it feeds on the tree's starch reserves and interferes with the tree's ability to absorb water and nutrients. Affected trees die from the bottom up in as little as four years.

With the help of Clemson Extension, a nonprofit organization called Carolina Hemlocks has worked to reestablish and bolster the hemlock population. The group was formed in 2018 by the husband-and-wife team of David and Carla Hedden.

"The seed was planted to turn concern and passion into action," says Carolyn Dawson, area extension forestry agent for the Oconee County Extension Office.

In addition to its educational programs, the nonprofit has treated more than 1,000 hemlocks for area landowners, as well as another 1,000-plus hemlocks in the Greenville Watershed. Also, it targeted all the trees along the South Carolina Foothills Trail.

Carolyn welcomes anyone who would like to volunteer to help treat affected hemlocks, or to report trees in need of treatment, to contact her at her email address, [dawson4@clemson.edu](mailto:dawson4@clemson.edu).



Photo courtesy of Carla Hedden

David and Carla Hedden, co-founders of Carolina Hemlocks, left, and Carolina Hemlocks board member John Bodiford, right, meet with a homeowner whose trees their group treated.



## HOME & GARDEN INFORMATION CENTER IS A VITAL COMMUNITY RESOURCE

Got a question — any question — about landscaping, growing fruits, vegetables or nuts, indoor plant recommendations or food safety? Clemson Extension's Home & Garden Information Center likely has the answers.

Established in 1997 and launched in 1999 by James Blake, the HGIC is a one-stop resource that South Carolina residents can tap into via phone, 888-656-9988; email, [hgic@clemson.edu](mailto:hgic@clemson.edu); and online at [hgic.clemson.edu](http://hgic.clemson.edu). With more than 900 fact sheets and articles on plant-related topics, nutrition and food safety, the HGIC delivers a wealth of research-based information on countless topics.

Last year alone, HGIC staff handled more than 13,000 calls and almost 12,000 emails, providing answers to questions and concerns of more than 16,000 South Carolina residents. In addition, the HGIC website, updated with fresh content weekly, had more than 6.9 million page views.

Agents are available via telephone and email Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except for university holidays. If an agent is not immediately available, callers can request a callback without losing their place in the queue.

"The HGIC is designed to complement our network of professionals and volunteers by answering the routine questions," says Millie Davenport, director of the Home & Garden Information Center. "This frees up our agents to deal with our commercial agriculture and horticulture industries, as well as conducting proactive programming to larger audiences."

### 4-H FOR KIDS: SUMMER PROGRAMS

South Carolina youth, ages 5 to 18, will once again have numerous opportunities to take part in summertime activities this year, thanks to the area's 4-H development program.

The traditional highlight of the summer is the annual 4-H Summer Camp, June 11-15 at Camp Long, on the outskirts of Aiken. Recreation activities include swimming, archery and more. Campers are housed in age-appropriate groups in cabins with full bathrooms. The dining room serves three meals a day, and snacks are available throughout the day. All counselors are fully vetted and trained.

"Campers really love the experience," says Janine Sutter, Pickens County Senior 4-H youth development agent. "One camper last year told me, 'This was my first time at camp and I was scared, but I had a great time. I loved the rock wall the best.' And a parent said, 'My child with disabilities went to camp, and they were so accommodating. She will be back.'"

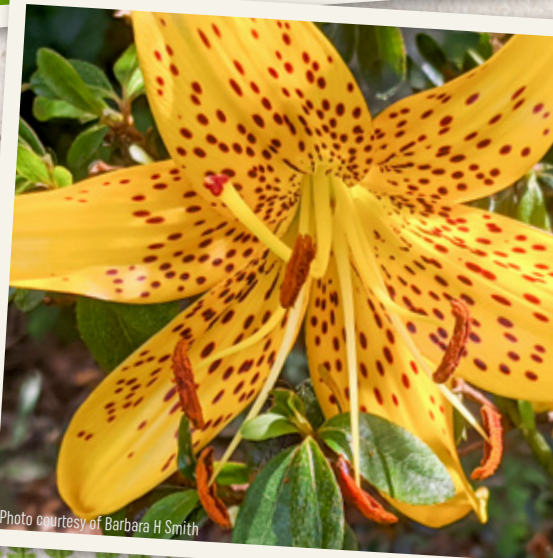
This summer's lineup of local activities is still in the planning process. Visit [clemson.edu/extension/4h](http://clemson.edu/extension/4h) for details. Information is also available from both the Pickens and Oconee extension offices on Facebook and Instagram. 📱



**TOP:** Carolina Hemlocks members and volunteers gather during a workshop.

**MIDDLE:** The bigleaf hydrangea flower comes in a variety of light pastel hues.

**RIGHT:** Tiny spots cover the Leichtlin's lily flower.





# HOW DOES YOUR ONLINE GARDEN GROW?

## Digital communities revolutionizing backyard agriculture

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

**S**tarting a garden in your own backyard isn't something you have to do alone. While you're unlikely to find help digging holes, putting in plants or moving mulch on the internet, you can find countless friends online to offer advice and support.

