

CONNECTED

Season for adventure

Summer camp spirit
at Camp Chatuga

HIT THE
TRAIL

RETIRING
THOROUGHBREDS



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

Seven decades of service

Supporting rural communities through better communications

NTCA proudly represents more than 850 telecommunications companies across rural America as they provide a variety of services including robust broadband, landline, wireless, data, video and IT support. June 1 marks our 70th anniversary, and it's a perfect opportunity to reflect upon how far this life-changing industry has traveled.

The independent telephone industry began to develop throughout rural America in the 1890s, largely because these regions were ignored by large national providers.

After World War II, as the telephone's popularity surged and the value of connectivity was recognized, Congress passed legislation to extend loans to bring telephone systems to rural communities.

With funding on the way, the need for an independent national organization to represent small telephone companies was at an all-time high and, in 1954, NTCA was born.

Eight rural telephone systems in seven states became the original members and got to work advocating to grow the industry.

Over the last few decades, NTCA has focused on the evolution of our members from telecommunications to broadband providers as well as numerous key priorities for rural America, including building a sustainable future for universal service, building Smart Rural Communities, providing cybersecurity tools, being the catalyst for policy engagement and so much more.

As NTCA celebrates its platinum anniversary, we are excited to see what is next for this vibrant industry as it supports rural America and beyond. 📶

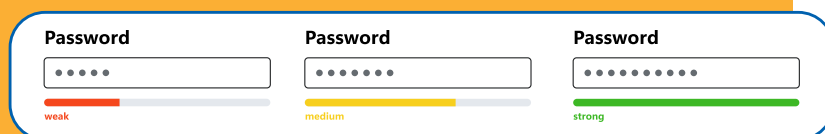
3 tips for password security



Illustration by origami8/Adobe Stock

Passwords are everywhere. From health care and school to work and play, software, websites, essential services and more, most of our daily online activities require a secure login.

The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency offers three tips to better password security — and a good password follows all three.



1 MAKE THEM LONG

At least 16 characters — longer is stronger!

2 MAKE THEM RANDOM

Option 1: Use a random string of mixed-case letters, numbers and symbols. For example:
cXmnZK65rf*&DaaD or Yuc8\$RikA34%ZoPPao98t

Option 2: Create a memorable phrase of five to seven unrelated words. Then, get creative with spelling and the addition of a number or symbol.

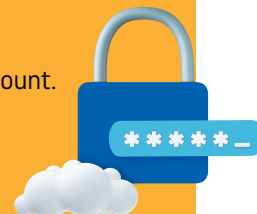
- » Strong: HorsePurpleHatRunBaconShoes
- » Stronger: HorsPerpleHatRunBayconShoos
- » Strongest: HorsPerpleHat#1RunBayconShoos



3 MAKE THEM UNIQUE

Use a different strong password for each account. For example:

- » **Bank:** k8dfh8c@Pfv0gB2
- » **Email account:** LmvF%swVR56s2mW
- » **Social media account:** e246gs%mfS#3tv6



Fortunately, password managers can help you keep up with these longer, more complex codes. Options range from tools already in your web browser to commercial software.



The 30-second commute

Photo by StockPhotoPro/Adobe Stock

Remote work can be a wonderful opportunity

To those who spend long hours in an office, on the road or in the field, working from home might sound like a dream. And, for some, it is.

It's estimated that by 2025 about 22% of the U.S. workforce — or 32.6 million people — will work remotely. A 2023 study by Forbes Advisor found 12.7% of the nation's full-time employees work from home, while another 28% work a hybrid model, dividing the work week between home and the office.

Working from home can help save money on gas, as well as wear and tear on vehicles. The flip side, however, is being face to face with household chores all day. The isolating nature of solo work can also be a challenge, as can establishing the distinction between work and home life.

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

- It makes sense that fast, reliable internet is the first component to remote work success. If your link to the working world is compromised, you can't get anything done. A backup location is another must, just in case a storm

knocks out the electricity or your peace and quiet is temporarily disturbed.

- Experts advise setting up a dedicated workspace — not in an area like your living room or bedroom — free from distractions, preferably with a door. While it might be tempting to work from the bed or couch, soft surfaces don't provide proper support and can lead to headaches, strains and arthritis. It's also important to consider how your workspace will appear to your co-workers and clients during on-screen meetings.
- Creating a routine is vital for remote work. If your family and neighbors know your schedule, they'll be less likely to present distractions.
- The opportunities for remote jobs are out there, you just need to know where to look. Computer tech jobs continue to be the most common opportunities, as are marketing, accounting, HR/recruiting and customer service.

