



UPCOUNTRY

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024

# CONNECTED

## Resources for Life

The Arc of Oconee

GIVING BACK

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GHOST TOURS





By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association


## The Most Important Rural Broadband Program You Probably Don't Know

In Washington, D.C., we often talk about the new grant programs that are going to help bridge the digital divide in our country. But I want to highlight what I believe has been the most successful rural broadband initiative, the federal Universal Service Fund.

So, what is the Universal Service Fund? The Communications Act of 1934 included language that said all Americans should have access to “rapid, efficient, nationwide communications service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges.” Today, the USF is the main federal program helping rural consumers connect to services comparable in price and quality to those in urban areas. This makes services more affordable for low-income families and supports critical connections for schools, libraries and health care facilities in rural communities by offsetting the high cost of building and managing rural communications networks.

There is one big difference that sets the USF apart from many of the new grant programs: The USF not only supports the construction and deployment of networks but also the maintenance of those networks. It helps ensure that these networks are maintained and sustained so Americans continue to make use of broadband long after the last shovel is put down.

An NTCA survey found that without the High-Cost USF program all rural consumers will pay at least \$100 more per month for their broadband service. And the viability of some rural broadband networks would be at risk, as the operations costs and repayment of the loans needed to build them cannot be covered.

NTCA is committed to efforts to preserve the USF so that the mission of universal service for all Americans can be fulfilled. 

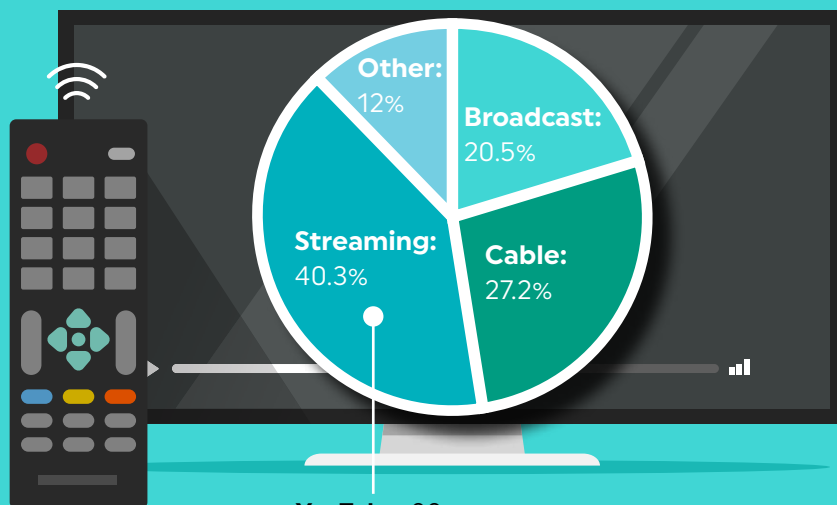
# Streaming Remains Strong

Each month Nielsen, a company that has long tracked viewership habits across a range of media, updates The Gauge. The report offers a snapshot of how various forms of media are consumed to create a picture of the media landscape.

Several key trends shaped the streaming results, such as June marking the end of the school year and start of school breaks, which led viewers 17 and younger to drive the largest upticks in TV usage across all ages.

As a result, this June streaming topped the earlier viewership record set by cable for that month in 2021.

## A SUMMER STREAMING SNAPSHOT



**YouTube:** 9.9%  
**Netflix:** 8.4%  
**Other streaming:** 6%  
**Prime Video:** 3.1%  
**Hulu:** 3%  
**Disney+:** 2%  
**Tubi:** 2%  
**Roku Channel:** 1.5%  
**Max:** 1.4%  
**Peacock:** 1.2%  
**Paramount+:** 1.1%  
**Pluto TV:** 0.8%

Source: Nielsen The Gauge



# A Web for All

## Technology assists those with diminished sight

About two-thirds of Americans rely on some form of contact lenses or glasses to correct nearsightedness, farsightedness and more. Then there are eye injuries and diseases like glaucoma that can diminish sight, and the inevitable process of aging can also cause a slow decline in eyesight.

In an increasingly online world—where vital information is often communicated using text on screens—people with diminished vision can struggle. However, there are resources available to help those with impaired sight, and even blindness, interact online.

For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires all websites to be accessible to everyone. While not every website is ADA compliant, sites for government agencies, banks and larger organizations are. The basic tools you need are free and as handy as web browsers like Chrome, Edge, Firefox and Safari.

