



UPCOUNTRY

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023

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**LT. GOV. PAMELA
EVETTE VISITS
UPCOUNTRY FIBER**

OCONEE STEM



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

A front row seat to history

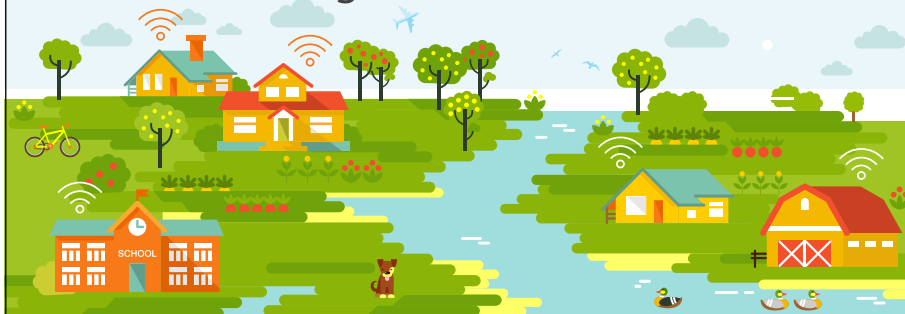
I recently spent the morning at the White House celebrating the historic announcement of \$42.5 billion allocated to all the states and territories in our union to help bridge the digital divide as part of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program, also known as BEAD.

The buzz in the security line was electric as folks lined up early to compare notes on why we are all passionate about broadband deployment, and I enjoyed sharing the activities of community-based broadband providers. I found myself beaming when a few people specifically referenced the fiber networks deployed by NTCA member companies. I love that the hard work of these companies and co-ops like yours is finally getting the credit that is due.

Mitch Landrieu, head of infrastructure initiatives for President Joe Biden, kicked us off and turned the podium to Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, who is leading BEAD and has genuinely put her passion behind her work. President Biden then took the podium and got right into sharing how much this historic investment in broadband means for our country. I was delighted to hear all the administration's folks share a mindset on the importance of reliable, comparable and affordable broadband and even how fiber is really the technology of choice for this historic investment.






As Secretary Raimondo noted, it really was a "happy broadband day." And, with the support of your community-based provider, we are sure to have many more delightful broadband days in the future. 📶

Why is broadband vital? It strengthens rural America



Life is often lived online, including working, socializing, learning, relaxing and more. Without fast internet access, however, these day-to-day essentials grind to a halt. But for rural communities, the stakes are even higher.

While it's something we might take for granted — at least for those of us who have access to broadband — the power of fast internet to profoundly improve quality of life remains striking.

 <p>-1- ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES: High-speed internet helps rural businesses expand their reach through e-commerce — possibly even connecting globally.</p>	 <p>-2- REMOTE WORK: Rural workers can tap into a pool of work-from-home jobs, allowing residents to avoid commutes or the possibility of relocating for work.</p>	 <p>-3- HEALTH CARE: Telemedicine and access to medical resources — such as time-sensitive treatments like stroke care — are critical.</p>
 <p>-4- EDUCATION: Rural schools, colleges and students can tap vast resources, including virtual classrooms and distance learning programs.</p>	 <p>-5- AGRICULTURE: Online resources allow farmers in rural areas to optimize crop management, monitor livestock, access weather information and more.</p>	

That's just the beginning. New opportunities will continue to appear, and rural internet providers will make the connections to bring those services to you.



©matorion/Adobe Stock

Stream it to win it

DON'T MISS A GAME THIS SEASON

Fall is prime time for sports fans. There's both college and NFL football. The baseball regular season wraps up, followed by the playoffs and World Series. The first NBA games tip off, too. And with such a rich stew of possibilities, the buffet of options for viewing sports is tastier than ever.

Once, a sports fan might be limited to viewing the feats of only regional teams, and the selection of those games was limited to the lineup a TV network offered. Now, however, sports fans can choose streaming services that best suit their interests and budgets. Pricing can change at any time, though, so verify the cost when you're ready to make a game-time decision.

SOME POTENTIAL WINNERS

► **NFL Game Pass:** For pro football fans, NFL Game Pass is a game-changer. This streaming service provides access to live out-of-market games. It's hard to beat if you're a fan who wants to keep up with a favorite team whose games typically aren't


broadcast in your TV market. NFL Game Pass also offers on-demand replays, condensed games and access to an extensive archive of previous seasons. While Game Pass is just one possibility for streaming NFL games, it's a good one.

► **NBA League Pass:** Do you love professional basketball? Thanks to NBA League Pass, there's a premium service perfect for anyone hooked on the NBA. There's coverage of live games and the opportunity to watch past games on demand. There's plenty of analysis, features, interviews and more. And it also works great on most devices.