REMOTE WORK RED FLAGS

When searching for work-from-home opportunities, it's important to avoid pitfalls. If the job sounds too good to be true, it usually is. Be wary if:

- The ad says things like, "unlimited earning potential," "investment opportunities and seminars" or "quick money."

- The job requires upfront expenses from you.
- You're asked for personal information — Social Security number, birthdate, banking account numbers, etc. — early in the interview process or as part of your initial application.
- You are offered a job without an interview or anyone contacting or asking for references. 🗨️



Pros of working from home

- Better work-life balance
- More freedom
- Improved employee mindset
- Decreased wardrobe budget
- Comforts of home
- No commute, less wear and tear on vehicle
- Self-regulated hours
- Flexible schedule



PARTNER OF



Serving the underserved

Our work continues

This past spring, we announced the next phase of sweeping progress for underserved areas of Anderson, Pickens and Abbeville counties thanks to \$44 million in federal grants designated by the South Carolina Broadband Office, or SCBBO.



JEFF WILSON (L)

Chief Executive Officer
WCFIBER

JIM LOVINGGOOD (R)

Chief Executive Officer
Blue Ridge Electric

Soon residents in parts of these counties will have access to high-speed fiber internet through Upcountry Fiber and WCFIBER. The grant allows us to continue to fulfill our mission to help bridge the digital divide where little to no access exists. An additional \$17 million from Upcountry Fiber and WCFIBER will be invested to extend the reach of these projects.

Nearly 3,000 Anderson County, 1,400 Pickens County and 125 Abbeville County addresses identified by SCBBO that currently do not have access to broadband internet service are included in the grant. Construction has begun. By the end of 2025, those addresses included in the SCBBO grant, and an additional 17,000 addresses surrounding the areas, will be able to sign up for broadband internet service through either Upcountry Fiber or WCFIBER, depending on their location.

Upon completion of construction mainly funded by this grant, Upcountry Fiber and WCFIBER together will have invested approximately \$71 million since 2021 in providing broadband access to areas that have been previously underserved. The resulting construction of about 3,200 miles of fiber will pass nearly 47,000 eligible addresses, mainly residential.

We are so thankful to Jim Stritzinger and his team in the South Carolina Broadband Office for their efforts to modernize the infrastructure in these underserved communities and entrusting us to be a part of that effort. Their diligence and commitment to bridging the digital divide is not simply their profession, it's truly a calling.

Additionally, county and state officials have advocated strongly for their communities, and we are deeply grateful for their efforts to advance this life-changing technology across South Carolina.

Once these projects are completed, no matter where you are within the grant footprints, you can expect to receive exceptional fiber internet service from either Upcountry Fiber or WCFIBER.

Utility cooperatives like ours have a long history of serving our neighbors in traditionally underserved areas. These grants not only benefit people in their homes but also make it possible for them to have access to better health care, education and job opportunities, which helps to build a better, more competitive community for everyone. 🗨️

The Upcountry Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by Upcountry Fiber, ©2024. 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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Produced for Upcountry Fiber by:



On the Cover:



Summertime campers take part in a wide variety of activities at Camp Chatuga, including music, outdoor skills and field sports. See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of Camp Chatuga