### **BROWSER BY BROWSER**

Microsoft's Edge browser scores well for assistive technologies. It lets users

increase the size of text and get image descriptions for screen readers. Also, a simple keyboard command—Ctrl+Shift+U on PCs and Shift+Command+U on Macs—signals the browser to read the current webpage aloud. Most other browsers require users to go into system preferences or use an extension for screen readers.


Meanwhile, Chrome's TalkBack screen reader adds spoken, audible or vibration feedback to your device. While the browser does not have a way to change the look of text, it does have extensions that allow users to customize their browsers to control visual clutter.

Google, the maker of Chrome and a popular search engine, has an award-winning disability employee resource group and says it is committed to hiring employees with disabilities. That commitment also helps it find ways to make its site more accessible.

Like Chrome, Apple's Safari comes with its own screen reader, VoiceOver. Users can choose the voice they find most pleasing and set the speech speed. It also lets users increase contrast, zoom in and

remove ads and distractions.

Firefox allows users to adjust the settings so every site has the same font, type size and color to enhance the ease of reading. It also has extensions for changing text to speech and making bookmarks larger, among other things.

While users may need a sighted person to set up the assistive features, modern technologies unlock the world to more people than ever. 



# Be informed and empowered

## Connect locally to feel the difference



**JEFF WILSON (L)**  
Chief Executive Officer  
WCFIBER

**JIM LOVINGGOOD (R)**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Blue Ridge Electric

**Y**our trust in us is extremely important. That's why transparency is key to everything we do.

We know you are bombarded by ads from companies vying for your business, including other broadband providers. We encourage you to look closely at their offers. We understand that price matters, and you need value for your investment. Before switching providers, make sure you are fully informed.

Here are six questions to ask your potential new provider: 1) Do you offer matching upload and download speeds, also known as symmetrical speeds? 2) How long is this price offer in effect? 3) What will my monthly bill be after this offer expires, including all fees and taxes? 4) Do you have data caps? If so, what do you charge if I exceed my data

cap? 5) If I terminate service before my contract is up, what is the penalty? 6) Will you dispatch a technician on nights, weekends or holidays if I lose service?

Large providers must now post broadband labels on their websites. These are designed to ensure you fully understand the service you are buying. Read these carefully and pay attention to all the details. At Upcountry Fiber, we are proud to be 100% fiber. Why does that matter?

### UNMATCHED SPEED AND PERFORMANCE

**Consistent high speeds:** Our fiber optic network ensures you enjoy consistent high speeds 24/7. Whether streaming 4K videos, gaming online or running a home office, our fiber service delivers the performance you need without interruption.

**Symmetrical speeds:** Enjoy the same high-speed connection for both uploading and downloading.

### FUTURE-PROOF TECHNOLOGY

**Scalability:** Our fiber network is designed to handle future technological advancements, ensuring your internet connection stays ahead of the curve.

### RELIABILITY

**Minimal downtime:** Fiber optic cables are less susceptible to weather conditions and electromagnetic interference, leading to fewer outages and more stable connections.

**Lower latency:** Experience lower latency with fiber, which means quicker response times for online gaming, videoconferencing and any activity that requires real-time interaction.

### HOW WE DO BUSINESS

**No misleading introductory rates:** With our service, what you see is what you get. We have no data caps and offer straightforward, competitive pricing with no sudden rate hikes after an introductory period.

### STAY LOCAL, STAY CONNECTED

**Community commitment:** As a locally owned company, we are deeply invested in our community. By choosing our service, you are supporting local jobs and contributing to the local economy.

**Personalized customer service:** Our local presence allows us to offer extraordinary customer support.

**Tailored solutions:** Our customized packages suit different needs and budgets, ensuring you get the best value without compromising quality.

**The bottom line:** Staying with us means opting for a faster, more reliable and future-proof internet connection. While other providers may lure you with lower prices, they often come with hidden costs, unreliable service, data caps and outdated technology. Our commitment to transparency, community and cutting-edge technology ensures you receive the best possible internet experience, today and in the future. 📞

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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 West Carolina, 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](mailto:info@UpcountryFiber.com)

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

24/7 Repair Line:  
888-760-2111 – select option for repair

### BUSINESS CONTACTS:

**Max Crawford**  
Area District Manager  
[Max.Crawford@wctel.com](mailto:Max.Crawford@wctel.com)

**Brandon Smith**  
Business Solutions Consultant  
[Brandon.Smith@wctel.com](mailto:Brandon.Smith@wctel.com)

**Carter Burton**  
Broadband Deployment Manager  
[Carter.Burton@wctel.com](mailto:Carter.Burton@wctel.com)

Produced for Upcountry Fiber by:



### On the Cover:



The Arc of Oconee serves individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, providing projects like this leaf transfer artwork. See story Page 8.