Online communities have revolutionized gardening, according to Adriana Copaceanu, whose 2016 gardening blog grew into the website backyardgardenlover.com. More than 100,000 gardeners also turn to its Facebook page where they can exchange tips and experiences. "By making it easier for people to find information and connect with others online, gardening communities have made gardening more accessible and appealing to a wider audience," Adriana says. "In the last few years, the amount of information online on gardening and resources has absolutely skyrocketed."

More than half the country — 55% of American households — gardens, according to findings by Scotts Miracle-Gro. The average garden measures 600 square feet, and tomatoes are the most common plant grown, appearing in about 85% of U.S. gardens. In addition to providing produce for a healthier diet, gardening has many other positive impacts including stress relief, promoting exercise, fighting dementia and staving off loneliness, to name just a few.

### CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES

While gardening has always offered opportunities for interactions at garden centers and at farmers markets, the online gardening community now presents limitless forums for collaboration. "I get daily emails with questions," Adriana says. "Sometimes, it's a quick answer, and other times I need to do some research because I'm not familiar with their specific location."

More than 5 million gardening enthusiasts have forged connections with other green thumbs through Reddit, a website that's home to thousands of online communities where users can anonymously discuss their interests and hobbies, seek support and share tips. They can also post photos and find immediate answers to questions like "I just pulled this dead squirrel out of my garlic patch, can I still eat the garlic in the summer?" or "Is this snake dangerous?"

"As the size of the gardening community has grown, there are more dumb and wrong answers; unfortunately, that's the nature of a platform that encourages participation," Reddit contributor kirbs2001 says. "The flip side is that more people are gardening and want to share what they know, or think they know, with others, and that's cool."

Still others just want a place to enjoy the outdoors in a community setting. "The gardening season is pretty short where I am, so





Photo by dprod/Adobe Stock

Photo by DriedovStock/Adobe Stock

## ONLINE RESOURCES ARE IN FULL BLOOM

### Gardening apps

- \* **From Seed to Spoon Gardening** — Created by new gardeners struggling to find all the right information for growing their first gardens, this covers it all.
- \* **SunCalc** — This is a sun-finder for garden placement. Enter an address and the app will tell you where to plant.
- \* **Homegrown with Bonnie Plants** — America's most-trusted vegetable company provides all the answers to questions about what to grow for specific conditions.
- \* **Planty** — Not sure what you've grown? This cute, simple app will identify and offer care tips for plants.
- \* **Garden Answers** — This extensive identification app provides garden and horticulture experts at your fingertips. The app identifies more than 20,000 plants and answers more than 200,000 commonly asked care questions.

### Websites

- \* The National Gardening Association's **garden.com** offers courses, gardening guides, a database and much more.
- \* The Old Farmer's Almanac has tips, daily facts and information, and other tried-and-true suggestions at **almanac.com**.
- \* Through its website **ahsgardening.org**, the American Horticulture Society promotes healthy, sustainable gardening practices and the critical role of plants.

*“In the last few years, the amount of information online on gardening and resources has absolutely skyrocketed.”*

— Adriana Copaceanu, founder of backyardgardenlover.com

I like to live vicariously through other people's gardens to get me through winter, lol,” says Calamity 0o0, another Reddit member who's active in the site's garden community.

Other gardening websites — including gardening-forums.com, gardenweb.com and gardenstew.com — offer all kinds of answers to all kinds of questions. Gardeners can also find like-minded friends on Twitter, and if it's easier to learn from videos, YouTube is for you.

The holy book of gardening and all things outdoors-related, The Old Farmer's Almanac, now offers a comprehensive website, almanac.com, full of valuable tips, along with a daily newsletter. The National Gardening Association formed in 1971 simply to promote gardening, and is now the largest

social media website dedicated exclusively to gardening. The group's garden.org offers online tools “to help gardeners connect, teach, share and trade with each other.”

Websites are great resources, but apps truly can be a gardener's best friend. First-time gardeners will find everything they need to start their plots through the Seed to Spoon app. Based on a home address, the SunCalc app designates the perfect location for plants to thrive, and Homegrown with Bonnie Plants has a “Help Me Choose” section to help gardeners determine which plants to grow, as well as one to help schedule tasks like sowing, watering, weeding and fertilizing.