Streaming Resources Available

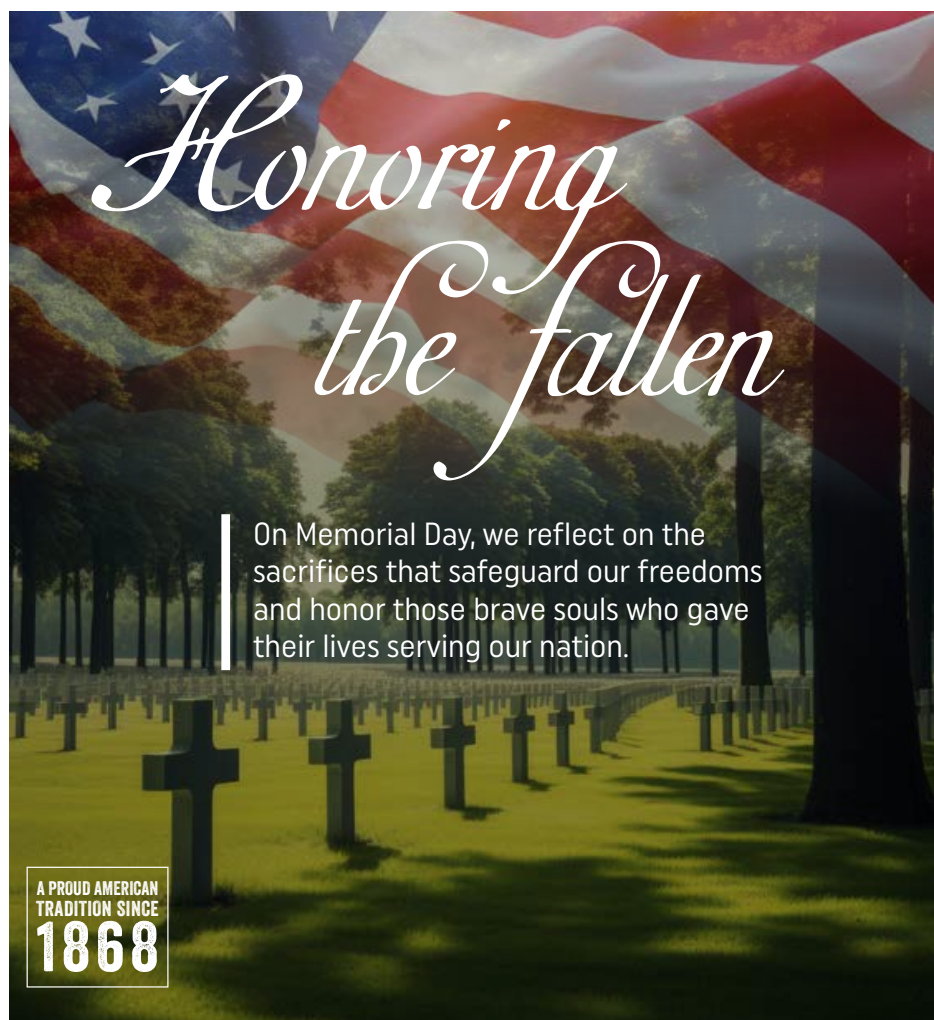
Upcountry Fiber is aware of the financial strain families face due to the unprecedented TV programmer rate increases at the beginning of 2024. While we can't control programmers' rates, we believe in providing alternatives, and that's where streaming comes in. Streaming offers a more affordable option, allowing you to choose from various services and packages that suit your needs.

As a special promotion, Upcountry Fiber is excited to offer a complimentary one-month subscription to Hulu + Live TV for customers who upgrade to our Gig speed package. Hulu + Live TV provides access to live TV programs, Hulu's on-demand library, ESPN+ and Disney+, offering a diverse range of content for our customers to enjoy during their streaming journey.

Because streaming can be complex to navigate, we've developed a Streaming 101 web page available at www.upcountryfiber.com/streaming101.

This page includes helpful information, FAQs, a downloadable booklet and a link to MyBundle, an online tool designed to help you find the right streaming services for you.

At Upcountry Fiber, we are committed to offering quality services and ensuring our customers have the support and resources needed to navigate the evolving entertainment landscape. Join us in embracing the future of streaming with our new Streaming Care Program.



Reflecting on Mother's Day, Father's Day

In celebration of Mother's Day and Father's Day, Upcountry Fiber honors parents of all kinds. From biological mothers and fathers to adoptive parents, stepparents and guardians, we extend our gratitude for the diverse roles you play in shaping lives.

Recognizing that not everyone's journey is the same, we pay tribute to those who have lost parents, acknowledging the strength it takes to navigate that path.

We also honor individuals who may not have children but contribute significantly to the lives of others as mentors, caregivers and pillars of support. We strongly believe that you can be a parent without having a child. The act of parenting is universal and seen through widespread examples across this world.

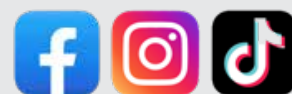
We cherish and uplift the spirit of parenting in all its forms. Thank you for what you do!

Holiday office closures

Upcountry Fiber's offices will close on Monday, May 27, in observance of Memorial Day.

Follow us on social media

on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.



OLD FRIENDS, NEW LIVES

THOROUGHBREDS FIND REFUGE AFTER RACING

Story by KATHY DENES

Two former star athletes — fierce rivals in their youth, when they raced neck and neck to world renown — enjoyed the spotlight together recently during an unbridled celebration of their 30th birthdays. There was no sign of the competitive spirit that once drove them. Instead, they displayed the calm that comes with finding greener pastures on the sprawling Kentucky farm where they both live.