Photo by Matt Ledger



## CYBERSECURITY TIPS

**October is National Cybersecurity Month**, the perfect time to review ways to protect yourself against phishing attempts.

Phishing is the term for emails, messages and websites that may look authentic but are designed to steal your personal information or money. For example, a phishing message claiming to be from your bank or an imposter posing as Upcountry Fiber may ask for your Social Security number or request you click a link that downloads malware to your computer. Some effective phishers even pose as an employer to convince employees to send client records or wire money to them.

How can you protect yourself? Look for warning signs and take the following action:

- **Check the email address**—Scammers often use email addresses that mimic legitimate ones, only spelled slightly differently or with .net instead of .com.
- **Look out for urgent language**—If the message says you must act immediately or your services will be canceled or you will be fired, that's a sign someone is trying to get you to panic and act without thinking.
- **Don't click on unsolicited attachments or links**—You could end up infecting your computer with malware or a virus.
- **If the sender asks for personal or financial information, be wary**—Legitimate institutions won't ask for your password, Social Security number or financial details in an email.
- **Spelling and grammar errors are another sign of phishing**—Legitimate companies carefully craft their emails and edit them extensively.
- **Don't think scammers have given up on phone calls**—Be aware of anyone asking for financial or personal information over the phone or via text.

## UPCOUNTRY FIBER COSTUME CONTEST!

Enter our Halloween costume photo contest for a chance to win a \$50 Amazon gift card.

The contest is open to photos of kids ages 12 and under, in our service area.

To enter email a photo to **photocontest@wctel.net** by 4 p.m. on Nov. 4.

Submissions will be posted to West Carolina's Facebook page, and the community will vote for the winners from

Nov. 4-8. The three photos with the most likes will win a \$50 Amazon gift card. Winners will be announced on Nov. 8. For full details, visit **westcarolina.com/halloween**.

## Our community. Your co-op.

Building a better future — together





# SPIRITS OF THE SEASON

## Ghost Tours Scare Up Connections to the Past

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS



Photo courtesy of American Ghost Walks

Allison Jornlin, depicted here in an illustration, researches and writes scripts for ghost tours.

For many, October isn't complete without spine-tingling ghost stories, and chances are your hometown has a few of its own. Allison Jornlin, co-founder and tour developer with American Ghost Walks, conducts research and writes ghost tour scripts in towns across the United States. Allison is also a paranormal investigator and speaker, and

she's been featured on the CW Network's "Mysteries Decoded."

Ghost tours are immensely popular, and Allison says they can be found in almost every large city and even in many small towns across the country. "I think people have lost their connection with history and with their ancestors, and this is a way to reconnect," she says.

Unlike haunted house attractions that have terrifying special effects, ghost tours offer authentic history in locations that give guests the chance to literally step into the paranormal. They allow people to connect to the haunted past through walking tours, bus/trolley tours, investigation-style tours and even pub crawls. Some guests report experiencing



Photo courtesy of Bulldog Tours

The Old Charleston Jail, which once held pirates, Civil War prisoners and the first known female serial killer, is an especially spooky spot.



Photo courtesy of Birmingham Historic Touring Company

A group pauses before entering the First Presbyterian Church during a ghost walk in Birmingham, Alabama.



Photo courtesy of Ryo Hamasaki

Ghost tours can include exploring the paranormal by bus or trolley, as well as on foot.

paranormal phenomena, like feeling unexplained cold spots or photographing disembodied faces and shadowy figures.

Allison pores through old newspapers and historical archives and interviews local people to give her tours as much local flavor as possible. “I’m looking for stories that are unique to the community that they come out of,” she says. While many stories across the country have common themes, Allison says, every place is a little bit different.

“You don’t have to believe in ghosts to enjoy the tour,” she says. Skeptics can have fun learning spooky stories. Tour guides often encourage guests to share their personal paranormal experiences to relate to one another. Ghost tours can’t guarantee guests will have an otherworldly encounter, but there is always a possibility.