► **Paramount+, Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV:** These services aren't known primarily as platforms that feature sports. Instead, they established footholds by offering deep libraries of new TV shows and movies, as well as catalogs of longtime favorites. But if you're already subscribing to stream from one of these services, or other

similar ones, take a closer look. You might be surprised by the sports available on a subscription you already have.

► **YouTube TV:** If you want an experience that's close to traditional TV — all the big networks and smaller ones, too — check out YouTube TV. ABC, CBS, NBC, ESPN and more are all available, and they're streaming in real time. You see the games as they're happening. You can even record events so you can watch them later.

► **ESPN+:** Are you a fan of sports other than the big leagues? ESPN+ takes a deep dive into soccer, tennis and more. There's coverage of everything from Ultimate Fighting Championship bouts to U.S. Open tennis. Smaller college conferences, such as the Ivy League and Conference USA, are showcased, with baseball, softball, hockey, wrestling and more. There's even access to a library of content from the ESPN documentary series "30 for 30." 



PARTNER OF



Faster service for a slower pace of life

It seems that in a blink of an eye, summer came and left all at once. And what a glorious blur it has been! We are making construction progress — record setting, in fact. We are committed to connect Pickens and Oconee counties and have set an aggressive goal to complete much of the construction in 2023.



JEFF WILSON (L)
Chief Executive Officer
WCFIBER

JIM LOVINGGOOD (R)
Chief Executive Officer
Blue Ridge Electric

We welcomed Darius Rucker for the first-ever Southern Fried Circuit charity concert event benefiting the Upcountry Fiber Foundation. Thousands of people from South Carolina and beyond flocked to Anderson to watch our South Carolina native belt out his famous songs all in the name of benefiting his home state.

We announced more funding to connect the Upstate, thanks to a solid partnership with the South Carolina Office of Regulatory Affairs.

And, we recently announced our newest service plans, designed for those who want even faster-than-fast speed without leaving the beauty of our area, 2.5 gigabit and 10 gigabit service.

The need for more bandwidth is only going to continue to grow. Our new multigig service offerings are perfect for households where there are several devices competing for a lot of bandwidth. Think about the professional who works from home and is on a Zoom call while the kids are streaming movies and playing online video games. Having


multigig service allows each of them to have zero lag time.

Additionally, from an economic development standpoint, our new multigig service allows people to have even more opportunities to work from home, which is a plus for drawing more professionals to our area and to supporting the ones who are already here. We are excited to be a part of what makes the Upstate even more attractive with this critical utility.

Simply put, we've built an internet network that will be ready for your technology needs when they arise — or even sooner.

The truth is, we've never really considered ourselves an internet provider. Rather, we provide an internet experience and related services designed to help you live your optimum life. That's why we've curated a variety of internet speed packages, along with WiFi options that fit what you need and want.

Our account service representatives are highly trained and happy to talk through options with you based on how you use your internet. So, while it'd be tempting to sell everyone 10 Gig internet because it's simply the fastest, we won't do that, because it may not be best for YOU. And, that is the Upcountry Fiber difference. We want to match you with the best internet package for your lifestyle.

Choosing the right speed for you may seem overwhelming, but we are here to help. We are your partner, and serving you fairly and kindly is our mission. 

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 10 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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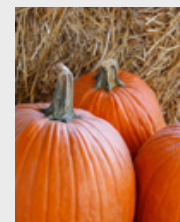
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On the Cover:



Pumpkintown General Store owner Bill Alexander takes pride in the locally sourced ingredients used in his menu. See story Page 12.

Photo by Matt Ledger

Hometown supporter

Story by MATT LEDGER

Living in Travelers Rest, South Carolina, Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette is frequently in the Upcountry Fiber service area of the Upstate. In June, she visited with Upcountry Fiber officials during a tour of broadband projects in Taylors.

“There were many things that impressed me during my tour,” Evette says. “The efficiency at which the expansion was being executed was at the top.”

Upcountry Fiber officials took the lieutenant governor, state Sens. Tom Corbin and Dwight Loftis and state Rep. Mike Burns to sites of broadband deployment, including an aerial installation of fiber lines on Camp Creek Road.

“The state of South Carolina has played a big role in funding with our buildout,” says Zach Hinton, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative’s vice president of economic development and support services. “We talked about how those dollars are being used and how effective those grants are in speeding up the buildout process.”

Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER partnered in 2021 to start the Upcountry Fiber project, anticipating nearly seven years to complete the 6,000 miles of fiber infrastructure. A state grant of \$24 million earlier this year already cut that project timeline by a third. “We are going through another round of grant applications now,” Hinton says. “If that takes place, we will pretty much be able to build out 80% of our entire system by the end of next year.”

BUILD BETTER WITH BROADBAND

The deployment of high-speed broadband benefits everyone. It’s especially vital for area schools, where students are beginning to focus on educational advancement and career possibilities.