Retired racehorses Silver Charm and Touch Gold are the very definition of Old Friends — which is the name of the group that houses them and more than 250 other thoroughbreds. Visitors to Old Friends' 236-acre Dream Chase Farm in Georgetown, Kentucky, get to meet these majestic retirees. Since its founding in 2003 by Michael Blowen, a former Boston Globe film critic, Old Friends has welcomed about 15,000 visitors for guided tours each year.

Silver Charm, who won the first two legs of the 1997 Triple Crown, enjoys retirement at Old Friends' Georgetown, Kentucky, farm.



Photos by Laura Battles



ABOVE AND LEFT: Guests meet Touch Gold at the Belmont champion's 30th birthday party.

FAR LEFT: Old Friends founder Michael Blowen addresses guests at the birthday celebration for former rival racehorses Touch Gold and Silver Charm.

MEET THE CHAMPIONS

- Go to oldfriendsequine.org/visit to schedule a tour.
- Walking tours, 90 minutes:
 - » General — \$30 per person, up to 20 people, no children younger than 10
 - » Founder's — \$100 per person, up to 15 people, led by Old Friends founder Michael Blowen, no children under 10
 - » Private — By appointment, \$75 per person with volunteer tour guide, \$200 per person with Blowen as tour guide, up to 10 people, no charge for children 11 and under
- Driving option, three hours:
 - » Every Horse on the Farm — \$150 per person, up to five people meet all the equine residents of Dream Chase Farm, led by Old Friends photographer Laura Battles, no children
 - » Buses and groups of more than 10 people, call 502-863-1775 for tour options.

SANCTUARY

The distance between Louisville's Churchill Downs and the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation Sanctuary Farm at Chestnut Hall in Prospect is only 15 miles. But for the thoroughbreds who call the farm home, it's a very long journey.

This sanctuary and event venue was created in 2021 by the TRF, a national group working to save thoroughbred horses from neglect, abuse and slaughter and providing lifelong sanctuary after their racing days are done. The farm is not open to the public, but tours can be booked through private appointment.

Visit trfinc.org for details about tours and any planned events, like the May Front Porch Summer Concert Series outside the historic Chestnut Hall farmhouse. 📞

RETRAIN, REHOME

Other groups are also hard at work for these animals, rescuing, retraining and rehomeing them after their exit from racing. For the past decade, the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance has helped fund the efforts of 86 such groups across the United States, including some based in Lexington, Kentucky.

One of those Lexington organizations, New Vocations, has placed more than 8,000 rehabilitated and retrained retired racehorses in adoptive homes since 1992. Another, the all-volunteer CANTER USA, has transitioned more than 25,000 horses. And for 20 years, the thoroughbreds served by the Secretariat Center at Kentucky Horse Park have been placed in new homes and in a range of new jobs, from therapeutic riding programs to mounted police units.

Providing a safe and secure retirement for thoroughbreds past their racing prime is an expensive endeavor, and most organizations doing this kind of work rely heavily, or sometimes exclusively, on donations. Horse sponsorships, monetary gifts, working as a volunteer, shopping at their online stores, fundraiser participation and buying "wish list" items are a few ways to help. Scheduling tours is another way, and it's the most fun!

Forging friendships

Making memories at Camp Chatuga since 1956

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

The school year is nearly over, and screen time will make way for sunscreen as a summer's outdoor adventures begin. And another group of children will head to their second home, Camp Chatuga, the second-generation, family-owned camp surrounded by the Sumter National Forest in Mountain Rest.

On any given week, the camp hosts around 150 children, many returning each year and eventually becoming counselors themselves, says Angela Gordon Sullivan, one of the camp's three director-owners.

Angela was once a camper herself. "I loved it," she says. "I always wanted the real experience of living in a cabin and having the friends that come in every summer and just was very excited — because that's what camp really is all about. It's just making friendships and memories together."

A FAMILY AFFAIR

In 1956, Angela's father, Nield Gordon, and his college roommate, Everett Pigg, founded Camp Chatuga as a boys' camp on what had been farmland. The lake was a cornfield, the basketball courts were once an apple orchard, and the dining hall sits where the original farmhouse was, with some of its flooring still in use.

The camp became co-ed in 1979 because of demand and to accommodate Nield's three daughters, Angela, Lucy Gordon Barnett and the late Kelly Gordon Moxley. For the last 25 years, Angela, Lucy and Kelly's husband, Rick Moxley, have run the camp. After marrying Rick, Sherry Moxley joined the family business, too.

Today, the 60-acre camp boasts a private lake where campers enjoy all kinds of aquatic activities, from waterskiing to canoeing



Angela Gordon Sullivan points to an image of herself as a child staying at Camp Chatuga, the year it became co-ed.