If you’re ready to test your luck, consider joining these popular local tours, if you dare:

- Charleston, South Carolina’s, rich history, fascinating places, people and landmarks bring with them incredible stories—and lots of ghosts. Check them out through Bulldog Tours. [bulldogtours.com/tours/ghost](http://bulldogtours.com/tours/ghost)
- The Birmingham Ghost Walk in Alabama includes two walking tours and the Ghosts and Graveyards Chauffeured Experience. [bhamhistory.com](http://bhamhistory.com)
- Old Louisville is home to what many consider to be the “most haunted neighborhood in America.” Learn why through Old Louisville Ghost Tours, in Louisville, Kentucky. [louisvillehistorictours.com/louisville-ghost-tours](http://louisvillehistorictours.com/louisville-ghost-tours) 📱

## FUN FACTS

- Most ghost tours in the U.S. run year-round.
- Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, claims to have America’s oldest ghost tour. It began in 1970 and is still running. In 1973, historian Richard Crowe started Chicago’s first ghost tour. He told ghost stories on the radio around Halloween, which inspired Allison Jornlin and her brother to establish American Ghost Walks.
- Many ghost stories have common themes. Allison notes the prevalence of stories about women who met unfortunate ends. Guides across the nation tell local stories of jilted lovers, forlorn widows and vanishing hitchhikers.

## SCARING UP A GREAT TOUR

Are you spending the spooky season exploring a new town—or your own hometown? A ghost tour is a fun way to learn about the history of a place and its people. Before you book one, follow these tips:

### CHOOSE A TOUR THAT SUITS YOUR GROUP

While each tour is unique, they typically fall into these categories: walking tours, bus tours, investigation tours and pub crawls. Investigation tours allow guests to become paranormal researchers for one night, and they typically focus on one building or property. A haunted pub crawl offers spirits of both the alcoholic and ethereal kinds.

### CHECK THE WEBSITE

Tour companies list important information on their websites, including an overview, length of the tour, walking distance, accessibility, age-appropriateness and cancellation/refund policies. Many tours encourage guests to purchase tickets in advance.

### READ THE REVIEWS

Check Google reviews and websites like Yelp or Tripadvisor for reviews. Search for detailed reviews that weigh the pros and cons of the tour. If you find positive reviews of a specific guide, you may be able to book a tour on a night when that person is working.

If you still have questions after your research, don’t be afraid to give the tour company a call.



# MAKING A *Difference*

## Arc of Oconee County fills a vital need

Story by JOHN CLAYTON



In late June, Gail Hinton proudly made an announcement over the phone: “Next month, my house will be paid for.”

She has every reason to be proud. A longtime participant at the Arc of Oconee County, Gail is a success story for the nonprofit agency for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Arc provides social activities, continuing education and a chance, whenever possible, to be independent.

Gail, 52, works full time at Schneider Electric while still attending Arc activities. She is among about two dozen regular Arc participants, also known as consumers. The organization is designed to serve adults with developmental disabilities who are shut out of some programs and the traditional education system after reaching the age of 22.

### SPANNING THE GAP

Arc of Oconee County, part of Arc of the United States, welcomes consumers ages 19 to 79 to programs at the center once a week, as well as special events, Executive Director Laura Price says. Called Our Place, the program provides socialization and enrichment activities.

“The public schools provide services for people with disabilities up until their 22nd year, so after that there’s a huge, long waiting list,” says Laura, a retired



**TOP:** Stacey Smith shows her daughter, Elizabeth, how to create a print pillow craft with fall leaves.

**BOTTOM:** Greg Graham, left, and Bret Wagner get creative with their projects.





Jacob Grabe, center, program leader for Clemson University Snap Ed Health Matters, leads a group from Arc of Oconee County around campus.



TOP: Gail Hinton presses a leaf onto a print pillow craft.

BOTTOM: From left, Bobby Johnson, David Wagstaff and Greg Graham enjoy a round of putt-putt at Oasis Ranch.

Clemson University IT professional whose son, Michael, had few options after finishing school around 2010.

It took nine years before Michael found the services he needed. Laura says wait times have improved, but it can still take four or five years to gain access to some programs. “That’s a long time for not having anything available to do,” she says. “So, we decided at Arc to focus on that population—those that were out of school but weren’t really getting any other services. The Our Place program is an opportunity for our participants to get together and to have socialization. We do recreational activities, music, dance, arts and crafts, everything.”