“The expansion of broadband in South Carolina is a game changer in our rural areas,” Evette says. “When our students



ABOVE: Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative’s Vice President of Economic Development and Support Services Zach Hinton, center, briefs Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette and other officials about the speed of deployment.



LEFT: Evette and state Sen. Tom Corbin, center in green, take a look at a map detailing the progress Upcountry Fiber has made on its fiber infrastructure.

can have the resources to complete their studies and access the information they need to compete with their peers, it provides a level playing field no matter your ZIP code. We have to meet people where they are. In many instances, transportation can be a barrier, and broadband takes that away.”

South Carolina is the third-fastest-growing state based on the current U.S. Census, expanding by 1.7% for 2022, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The Palmetto State experienced over \$10 billion in capital investment last year, according to the South Carolina Department of Commerce.

“When businesses are looking to expand and relocate, they consider infrastructure

BELOW: Line crews use bucket trucks to pull fiber cables into position.



such as broadband,” Evette says. “This expansion will lead to more development in our rural areas, adding to the economic prosperity of our entire state. New industry nurtures retail and residential investment, which leads to long-term impactful change in a community.”



ON LOCATION

Movie productions seek rural Southern settings

Story by ANNE BRALY

Lights, camera, action! Those words, once heard primarily in Hollywood studios, now echo through wooded forests and city streets across the South. And for many, a visit to places they've seen on the silver screen adds some excitement to a vacation.

"Film has always been such a powerful medium, and I think people enjoy being a part of something that meant so much to them," says Dan Rogers, senior project manager for the South Carolina Film Commission.

It's widely known that the Atlanta area is a hot spot for zombies in "The Walking Dead" and the unusual happenings in "Stranger Things." Nashville's been given the nod by directors, too, with films including "The Green Mile," with Tom Hanks, and "Coal Miner's Daughter," starring Sissy Spacek as Loretta Lynn, filming in Music City.

Small towns, too, have seen their share of screen time. Black Mountain and Cedar Mountain, both in western North Carolina, were locations for several scenes in "The Hunger Games." Berry College in Rome, Georgia, was transformed into Carmichael Plantation in scenes from "Sweet Home Alabama." Also, Tidalholm Mansion along the Beaufort River in Beaufort, South Carolina, set the stage for both "The Big Chill" and "The Great Santini."

So, what is it about the South that has turned it into the new Hollywood? Kyle Bucher, production manager for virtual productions at 3rd Realm Creations in Mobile, Alabama, says it all goes back to what helps make the region famous — Southern hospitality.

"It goes a long way," he says. "The local hospitality of people and their willingness to try and help is ideal. Also, the local creativity among artists and the community is a stark comparison from Los Angeles and other filming areas."



ALABAMA

Lower Alabama has seen a lot of interest come its way since "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" was released in 1977. You can still see where the main character, Roy Neary, lived in Mobile, 613 Carlisle Drive, along with the home of character Jillian Guiler at 22250 Alabama Highway 181, in Fairhope.

More movie sites in Alabama include Waverly Lake, where a scene in "Norma Rae" was filmed, and Eufaula, where the historic streets were the backdrop for "Sweet Home Alabama." Huntsville's Space and Rocket Center has also been a location in several movies, including "Space Camp" and "Space Warriors." Most recently, West Mobile's Honduran Kitchen, off Snow Road, was used to shoot Robert de Niro's new comedy "About My Father," released Memorial Day weekend.



Blacksher Hall, a grand mansion in Mobile, was used in filming "USS Indianapolis: Men of Courage."

Photo courtesy of Kyle Bucher



KENTUCKY

The diverse topography in the Bluegrass State makes it ideal territory for scouts looking to film movies, says Tim Bates, manager of the Kentucky Film Office.

“Some might think that a destination is particularly beautiful, or maybe they really enjoyed a film so much that they want to experience more of it,” he says. “It’s a rather easy connection between filmmaking and tourism.”

Some of the movies filmed in Kentucky and sites that you can visit include, Pompilio’s Italian Restaurant in Newport, featured in 1988’s “Rain Man” with Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise. Or, visit Fort Knox to see where “Stripes,” starring Bill Murray and John Candy, was filmed. The Pioneer Playhouse in Danville was the backdrop for the film “Raintree County” with Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift. Also, Keeneland in Lexington is always a fun place to visit for tours, a chance to see the horses and, while you’re there, see where much of “Seabiscuit” was filmed.



Danville’s Pioneer Playhouse remains a popular place and is the setting for the Elizabeth Taylor film “Raintree County.”

Photo courtesy of Kentucky Tourism



Photo courtesy of New Line Productions

Walk in the steps of Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams along King Street in Charleston as they filmed “The Notebook.”