Camp Chatuga aims to keep campers engaged throughout the day.

Photos courtesy of Camp Chatuga

to swimming. A football-sized field is home to many of the camp's events. A recreation hall and dining hall serve the campers, who stay in cabins. The camp maintains a 4-to-1 ratio of campers to staff members.

Set up with bunk beds, each cabin houses a counselor and between four to eight campers, depending on their ages. Screened windows let in the cool mountain air. "We're surrounded by the forest, but we're not in the forest," Angela says. "It's a very open, beautiful place."

ACTIVITIES ABOUND

Camp Chatuga welcomes rising first to 11th graders. Their summer before their senior year of high school campers can become a "camper in transition" and are given more responsibility. Once they graduate, they can become counselors.

Each day at the camp begins with breakfast and a cabin cleanup before campers head to their activities. Then more activities — over 30 are available from horseback riding to sports to crafts — follow lunch before swim time, dinner, an evening all-camp event and lights out. All-camp events could be anything from a game of Capture the Flag to movie night, themed dances or a talent night.

Campers gain a sense of independence, a chance to disconnect from technology and the opportunity to forge face-to-face friendships, Angela says. "There are just so many benefits — being outdoors, nature, friendships, experiences — that camp can offer." ☑



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A trio of pulled-pork tacos is a popular menu item. Mathew Nelson and his wife, Teresa Parrish, named their tavern after their dog, Willie Nelson. Delicious food and lively entertainment are the recipe for a relaxing evening. Courtside rooms include a queen bed, minifridge, coffee maker and a TV. On weekends, Chattooga River Lodge hosts live music acts, like local band Modern Mammals.

Photos courtesy of Chattooga River Lodge

The year-round retreat

Chattooga River Lodge welcomes happy campers

Story by JAMIE BIESIADA

From sleeping under the stars and campfire cooking next to the scenic Long Creek, to enjoying an air-conditioned night in a lodge with a full-service bar and restaurant attached, visitors can have it all at the Chattooga River Lodge.

"We guarantee that we're open," owner Mathew Nelson says. "If you come up to Long Creek and it's between 11 a.m. and 9 p.m., any day of the year, the lodge is open for you."

Mathew and his wife, Teresa Parrish, are on a mission to establish a destination in Long Creek. The 34.5-acre campground, surrounded by Sumter National Forest, offers 17 tent and eight RV camping sites, as well as nine lodge guestrooms and a marble bathhouse. Long Creek runs through the campground, with many campsites near the water.

The lodge is home to Willie's Tavern, open daily from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m. on weekdays and until 10 p.m. on weekends. The tavern is named after Mathew and Teresa's dog, Willie Nelson. "You get that combination where one night, maybe you have hot dogs over the fire or throw a grill

out there and make some steaks," Mathew says. "But then the next night, you've been on the river all day. You're kind of tired. You're kind of wet. And you get to come inside, watch a football game and have a beer."

Mathew brought on chef Dustin Farnsworth and his wife, Cat Heim. They debuted a new menu last March, featuring tacos, wings, burgers, seafood and pasta dishes. The lodge also hosts live music every Friday and Saturday. In the summer, bands play in an outdoor courtyard.

NEW AMENITIES ON TAP

Over his 27-year tenure as a software developer, Mathew says it began to feel like a burnout career. In early 2020, he bought the Chattooga River Lodge, where amenities now include reliable internet access.

"The satellite internet providers were saying they were high speed, but honestly, that's nonsense," he says. "Previously, I had to do the opposite of advertising and say, 'While we do have internet, it's very slow and you can't expect much.' I had to lower expectations before people arrived.

It was a constant frustration, from morning to night, for years."

He knew upgrading would provide his guests with internet service to keep them coming back. So, he signed up for Upcountry Fiber's high-speed broadband the first day it was available.

Upcountry Fiber's network allows guests to access their preferred streaming services, but there are more benefits. "It's not just for the guest experience, but also for our own operations," Mathew says. "It used to take hours to update QuickBooks with receipts and now it's like 10 minutes. It's a night-and-day difference."

Mathew added smart locks and security cameras at Willie's Tavern, which he can monitor from his home office.

"Guests expect nowadays that when you go traveling, you're going to have high-speed internet," he says. "With Upcountry Fiber, I'm now able to meet those expectations." 📶

CHATTOOGA RIVER LODGE

110 Blalock Place, Long Creek
864-777-9210
chattoogalodge.com



Living the HIGH LIFE

Hot Air Balloon Rides Make for a Magical Experience

Story by JEN CALHOUN

As a child growing up in California, Kim McCourt scrambled up hills, cliffs and trees to see the land below. “I had this need to see all those things I never even knew were there,” he says.