Clemson University students studying nursing and recreational therapy also visit, hosting classes on topics like general health and hygiene, all designed

to help create a better quality of life for Arc consumers.

### SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Bowling at Seneca’s Oconee Lanes is among the regular activities Arc clients enjoy. They also play mini golf and swim when the weather allows. Movie nights are popular, as is an annual talent show where the spotlight literally shines on Arc participants like Gail and Becky Oates, who says she will probably be singing some country music during the Oct. 10 extravaganza.

“We enjoy doing talent shows and stuff like that,” says Becky, 52. “We’ve got performances and everything.” Becky and Gail are both described as “mama bears” by some of their peers at Arc, doling out help and hugs whenever needed.

For 27-year-old Elizabeth Smith, the dances are the most fun, says her mom, Stacey Smith, who is also an Arc board member. The Arc family participated in the Tim Tebow Foundation’s annual Night to Shine event, a virtual prom night experience for people with special needs, this past February.

“We decided to host that for our participants at Arc this year, and that was Elizabeth’s most favorite,” Stacey says. “We’ve done that for many years but doing it there with our Arc friends was super special.”

The events are common ground for participants of all ages and functionality levels, including Elizabeth, who Stacey says

functions at a 3- to 6-year-old level, while others, like Gail, are largely independent.

“Becky and Gail are both very able to engage and do most everything we do independently,” says Stacey, who is Elizabeth’s caregiver. “They understand safety awareness in their environment, so when we go play putt-putt Gail and Becky both will jump in and help Elizabeth or some of the others that need some help. That gives them a great sense of purpose, being able to come alongside and give a helping hand. It blesses us to be a blessing to others, and Becky and Gail get to experience the blessing of coming alongside and helping others like my Elizabeth.”

The range in ages and the disparity in developmental abilities could be seen as challenging, but the staff, volunteers and consumers make it work and even flourish. “We enjoy watching them as groups, helping each other and doing things together,” Laura says. “After they get to know people, I guess they really don’t see so much of an age difference, and disability difference doesn’t matter either. They’re just friends and talk to each other and have some good social experiences. There have been several friendships that have been made over time that are really nice.”

Stacey says Arc fills three requirements for Elizabeth—it’s safe, beneficial and it’s something she looks forward to. But Arc also fills a need for parents and caregivers. “There’s a support system there of the parents and caregivers and even the staff and board members, as well,” Stacey says. “It has filled a tremendous need on several levels for Elizabeth, individually, and for us as a family.” ☺



# RUNNING TOWARD THE FUTURE

## Rural Athletes Must Overcome Hurdles to Win Scholarships

For much of her life, Olivia Murphy focused on becoming a collegiate swimmer. The biggest obstacle she faced didn't come in the pool—it was catching the eye of college coaches.

Each year thousands of student-athletes pursue college athletic scholarships. Ultimately, only about one out of every 50 succeeds, according to a 2021 study by Next College Student Athlete. That bar can be even tougher to clear for athletes like Olivia, who live in rural areas, where it's often difficult to get the attention of major programs.

For those students, earning a spot on a college roster takes more than just the talent and commitment to be a high-level athlete—it also takes a “second job” as a communicator and organizer, working just to be seen.

“I didn't start the actual recruitment process until summer of my junior year, which is a little late for some people,” says Olivia, a Tennessee resident and 2024 Tullahoma High School graduate.

### MAKING A SPLASH

Olivia's path was more straightforward than that of many other athletes: Swim fast, win races. A key member of the Wildcats' school-record-setting relay team, she recorded plenty of fast times while helping the team win its first division title.

She knew she had the speed, she just needed the coaches to know it, too. “When you first reach out to a coach, whether it's through a questionnaire or an email, you put your best events and your best times in there,” Olivia says.

When prospective recruits submit statistics, coaches compare their times to those of their current swimmers, as well as the

ones winning division and national titles. Athletes from almost every sport send out these cold-call emails to coaches across the country. In sports like football and basketball, where skills can't be boiled down to a set of times or statistics, athletes will create their own highlight videos and send those to coaches.