SOUTH CAROLINA

“Outer Banks” a hit show on Netflix, has brought many people to the area. As a result, “they’ve discovered the beauty of our Lowcountry,” Dan says.

Some of the best areas to visit locations from “Outer Banks” are along Shem Creek in Mount Pleasant. Also, visit the Gaillard Center in Charleston, aka the UNC Chapel Hill Law Library. If you’re in the Charleston area and want to find out more, visit charlestoncvb.com.

Other South Carolina movie sets include Four Square Gospel Church — actually, Stoney Creek Independent Presbyterian Chapel in McPhersonville — where Forrest Gump went to pray for shrimp, and Lucy Point Creek between Coosaw and Lady’s Island, where most of the water scenes were shot. Movie fans can find more places at southcarolinalowcountry.com.



TENNESSEE

The flatlands and mountains of Tennessee have been the backdrop for many movies, and here are some sites that you can visit and relive the magic of the big screen.

Visit Charleston, Cleveland and the Hiwassee River to see where “Wild River,” the first major motion picture filmed entirely in Tennessee, was made. Tour the town of Charleston with a local researcher, and walk the banks of the river and learn of other nearby places that were used in the film. Email davidswafford@charter.net for details.

Drive by the Tennessee State Prison in Nashville and see where parts of “The Green Mile,” “Last Dance” and “Walk the Line” were filmed.

Visit Knoxville’s Neyland Stadium, Market Square and the historic Tennessee Theatre to check out locations you’ll recognize from “The Last Movie Star.”

The swamp at Reelfoot Lake was a setting for the action film “U.S. Marshals.” Be sure to bring your binoculars, too. The bird-watching here is some of the best in the state.

Visit Fall Creek Falls State Park where you can bring out your Baloo and explore areas where the 1994 live-action adaption of “The Jungle Book” was filmed. Wear your hiking shoes — there are plenty of waterfalls, hiking trails and rocks to climb and a canopy challenge course to experience. 📱



Photo courtesy of Tennessee Tourism

The eerie, spooky swamps in Reelfoot Lake made the perfect backdrop for the thriller “U.S. Marshals.”

ADVANCED LEARNING

Oconee County Schools put STEM at the head of the class

Story by LUIS CARRASCO

Whether it's emergency services, manufacturing, mechanical engineering, or even bees or business solutions, the Oconee County School District is investing in STEM education.

The district's new Hamilton Career and Technology Center, welcoming students from Walhalla, Seneca and West-Oak high schools, opened in Westminster in 2020 in one of the county's growing industrial parks. In addition, other schools around the district have dedicated STEM teachers who are helping to prepare students from elementary to high school for careers or further education in science, technology, engineering and math.

"We want our students to have the opportunity to experience technology in a way they would see it in the real world and to get those real-world experiences," says Philip Price, chief technology officer for Oconee County Schools. "We want them to be ready when they graduate, whether they choose to enter the workforce or continue their education."

Philip says the district is trying to build an effective STEM program that prepares students to enter rapidly changing technological and scientific fields — and that may be the biggest challenge for the county's educators. "I heard a quote that we're preparing kids for jobs that don't even exist yet," he says. "Our technology changes exponentially, and so our kids are being exposed to things, and we're giving them experiences so that they're prepared for the future."

Regardless of the specific career path a student chooses, it will almost certainly intersect somehow with technology. Philip says the county's educators and leaders are giving students the resources to prepare them for varied futures, including necessary high-speed internet service.



ABOVE: Brooklyn Thomason uses her digital device to complete a project.



LEFT: Sixth grade science teacher Jennifer Padgett, center, conducts an experiment with students, Joseph Medlin, left, and Brayden Mayes.



RIGHT: Kamiyah Waddell, left, and Ma'niaja Hawkins prepare for launch during a science experiment.

"Upcountry Fiber has prioritized the school district, which is important because if we have an outage, it's really important to get it rectified as soon as possible," Philip says. "It's been a great experience for our students to have such a reliable source for internet. So many of our instructional programs and things we do rely on the internet."

GETTING STARTED

James M. Brown Elementary School is among the schools in the district with a dedicated STEM teacher. Courtney Sheriff's students tackle everything from graphic design and 3D printing to beekeeping.

For Brown Elementary Principal Mary Thrift, it's all part of a bigger picture for some of the district's younger students who are hungry for hands-on experiences in STEM. "If we don't lay the foundation and the building blocks, then we send students to middle and high school that are going to have holes and gaps and lack experiences to really know their full potential," Mary says. "We take what we do here very seriously and make sure



The Hamilton Career and Technology Center moved into its new digs at a Westminster industrial and business park in 2020, but the mission of offering hands-on educational opportunities remains the same. “We have 26 programs that students can choose from,” says HCTC Director Carson LeCroy.