But when his family moved to the flatlands of Florida, he had to find a new way to see the world. In 1998, he took his first flight in a hot air balloon. “I learned that ballooning is, well, kind of magical,” says Kim, who is now a licensed hot air balloon pilot in the Orlando region. “There’s the exploration part of it, and you’ve got Mother Nature all around you.”

ULTIMATE ADVENTURE

These days, Kim often travels the skies with tourists who want to experience a ride they can’t find at the region’s theme parks. For many, it’s a way to fly without being contained in the metal tube of an airplane. “In the balloon, you can see so much more, and you can actually feel everything,” Kim says. “You can breathe the air.”

There’s a spiritual component, too, says Mark West, vice president of the Balloon Federation of America. West, a former Navy pilot, also served as president and chief engineer of Aerostar International, which was once the largest hot air balloon manufacturer in the country.

“Ballooning has an incredible amount of magic to it,” Mark says. “Virtually everyone who sees one is enamored with them. I suppose they’re kind of representative of breaking free of the bonds of Earth and floating away.”

UP AND AWAY

Across the country, hot air balloon rides are a popular pastime for families celebrating a special occasion or tourists looking for a new experience. Some passengers want to make memories with their families, while others go to commemorate important events, like marriage proposals, bucket lists and to spread the ashes of loved ones into the sky. “There are all kinds of stories,” Kim says. “The only things that stay the same are the sun coming up and people smiling.”



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Balloons get ready for a flight.

Most hot air balloons are operated by gas.

Hot air balloons take off during an event.



But as wide-open spaces dwindle, so do the balloon rides. Pilots simply don't have enough space to land. Weather's also been a factor, because unreliable winds can ground a pilot. Kim says he's seen this firsthand. "Over the last 15 years, the weather went from 275 days we could fly to probably 100 days," he says.

He worries other factors could cause ballooning to take a hit, too. "Fabric, wicker, propane, repairs and parts are way more expensive these days, so it takes more money to maintain them," Kim says.

HOPE FLOATS

Despite the challenges, Kim still grins like a kid after an early-morning

flight. "There's nothing like it," he says. "When we lift off and the sun starts to rise, we might rest at the top of a tree and stare clear down to the bottom of a pond. Then we'll take off again and maybe rest right on top of the water where the mist is coming off the surface. It's up and down, up and down — gently. One person said it was like flying in the hand of God while getting a brain massage."

Balloonists enjoy attempting to describe the sensation of floating on — and with — the air, Mark says. "One of my good friends said it was 'having a destiny without a destination.' I think it attracts people who want to enjoy the beauty of the Earth and want to experience that kind of freedom." 🗨️

To catch a ride with Kim McCourt, visit greaterorlandoballoonrides.com. For more information on hot air ballooning and the people who are passionate about it, visit the Balloon Federation of America's Facebook page, or find the group at bfa.net.



1783

THE BIRTH OF THE HOT AIR BALLOON

▶ June 1783 — First unmanned flight

After a year or two of experimentation and invention, brothers Joseph Michel and Jacques Etienne Montgolfier publicly launch their version of a hot air balloon. It held no passengers. The balloon landed in the middle of a vineyard a little over a mile from where it had taken off.

▶ September 1783 — Confused farm animals

The first balloon flight with passengers launches in Versailles carrying a duck, a rooster and a sheep. The animals made it out alive. However, sources say the sheep kicked the duck and damaged its wing. King Louis XVI of France was pleased to learn that animals could breathe so high up.

▶ November 1783 — First human flight

Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier and another passenger take the first untethered, human-occupied flight. The flight, which launched in France, lasted about 25 minutes and reached an altitude of about 500 feet. Less than two years later, de Rozier and his passenger would become the first people to die in a hot air balloon crash during a flight from France to England.

▶ December 1783 — Hydrogen balloon

Jacques Charles, a French physicist who had been experimenting with hydrogen balloons, boards one with a few colleagues. They traveled 25 miles in less than two hours. They also carried a barometer and a thermometer. Afterward, gas balloons became the preferred method of ballooning.

Sources: DragonFly Balloon Adventures, Virgin Balloon Flights, National Balloon Museum

A truly magnificent seven

Monthlong expedition showcases South Carolina's outdoor splendor

Story by LAZ DENES



Asking Tom Mullikin which of South Carolina's seven geographical wonders he likes best is about as unfair a question as asking him to choose a favorite from his four children. The Camden-based environmental attorney and renowned outdoorsman has a deep love for the natural beauty of the state and has set foot in almost every part of it at one time or another.