This can be especially valuable for rural athletes. Coaches can't visit every town to scout athletes, but there's no travel time in opening an email. Olivia says coaches especially want to see the swimmers' videos. “They love videos,” she says. “Most coaches like to see video because they want to see your technique or where your weaknesses might be.”

### SHOWCASING SKILLS

Sometimes, rather than sending videos, recruits travel to camps and showcases so coaches can watch them in action and compare their skills to athletes at a similar level. These are often sport-specific camps run by college programs where potential recruits get hands-on practice time with





Photo courtesy of Olivia Murphy

Olivia Murphy's best swimming events are the 100-meter freestyle, butterfly, backstroke and the 50-meter freestyle.

coaches. At regional showcases or tournaments, thousands of athletes can test their skills while scores of coaches look for diamonds in the rough.

Landyn Cox, a 2024 high school graduate from McKee, Kentucky, competes in archery and found success at these large events since most high schools don't have archery teams. He was offered a scholarship to be an archer at the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, Kentucky. He competed on the USA Archery U18 Compound National Team, the World Archery 3D Championships and other USA Archery Team events. He says the USAT events are a solid way to draw attention. "If you win like one of the USATs or certain big events, that gets your name out there pretty fast," he says.

## MAKING A DECISION

Once coaches begin recruiting, the challenge comes in settling on a school. Olivia narrowed down her list to three. "I wanted to limit myself to three visits because I'm really bad at decisions," she says.

Part of the process was deciding what size school she wanted to attend. Many athletes feel the need to compete at a prestigious NCAA Division 1 school, but they



Photo courtesy of USA Archery

Landyn Cox first competed in archery through the National Archery in the Schools program.

## SCORING AN OFFER

1. Know your skill level and learn the NCAA or NAIA eligibility requirements.
2. Compile an athletic resume with:
  - Skills video
  - Athletic stats
  - Academic transcripts, ACT/SAT scores
  - Extracurricular activities
3. Email coaches.
  - Include your athletic resume.
  - Subject line: Name, position, current grade level and key stat: "Jane Doe, High School Sophomore, Pitcher, 90 mph fastball"
  - Individually craft each email, clearly stating why you're interested in that program.
4. Make campus visits and meet coaches. Keep sending updated stats.
5. Lock down your offer and negotiate your amount. Don't discount merit-based, academic or other scholarships.



could find a home—and potentially more playing time or better financial aid—at a smaller school. "Division 1 isn't everything," Olivia says. "It's not live or die."

No matter the size or program, a visit is the critical component. After a successful recruiting visit where she got along great with her future teammates, Olivia chose Delta State University, a Division II school in Cleveland, Mississippi.

"They need to go where they feel like they best fit," she says. "I was like,

"There's no way that I'm not going to go Division 1," and then I found a school that matches up with Division 1 schools and I got better scholarship offers and felt like I fit with the team better. And so, I was like, 'Oh, that's not the end of the world.'"

But it will be a whole new world for Olivia, Landyn and other rural athletes as they aim to parlay their hometown successes and hard work to the next level. 🏹

# POSITIVE IMPACT

## Upcountry Fiber Foundation supports communities

Story by PATRICK SMITH

Thanks to the impact of the Upcountry Fiber Foundation, thousands will benefit from the kindness of strangers across the Upstate region.

The Upcountry Fiber Foundation works to create a stronger connection between local organizations with a direct impact on education, youth services, culture and health and human services. In 2023, the foundation awarded grants to 12 organizations, totaling \$61,820.

Recipients include: Anderson Free Clinic Inc., Cancer Association of Anderson, Center for Developmental Services, Family Promise of Pickens County, Golden Corner Food Pantry, Grace's Closet, Lakes and Bridges Charter School, Meals on Wheels—Anderson, Ripple of One, The Tribble Center Special Needs Foundation, Upstate Institute of Youth Programs Inc. and Wild Hearts Equine Therapeutic Center Inc.

Upcountry offers its heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to the

Upcountry Fiber Foundation. To learn more or apply for a grant, go to [upcountryfiberfoundation.com](http://upcountryfiberfoundation.com). Keep reading to learn how your donations positively affected nonprofit organizations throughout the area.

### CANCER ASSOCIATION OF ANDERSON

“We work to help lessen the burden on Anderson County residents who are battling cancer through financial, physical and emotional support,” Executive Director Angela Stringer says. “All the money we get is through grants and individual private donations. Every penny helps, and I’m proud that we’ve never had to turn anyone away. Everything we do is patient first, not just to help them get through cancer treatment, but to become stronger on the other side.”