So, while you may be on your own physically, you'll never lack for company along your gardening journey. 🌱





# “History in the Making”

Upcountry Fiber invites Darius Rucker for fundraising concert

Story by MATT LEDGER

The Upcountry Fiber Foundation is turning to a famous face to boost its effort to better the community.

“We are thrilled to announce that musician and philanthropist Darius Rucker will be headlining our very own Southern Fried Circuit, a charity concert benefiting the Upcountry Fiber Foundation,”

says Mary Miller, marketing manager for Upcountry Fiber and WCFIBER.

Darius, a proud South Carolina native, is a Grammy Award-winning musician who has advocated for more than 200 charitable causes.

Since inception in 2021, Upcountry Fiber Foundation, the charitable arm of

Upcountry Fiber, has sought to create strong connections with the community.

The grassroots organization is committed to supporting and uplifting the community, with special focus on providing opportunities for youth development, arts and culture enrichment, services and basic needs for humans and animals alike. ☎



Lindsay Ell's breathtaking guitar licks and unmistakable vocals make her one of the most exciting new performers to watch.

Photo by Taylor Kelly



July  
28

**William A. Floyd  
Amphitheater  
at the Anderson  
Civic Center**

**Doors open: 6 p.m.**

**Lindsay Ell opens  
the show at 7:30 p.m.**

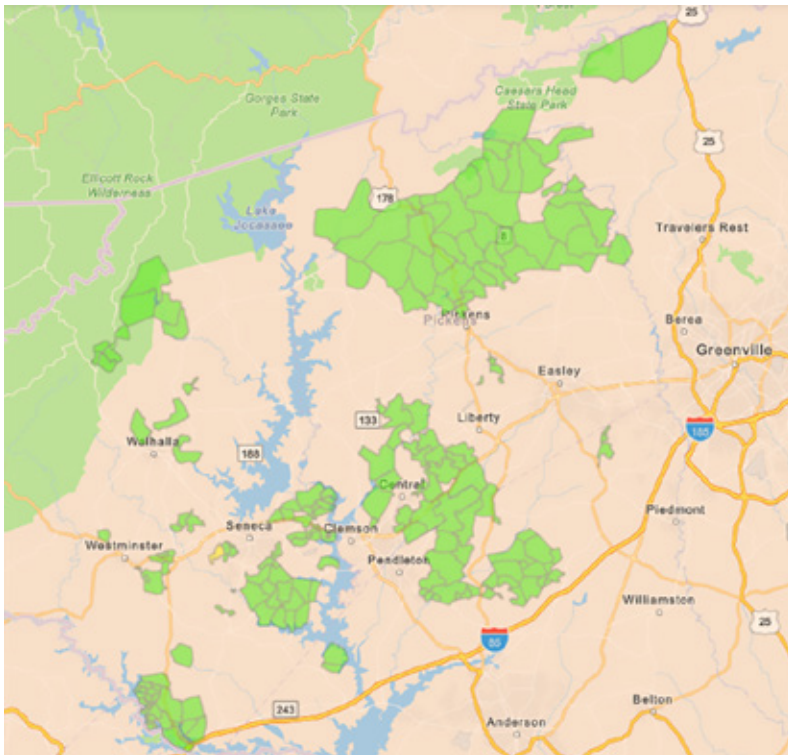
**Darius Rucker takes the stage at 8:45 p.m.**

**For more information, to purchase tickets, or to become a sponsor,  
go to [southernfriedcircuit.com](https://southernfriedcircuit.com).**



# BUILDING BROADBAND in the Upstate

Since launching in 2021, Upcountry Fiber has deployed an average of more than 100 miles of fiber optic cable each month. We are committed to expanding the reach of our high-speed internet network to underserved and unserved areas. The collaboration of teams from 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](https://upcountryfiber.com).



## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

### *Daja Davidson*

**Daja Davidson**, marketing specialist for Upcountry Fiber, heads the efforts from the Blue Ridge Electric side of the partnership. She joined the Blue Ridge Electric family in fall 2019 and moved to the fiber crew in 2020. “I’ve gained a work family second to none, and I’m so blessed to call this work,” Daja says.

A graduate of Clemson University, Daja is a proud, orange-blooded Tiger, who earned her MBA online from Louisiana State University during the pandemic. Daja and her husband, CJ Davidson, co-own a gym, Tempo Sports Academy. They met at Clemson when she was a junior and a cheerleader and he was a dual-sport athlete. “We went through most of undergrad without knowing each other,” Daja says. “I mean, seriously, how does the football player and the cheerleader not know each other?”