When pressed for an answer, he cites the scenic hike to the top of 3,554-foot Sassafras Mountain, the highest point in South Carolina, located along the North Carolina state line in the Jocassee Gorges Wilderness Area. "It's almost indescribable, the beauty up there on a pretty day in the Appalachian Mountains," Tom says. "It's on Cherokee Nation land, so there's a lot of history that goes with it, and you can see four states on a clear day."

Sassafras Mountain and Jocassee Gorges are the northernmost of South Carolina's seven wonders, the others being the Chattooga River, Congaree National Park, Edisto River, Ace Basin and Bulls Island. They're connected by the Palmetto Trail, some 350 miles of which Tom and

hundreds of others have trekked together each of the past four summers as part of an annual 30-day expedition called the South Carolina 7, or SC7.

The event, held in cooperation with nonprofits Global Eco Adventures and the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, moved from July to the spring this year for the first time to better involve students while school is still in session. It was slated to embark on Earth Day, April 22, and conclude on May 22.

HIKING SOUTH CAROLINA

Participants are invited to join the trek anywhere along the route to experience its environmental awareness seminars and experiences and as an opportunity to enhance their health and well-being. Tom leads the hikes, which cover the state.

"What gives this event real meaning is we literally walk from one end of the state to the other, and that gives you a different feel for our state," says Tom. A Camden High School and University of South Carolina graduate, he's dived each of the world's five oceans and climbed the world's seven tallest mountain peaks.

◀ The South Carolina 7 event encourages people to explore, care for and protect the outdoors.

▼ Tom Mullikin and his wife, Virginia Ann, enjoy a hike in Oconee County.



Photos courtesy of SC7

"In the years we've been doing this, I feel like I've learned so much more about the history, the culture, the people and the food that you don't get any other way," he says. "You get on that path and you see it, you feel it."

Over the SC7's first four years of existence, the organization attracted a tremendous following, across the country and internationally, via social and traditional media – 16.5 million followers and impressions and counting.

"Our measure all along has been, are we getting good information to people, and are we getting people involved," Tom says. "I'll tell you we've tapped into a lot of interest and passion from a lot of people. It's been way beyond my greatest hope and expectation, and I think the best is still in front of us." 📱

Learn more!

southcarolina7.com

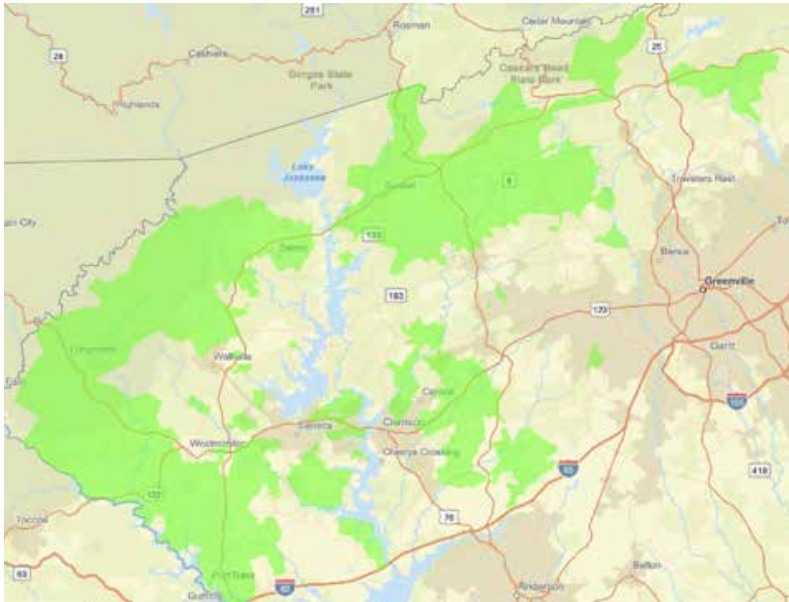
Facebook — South Carolina 7

Connecting the Upstate to BROADBAND

In 2023, Upcountry Fiber connected 1,400 miles of fiber optic cable, giving 9,266 more residences and businesses access to high-speed broadband.

Upcountry Fiber's network currently has an excellent net promoter score of 85. This survey measures customer loyalty, satisfaction and enthusiasm for a company. Upcountry Fiber's score places it in the top percentile of broadband providers nationwide.