### FAMILY PROMISE OF PICKENS COUNTY

“Through our Homeless Prevention Program, we help families with children under 18 who are struggling,” Executive

Director Nath Briley says. “We give them an opportunity to stay in their homes and help them to get back to self-sufficiency to build a bright future. The Upcountry Fiber Foundation Grant helped us with the program tremendously. We’re so appreciative because it helped so many hardworking folks in our community.”

### GOLDEN CORNER FOOD PANTRY

“We continue to see a high need for food assistance,” Chairman Mike Harlin says. “There are a lot of people in the county who struggle with food insecurity, and a lot of folks who just have a really difficult time making ends meet. Last year, we had about a 30% increase in people seeking assistance. The grant is a big help so we can continue to provide all that food, despite all the increased demands. It’s been a real blessing to have the extra help.”



The staff of the Anderson Free Clinic received one of several grants from the Upcountry Fiber Foundation.



Upcountry Fiber's Daja Davidson, far left, presents a check to the Cancer Association of Anderson, including site manager Kim Fischer, volunteers Laurie King, Marilyn Zapata and Andria Carpenter, patient services advocate Haley Moore and Executive Director Angela Stringer.



West Carolina CEO Jeff Wilson, left, and Blue Ridge Electric CEO Jim Lovinggood, right, present a check to Golden Corner Board Chairman Mike Harlin.

Photos courtesy of Upcountry Fiber Foundation

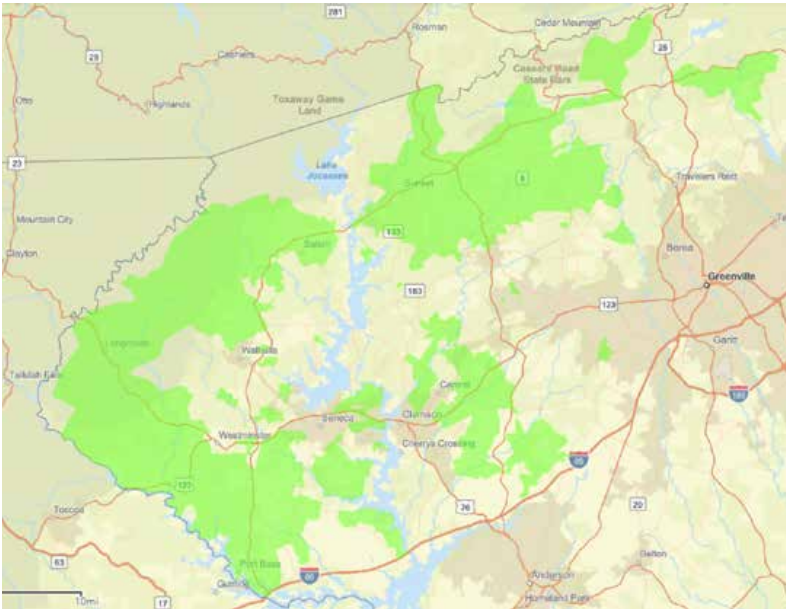


# Connecting the Upstate to BROADBAND

Upcountry Fiber has constructed about 3,000 miles of fiber optic cable since the start of the project and connected 17,000 residences and businesses 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 West Carolina 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.

## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

*Mark Hagan*



Mark Hagan is the outside plant engineering district team lead. He is based at the Abbeville office and has worked on the Upcountry Fiber project since it started.

In 2001, he began working as an engineering contractor for West Carolina.

Mark has a bachelor's degree in history from Lander University. He and his wife, Pamela, have a 14-year-old daughter named Tes and several dogs. In his spare time, Mark likes to watch sports, especially football. The family enjoys a weekly movie night. Mark is a fan of action comedies, while Pamela and Tes prefer horror movies. 🗨️



**TO LEARN MORE** about Upcountry Fiber, and to register your interest in signing up for service, go to **[upcountryfiber.com](https://upcountryfiber.com)**.

# Kick Off THE SEASON



## Healthy Eats for Your Tailgate

It's time to think about tailgating. Even if you aren't a football fan, you can enjoy the food that goes along with the big game, from pots of chili to tater skins and Buffalo wings.

But these tailgating treats may not agree with your waistline. There are healthy alternatives to consider for lightening up your football spread without sacrificing taste. You'll score some touchdowns yourself.