“HCTC has something for everybody, whether a student plans on attending a four-year institution after high school or goes straight into the workforce.”

Students can start their education and potentially find apprenticeships in fields such as architectural design, health science, engineering, computer programming and information technology.

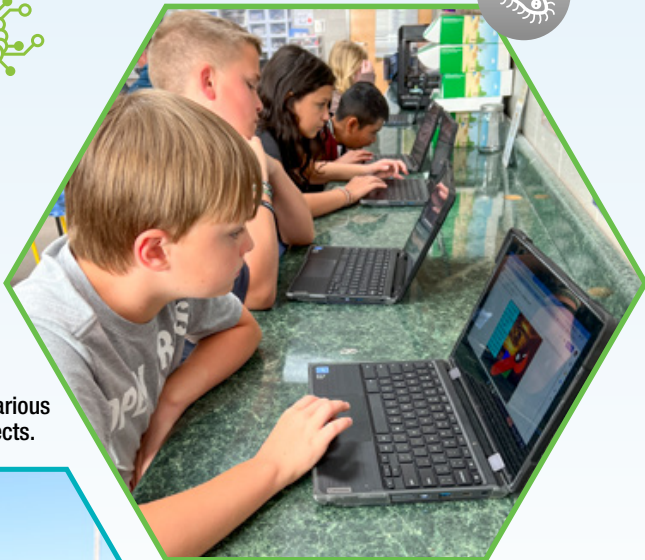
A partnership with Tri-County Technical College allows students in some fields of study to earn college credits while attending HCTC. Education students at HCTC can also earn credits at nearby Southern Wesleyan University.

“Our goal is to give students a shortcut to whatever career that they’d like, whether that’s in the form of college credit or whether it’s in the form of a certification that they can earn while they’re here,” Carson says. “We want to give them the shortcut that they need so they can be competitive in the workforce.”

HCTC also hosts Project Lead the Way, a nationwide STEM initiative focusing on computer science, engineering and biomedical science. “Project Lead the Way is a lot of hands-on, project-based learning, and technology is at the center of it,” Carson says. “We see the fruits of that curriculum because it’s rigorous.”

About 125 students are involved in Project Lead the Way at HCTC, and about one-third of the district’s 3,000-plus high school students attend classes at HCTC. 📱

RIGHT: Students use WiFi-enabled devices to research various STEM projects.



that we’re sending kids on to the next level who are ready. We want to teach them to be flexible with their thinking because something that is current now could be flexible in six months, and they need to be ready for that.”

NEXT STEPS

By the time students arrive at Seneca Middle School today, technology has often become second nature to them thanks to cellphones, laptops

and tablets. STEM classes help middle school students learn the tech behind the screens.

Seneca Middle School Principal Elizabeth McDonald says computer technology and programming classes are among the STEM courses of study her school offers. “We even have two business education classes that do a lot with technology and advertising,” she says. “They do a lot of programming with different computers and robots.”

The school’s Women in Charge program is designed to get more girls involved in STEM, and Elizabeth says it is working. The group studied hot air balloons in the spring and had a balloon release just before the end of the school year in May.

“I feel like we really take great care to expose students to different curriculum throughout,” she says. “It’s extremely important at this age — in between elementary and high school — to get them engaged in a way that really allows for more learning.”



ABOVE: Hunter Cope uses a grinder during a course on machine tool technology.

RIGHT: Carson Saunders, left, and Ja’Ree Watson practice the skills required to be an electrician.



Weaving

THROUGH OUR CULTURE

Textile arts have long history in rural America

Story by CHERÉ COEN

For centuries, quilts, pieced together from fabric swatches, warmed sleeping families. Woven blankets also provided warmth and offered an opportunity for creativity in a time when women were busy working at home and had little time for the arts.

Today, quilts and blankets still cover beds around the world, but the historic art form has reached exceptional heights through the use of 3D techniques, photography, natural elements and more. “It’s not just a pretty quilt on a bed,” says Deborah Blanchette Bradley, managing director of the nonprofit Texas Quilt Museum. “This is fine art.”

The La Grange, Texas, museum began when quilters Karey Bresnenhan and Nancy O’Bryant Puentes, producers of Houston’s International Quilt Festival, wanted to share art quilts year-round and not just during the November festival. They restored an 1892 building to 95% of its original architecture and opened the museum in 2011 to exhibit quilts and educate the public on the art of textiles.

“Our purpose is to help people see and understand the world of quilting,” Deborah says. “Women were the heart of the home. Our mission is to offer and share the legacy and history — mostly women’s history — through quilting.”

The museum weaves together American textile history and modern art in its exhibits, including the recent “A Tribute



Photos courtesy of National Quilt Museum

to Mary Ann Vaca-Lambert,” whose quilts have been displayed internationally. The museum also hosted an “All Creatures” juried show with 50 quilts based on James Herriot’s novels and the popular PBS series “All Creatures Great and Small.”