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

Kerri Hall

CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

Kerri Hall, the customer service manager for Upcountry Fiber, began her career with WCTEL in 1999. She primarily works from the Abbeville office but enjoys traveling throughout the area.

As customer service manager, she leads the team of account service representatives. "We have ongoing training which focuses on customer education and meeting the customers' needs," she says.

A FAMILY THAT SERVES OTHERS

Thirty-six years ago, Kerri married Michael Hall, an engineer with Little River Electric Cooperative in Abbeville. They have three children. Clayton, 30, recently completed six years of active service with the South Carolina National Guard. Middle son Brandon, 27, followed his father into the power industry and is a lineman with Duke Energy. Youngest son Matthew, 20, is a junior at Lander University. The Halls have a 5-year-old granddaughter, Zoey Hall, and five Jack Russell terriers.

Kerri has a bachelor's degree in marketing and management from Lander University, with a minor in music. She spends her spare time on music-related activities, including clogging. 🎵

OLDIES

but goodies

Classic recipes create timeless tastes

Although we love creating new recipes in keeping with today's tastes and trends, there's something sweet about a vintage recipe that can still hold its own. Get ready for a trip down memory lane with these old-fashioned recipes we still love.

From classic chicken tetrazzini to a delightful lemon icebox pie, these vintage recipes are worth holding onto. They may have been gone from our culinary repertoire for a decade or two, but they certainly are not forgotten.

Ready for some nostalgia and satisfied smiles at your table? Give these retro recipes a try, and they're sure to stir up good memories.



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

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



CHICKEN TETRAZZINI

No roundup of retro recipes is complete without a classic chicken tetrazzini.

- 16 ounces linguini or spaghetti, cooked
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 4 chicken breasts, cooked and diced
- 2 cans cream of chicken soup
- 2 cups sour cream
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, grated
- 2 cups mozzarella cheese shredded

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish and set aside.

Cook noodles to al dente, according to the box instructions. Drain and set aside. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, combine chicken, soup, sour cream, butter, chicken broth, garlic salt, parsley and pepper. Mix well, then stir in cooked noodles. Pour mixture into prepared baking dish. Sprinkle both cheeses on top and bake, uncovered, for 36-42 minutes, until cheeses are melted and casserole is bubbling.

CREAMED CORN

If you can't wait until summer to take advantage of sweet Silver Queen corn, use the sweetest corn you can find.

- 13 ears of fresh corn, husks and silks removed
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper

Remove silks from corn. Cream the corn by cutting the kernels from the cobs, then scrape the

corn cobs with the back of the knife to get all the "milk" and pulp. Transfer creamed corn to a large skillet. Add milk, butter and salt. Cook over low heat, stirring often, for 30 minutes. If corn becomes too thick, add more milk for desired consistency. Sprinkle with pepper. Makes 6-8 servings.



CLASSIC SOUTHERN CORNBREAD SALAD

- 1 skillet of your favorite cornbread
- 1 cup diced onions
- 1 green or red bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 cup diced tomato
- 1 15-ounce can whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 pound bacon, cooked until crisp and crumbled
- 2-3 cups mayonnaise
- 1 package ranch dressing mix

Crumble cooled cornbread into a large bowl. Add onions, bell pepper, diced tomatoes, corn and bacon. Stir until well combined. In a separate bowl, stir together mayonnaise and ranch mix until well-blended. Add mayonnaise dressing mixture to salad and stir until fully mixed. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours before serving.



LEMON ICEBOX PIE

Finish your retro meal with a slice of this much-loved pie.

Crust:

- 1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 7 tablespoons butter, melted

Filling:

- 2 14-ounce cans sweetened condensed milk
- 1 cup fresh lemon juice
- 5 large egg yolks
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the crust: Preheat the oven to 350 F. Combine the cracker crumbs, sugar and butter in a medium bowl. Mix with a fork until the crumbs are well coated and stick together when pinched. Press the mixture into the bottom and up the sides of a 9-inch pie plate. Bake until set, about 10 minutes. Set aside to cool slightly, about 10 minutes.

For the filling: Whisk together the condensed milk, lemon juice, egg yolks and lemon zest in a medium bowl until combined. Pour the filling into the crust and bake until the center is set but still slightly jiggly, about 15 minutes. Let cool for 30 minutes, then refrigerate until chilled, about 2 hours.

Once pie is chilled, beat the heavy cream, powdered sugar and vanilla in a large bowl with a mixer on medium speed until soft peaks form. Spoon onto the center of the pie and serve.

Alternatively: Buy a premade graham cracker crust as a timesaver. 📌



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