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

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

## WHITE CHICKEN CHILI

- 4 boneless chicken breasts (2 to 2 1/2 pounds)
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 3/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 2 cans whole green chilies, chopped (see tip)
- 3-4 cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed (see note)
- 2-3 teaspoons cumin
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2-1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/2-1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- Additional chicken broth, if needed

In large pot, add chicken breasts and completely cover with water (4-6 cups). Simmer chicken breasts with basil, salt, onion powder, garlic powder, thyme and parsley until completely cooked.

Remove chicken from broth and let cool. Reserve the seasoned broth for the chili. Once chicken is cool, chop and set aside.

In a large stock pot, add butter and olive oil, and saute onion, celery and bell pepper until vegetables are translucent. Add chopped chilies and two cans cannellini beans. When mixture is warm, mash beans with a potato masher.

Add 2-3 cups of the reserved broth, chopped chicken, cumin and 1-2 more cans cannellini beans. Let simmer 30 minutes to an hour. If mixture becomes too thick, add more broth. Add sour cream, heavy cream and fresh cilantro, and stir well. Taste and adjust seasonings, such as salt and cumin. Just before serving, stir in grated Monterey Jack cheese and ladle into serving bowls.

**Tip:** You will get better quality if you buy the whole chilies rather than chopped chilies.

**Note:** Progresso brand provides a better-quality bean that holds up well as the chili simmers, and you should only need three cans. If you use another brand and find that it is disintegrating as the chili simmers, add a fourth can of beans.





## PARMESAN CHICKEN WINGS

*These delicious wings are oven-baked.*

- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons ground pepper
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- 1 1/2 cups panko breadcrumbs
- 1 1/4 cups grated parmesan cheese
- 2 pounds chicken wings, cut at joints, wing tips discarded
- 3 tablespoons balsamic glaze (store-bought or made from scratch)
- Lemon wedges
- Ranch dressing
- Celery and carrot sticks

Preheat oven to 450 F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Coat with cooking spray. Combine flour, garlic powder and pepper in a shallow dish.

Place eggs in a second shallow dish. Combine panko and cheese in a third shallow dish. Working in batches, dredge chicken pieces in the flour mixture, then the eggs and finally in the panko mixture, shaking off excess after each dredging. Place on the prepared baking sheet. Coat the chicken lightly with cooking spray.

Bake, turning the chicken halfway through, until the chicken is golden brown, and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest portion registers 165 F, 20-25 minutes.

Arrange the chicken on a platter. Drizzle with balsamic glaze and serve with lemon wedges and ranch dressing for dipping with celery and carrots.

## DOUBLE DIP HUMMUS

*This recipe from Eating Well could be the creamiest hummus you've ever tasted. It's best made a day in advance.*

- 8 ounces dried chickpeas (about 1 cup)
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 7 large cloves garlic, divided
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1/2 cup tahini, divided
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice plus 1 tablespoon, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin, plus more for garnish
- Paprika for garnish
- 1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons of the prettiest chickpeas for garnish. Rinse the remaining chickpeas and garlic and set the colander over a bowl. Refrigerate the chickpea mixture, reserved cooking water and pretty chickpeas separately overnight.

Place chickpeas in a medium saucepan and cover with 2 inches of water. Stir in baking soda. Soak overnight. Drain the chickpeas and rinse well. Rinse out the pan. Return the chickpeas to the pan and cover with 2 inches of fresh water. Add garlic. Bring to a boil. Keep at a rolling boil until the chickpeas are tender and almost falling apart, 25-40 minutes.

Reserve about 3/4 cup of the cooking water, then drain the chickpeas. Set aside

The next day, combine the chickpeas, 6 of the garlic cloves and 1/2 cup of the reserved cooking water in a food processor (or blender) with 1/4 cup each oil, tahini and lemon juice. Add salt and cumin. Process until creamy. Transfer to a serving bowl. Puree the remaining 1/4 cup each oil and tahini with the remaining garlic clove, 2 tablespoons of the cooking water and 1 tablespoon lemon juice until smooth.

Make an indentation in the center of the hummus and spoon in the tahini-lemon mixture. Sprinkle the hummus with cumin and paprika, if desired. Garnish with the reserved whole chickpeas and parsley. Serve with fresh carrots, celery and other colorful vegetables and/or pita chips. 🥗





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