Clemson football remains a part of her life. “You can catch me this fall hosting the ‘Tiger Tailgate Show’ for Clemson University football on the Clemson Athletic Network,” she says.

Daja, who competed in the 2016 Miss America competition after winning Miss South Carolina, serves as executive director of the Miss South Carolina Teen program.

Daja’s favorite apps?

She enjoys riding her Peloton, enhanced by the app-tracking workouts from the popular stationary bike.

She credits another app for helping her find her way. “I have the sense of direction of a falling leaf, so Waze, a navigation app, is my life,” Daja says. “I literally couldn’t get anywhere without it.” 🗺️



# Bite-size brilliance

## A not-so-spicy meatball!

**F**ew foods have the versatility that meatballs offer. They're perfect for parties served with toothpicks, but they can also be your dinner tonight served over pasta or mashed potatoes.

What makes a good meatball? Some recipes call for chicken or veal while others rely solely on ground beef. Some recipes call for frying them in a skillet while others send them straight to the oven.

No matter the approach to the finished product, most everyone can agree on one thing: Meatballs are a blessing in the culinary world all wrapped up in a ball of meat.



### SWEET-AND-SOUR MEATBALLS

#### Sauce:

- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1/3 cup pineapple juice
- 1/4 teaspoon Chinese five-spice
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch

Place the brown sugar, vinegar, ketchup, soy sauce, pineapple juice and Chinese five spice in a saucepan over medium heat. Simmer for 5 minutes or until the sugar has dissolved. Stir in cornstarch and simmer for 2 minutes more to thicken. Remove from heat and set aside.

#### Meatballs:

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 (1-pound) bag frozen meatballs
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 red or green bell pepper, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 cup diced pineapple
- 4 green onions, cut into 1-inch pieces

Place a wok or large frying pan over high heat. Add the oil and the meatballs and cook, turning every minute or so, for 4-5 minutes or until almost cooked through. Add the onion and stir-fry for another 2 minutes. Add the bell pepper and stir-fry for another minute, then add the pineapple and the sweet-and-sour sauce. Stir-fry until well combined. Remove from heat and toss in the green onion.



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

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



## SALISBURY STEAK MEATBALLS

- 1/4 cup grated onion
- 2/3 cup panko bread crumbs
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons ground mustard
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 1/4 pounds ground beef
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (plus more, if needed)

### Gravy:

- 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 6-8 medium mushrooms, chopped
- 1/2 cup onion, sliced 1/4-inch thick
- 4-6 cloves garlic, minced

- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups beef stock
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce

In a medium bowl, combine grated onions, breadcrumbs, salt and all the remaining ingredients except the ground beef and oil. Allow the mixture to stand for 5 minutes, then add the meat and mix until just combined and divide the mixture into about 20 meatballs.

Add oil in a large skillet and heat to medium-high. Add the meatballs in a single layer and cook for about 10 minutes, flipping halfway through, until all sides brown evenly. Remove to a plate. If needed, add additional oil and cook any

remaining meatballs the same way.

For the gravy, add 1 tablespoon of butter to the skillet. When melted, add mushrooms and cook 3-4 minutes. Add the onions and saute for 3 minutes, add the garlic and let cook for 30 seconds or until fragrant. Add the remaining butter to the skillet. When melted, add the flour and stir to combine and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Gradually pour in the beef stock, still stirring constantly. Stir in Worcestershire sauce, Dijon and soy sauce and simmer for 3 minutes or until it thickens slightly. Add the meatballs to the skillet along with any juices that may have collected on the plate and cook for 4 minutes. If the gravy thickens too much, add a splash of water. Taste and adjust seasonings as desired.

## BUTTERY CHICKEN MEATBALLS

- 1/2 medium onion, grated
- 1/2 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 1/2 pounds ground chicken
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- 2 tablespoons freshly chopped parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

### Butter sauce:

- 1/2 cup butter
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon freshly chopped parsley

Mix the onion and bread-crumbs together in a large

mixing bowl. Let the mixture sit for 2-3 minutes. Add the rest of the meatball ingredients, excluding the oil, to the bowl. Mix everything together well. Form the mixture into meatballs.

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the meatballs, working in batches if needed. Cook for 2-3 minutes per side until well browned. Transfer the cooked meatballs to a plate and set aside.

For the sauce, add the butter to the skillet, then stir in garlic and ginger and cook for 1 minute. Add the tomato sauce, tomato paste, garam masala, smoked paprika, turmeric, cumin, coriander and chicken broth. Bring the sauce to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes or until slightly thickens. Stir in the cream. Return meatballs to skillet and let them simmer in the sauce until heated through. Garnish with parsley and serve. 🍽️







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