ADDITIONAL INCOME

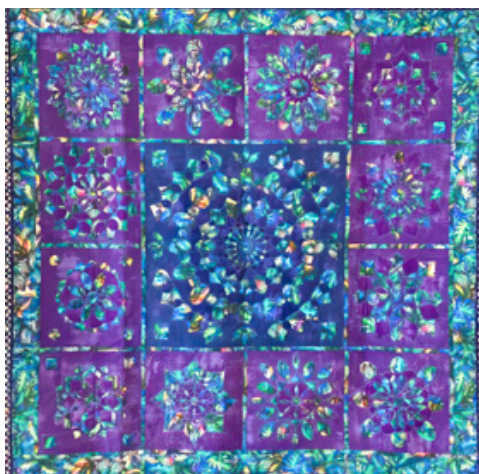
Textiles evolved from utilitarian items to high art, but they also provide many people with additional income. Many members of the McCreary Mountain Craft Center in Parkers Lake, Kentucky, sell their textiles, in addition to other works. The center started as a 4-H organization designed to preserve the craft traditions of Southeast Kentucky.



Photos courtesy of National Quilt Museum

TOP: The National Quilt Museum is in Paducah, Kentucky, one of only a handful of UNESCO Creative Cities in the United States.

ABOVE: The museum displays a wide variety of contemporary textile arts.



A display this year at the Texas Quilt Museum included artwork created by Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo blue ribbon quilt prizewinners.



Photos courtesy of Texas Quilt Museum

“The center was started by an extension agent,” says President Terri Cash. “He wanted to help people in the area make money by selling their crafts.”

The center celebrates 60 years in 2023 and is completely run by volunteers. Artists join for \$10 a year and keep 75% of their earnings. It’s a labor of love, Terri insists. “We’re definitely not out to make money because of the amount of time we put into it.”

Most members are middle-aged and above, but Terri sees young people crafting as well, so weaving and quilting continue to be American art forms. “And we’re happy to pass it down,” she says.

GETTING STARTED

Deborah sees museum visitors looking at professional quilts and other textile artwork and forlornly musing that they could never create such masterpieces. She encourages people to view these showpieces as inspiration to create. “There’s so many ways of being inspired in quilting,”

Deborah says. “You can find inspiration in everything.”

It’s the reason the museum includes education in its programming. It works with Arts for Rural Texas for after-school programs and two summer camps. Children learn skills like needle felting and quilting. “They make a nine-block quilt,” Deborah says. “They learn three patterns and do it all in one week. None of them will look alike.”

The recently opened Discover Exhibit gives children quilt block puzzles and an I Spy adventure through the museum. “It’s meant to inspire kids to learn and take on the art of fabric,” she says. “Art stretches the mind and inspires.”

In addition to the classes and lectures the museum offers, adults looking to get into quilting should find a local guild, Deborah suggests. Quilting guilds exist across the country, and group members are available to mentor and help newcomers. “That’s a great place to start,” she says. “All of these ladies — there’s men in there, too — love to share. It’s like a modern-day quilting bee. If nothing else, it helps you not do it alone.”

Another avenue is sewing classes at extension offices and through 4-H. The University of Minnesota Extension Office, for instance, offers a youth quilting workshop.


Deborah was never a quilter, she was hired to administer the museum, but she’s since taken it up and loves the community she found. “It’s been a wonderful world to become a part of,” she says. 



Photo courtesy of Texas Quilt Museum

Western art created by La Grange High School students is displayed at the Texas Quilt Museum.

Online Resources

• **Paducah, Kentucky**, is home to both the National Quilting Museum and the American Quilter’s Society, dedicated to spreading the importance of quilt making and helping quilters achieve their goals. Because of its quilting heritage and advancements of quilting worldwide, the city was named a UNESCO Creative City for Crafts & Folk Art. View textile art in Paducah’s Lower Town Arts District and visit for AQS’s QuiltWeek April 24-27, 2024. For more information, visit quiltmuseum.org or americanquilter.com.

• **McCreary Mountain Craft Center** celebrates 60 years of showcasing and selling handmade art and crafts. Located in Parkers Lake, Kentucky, near Cumberland Falls, the center sells a variety of textiles. Visit Facebook and search for the McCreary Mountain Craft Center.

• **Texas Quilt Museum** in La Grange rests between Houston and San Antonio and offers exhibits that change four times a year, youth education and one of the largest quilt research libraries in the country. Learn more at texasquiltmuseum.org.

Finding a new lane

Table Rock trucker creates a delicious detour

Story by LUIS CARRASCO

It took 12 years for Bill Alexander to launch his second career as a restaurateur, but once he stepped behind the register at the Pumpkintown General Store and Cafe, he didn't look back.

The cafe, located at the intersection of Table Rock Road and Highway 8 in Pickens County, seats more than 100 people. It's not unusual to see a line out the door on a busy weekend. Diners appreciate having a good breakfast or lunch surrounded by antique decorations in a relaxed atmosphere.

Before he bought the place in 2017, Bill was a regular breakfast customer starting in 2005, shortly after he retired from 40 years of driving a truck. He and his wife lived in nearby Table Rock State Park,

and the cafe was one of the few dining options around.

Eventually, owner Harry Monroe decided to retire himself, and Bill saw an opportunity.

"I thought, 'You know, I'm there near every morning anyway, so I might as well buy it,'" he jokes.

He knew that the location and good food — served hot and fresh — would be the keys to success. Even if he had to overcome some initial skepticism.

"My wife, she thought I had lost my mind when I told her," he laughs. "She said, 'You don't know anything about a restaurant.' I said, 'Darling, I've eaten out for 40 years in restaurants, I know a little bit about what people expect.'"

What people expect is, well,



Owner Bill Alexander takes pride in the locally sourced ingredients he uses for the cafe's menu items.

Photos by Matt Ledger

something a little bit better than what the old cafe had to offer, he says. When asked if the breakfast he enjoyed for over a dozen years as a customer was any good, he has a quick answer. "It was OK," Bill deadpans. "The locals complained that the bacon would be good one day and then the next day it wouldn't be good."

That lack of consistency was one of the first things he was intent on ironing out as he took over.

"When I bought it, I sat down with the food supplier and asked what product was being bought. She went down the list and I think it was like the cheapest thing that they had," Bill recalls. "I said, 'I want the best of everything you

have. Whatever I order, I want it to be the best.'"

That focus on quality has paid off. Judging from reviews online, tourists, visiting the area campgrounds and state park, love the food as much as the locals do.

Bill, who turned 77 in August, says he has no plans to retire a second time. He's having too much fun making his customers happy. "That's my job," he says. "I walk around, talk to everybody and make everybody feel welcome."

PUMPKINTOWN GENERAL STORE AND CAFE

3837 Pumpkintown Highway,
Pickens
864-878-0799
The cafe is on Facebook as Pumpkintown General Store.

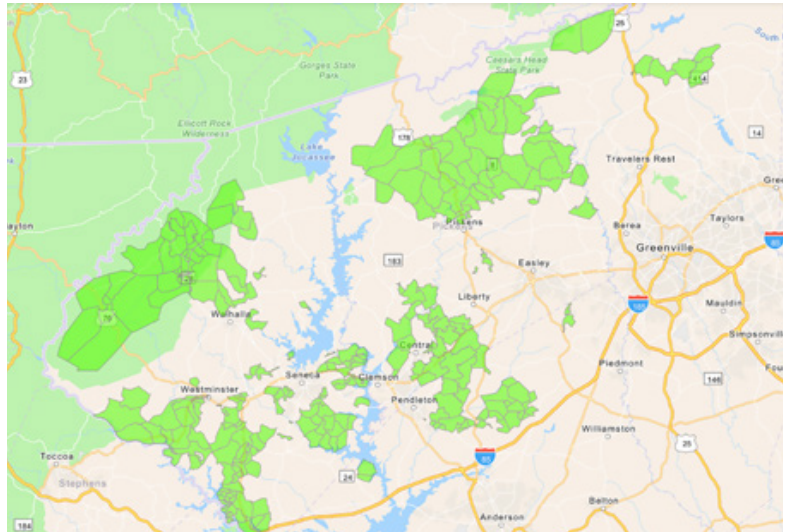


Pumpkintown General Store owner Bill Alexander poses for a photo with the staff members who cook and serve the food, including, from left, Tori Burgess, Emily Cook, Neely Springfield, Jady McCarson and Anniegrace Roach.

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. Fiber crews are currently working in other parts of our service area to further expand broadband availability.



TO LEARN MORE about Upcountry Fiber, and to register your interest in signing up for service, go to **upcountryfiber.com**.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Shannon Sears

Shannon Sears has worked in the telecommunications industry for 24 years. He is the director of commercial operations with our internet partner, WCFIBER. He primarily works out of the Abbeville office and spends plenty of time in the Upstate.

“Our team is responsible for many aspects of customer service,” Shannon says. “When you call to sign up for service, you are visiting with a member of the commercial operations team. To be able to grow our services to the Upstate under the brand Upcountry Fiber is a career high for me.”

Shannon is a graduate of Lander University with a bachelor’s degree in business administration with a concentration in marketing. He oversees the marketing efforts for both Upcountry Fiber and WCFIBER.

He has served on the NTCA Marketing Committee for several years, most recently as chairman. The committee represents independent broadband providers and cooperatives from all over the United States. Shannon also serves on the NTCA Smart Rural Communities Committee.

Shannon and his wife of 29 years, Brandi, have two adult daughters. Sara Beth works as a pharmacist in Greenwood, and



Shannon Sears and his wife Brandi at the wedding of their daughter Victoria with their other daughter, Sara Beth.

Victoria is a teacher in Virginia Beach, where she resides with her husband, Lucas, who serves in the Navy.

Shannon is a past president of the Abbeville Rotary Club and is currently the chairman of the board of the HopeSouth Credit Union.

“I continue to be impressed with not just our small community, but all the communities across our service territory,” Shannon says. “We live in the most beautiful state in the country, near the ocean and the mountains, have stellar medical care and, of course, some of the best internet service in the country. As we say in our promotional materials, ‘This is Life Unlimited.’” 📶

Layers of flavors

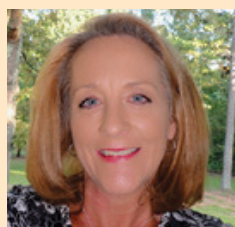
Perfect the sandwich

What makes a sandwich? We posed that question to Bridget Lancaster, host of the popular cooking show “America’s Test Kitchen.”

“A classic sandwich will have a filling between two slices of bread,” she says. “It’s portable, self-contained, and you probably won’t need a knife and fork to eat it. But then you get something like an open-faced sandwich, which is often very saucy or hot and is eaten with a knife and fork.”

Really, a sandwich is what you make it — one slice, two slices, baked, broiled, grilled in butter or served cold. Here are some sandwich tips from “America’s Test Kitchen.”

- Add a tangy sauce such as tzatziki, horseradish or a creamy salad dressing rather than mayonnaise or mustard.
- Consider other breads, such as a sturdy ciabatta or even a nut bread for extra flavor. To keep the sandwich from becoming too much to handle, use just 3-4 ounces of meat and an ounce of cheese. Toast the bread to boost the flavor and keep the sandwich from becoming soggy.
- Instead of a pickle, try chutney or a tangy relish. Instead of iceberg lettuce, try arugula, watercress or spinach. And don’t forget veggies. Consider cucumber, shredded carrots and sprouts.



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

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



‘America’s Test Kitchen’ **GROWN-UP GRILLED CHEESE**

- 7 ounces aged cheddar cheese, cut into 24 equal pieces, room temperature
- 2 ounces brie, rind removed
- 2 tablespoons dry white wine or vermouth
- 4 teaspoons minced shallot
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 8 slices hearty white sandwich or rosemary bread

Process cheddar, brie and wine in a food processor until smooth paste is formed, 20 to 30 seconds. Add shallot and pulse to combine, 3 to 5 pulses. Combine butter and mustard in small bowl.

Working on a parchment paper-lined

counter, spread mustard-butter evenly over one side of slices of bread. Flip four slices of bread over and spread cheese mixture evenly over slices. Top with remaining four slices of bread, buttered sides up.

Preheat a nonstick skillet over medium heat for 2 minutes. Place two sandwiches in skillet; reduce heat to medium-low; and cook until both sides are crispy and golden brown, 6 to 9 minutes per side, moving sandwiches to ensure even browning. Remove sandwiches from skillet and let stand for 2 minutes before serving. Repeat with remaining two sandwiches.

Note: Hold sandwiches on a wire rack on a baking sheet in the oven at 250 F while the second round cooks.



Easy Reuben

- 8 slices rye bread
- 4 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1/4 cup Russian or Thousand Island dressing
- 8 slices Swiss cheese
- 1 pound corned beef
- 1 1/2 cups sauerkraut, well-drained

Butter one side of each slice of bread. On the nonbuttered side, spread Russian dressing on each slice. Top half of the slices with cheese, corned beef and sauerkraut. Top each sandwich with remaining slices, dressing side down.


Heat a medium skillet over medium heat. Place a sandwich in the skillet and cook until golden and cheese is melted, 3 minutes per side. Serve immediately.

ZIPPY BEEF BARBECUE SANDWICH

Make the barbecue the day before and assemble the sandwiches right before your hike or tailgate or wherever you spend your beautiful autumn weekend.

- 1 1/2 cups ketchup
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup picante sauce
- 1/2 cup dry red wine
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 beef sirloin tip roast (4 pounds)
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced
- 16 kaiser rolls, split and toasted
- 2 cups deli coleslaw

Mix first nine ingredients. Cut roast in half; cut slits in roast and insert garlic. Place in a 5-quart slow cooker. Pour sauce over top. Cook, covered, on low until tender, 8-10 hours.

Remove beef. Skim fat from cooking liquid. Shred meat with two forks; return to slow cooker and heat through. Serve on rolls with coleslaw. 





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