



UPCOUNTRY

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

CONNECTED

Sounds of Appalachia

Young musicians take
the stage



PATRICK SQUARE

BRISTOL RACEWAY



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO

NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

Professionally Secure

NTCA members are committed to your safety

As we enter the holiday season, it is an opportunity to acknowledge a group of professionals you may not realize is working diligently behind the scenes to make this season—as well as every month of the year—enjoyable and safe.

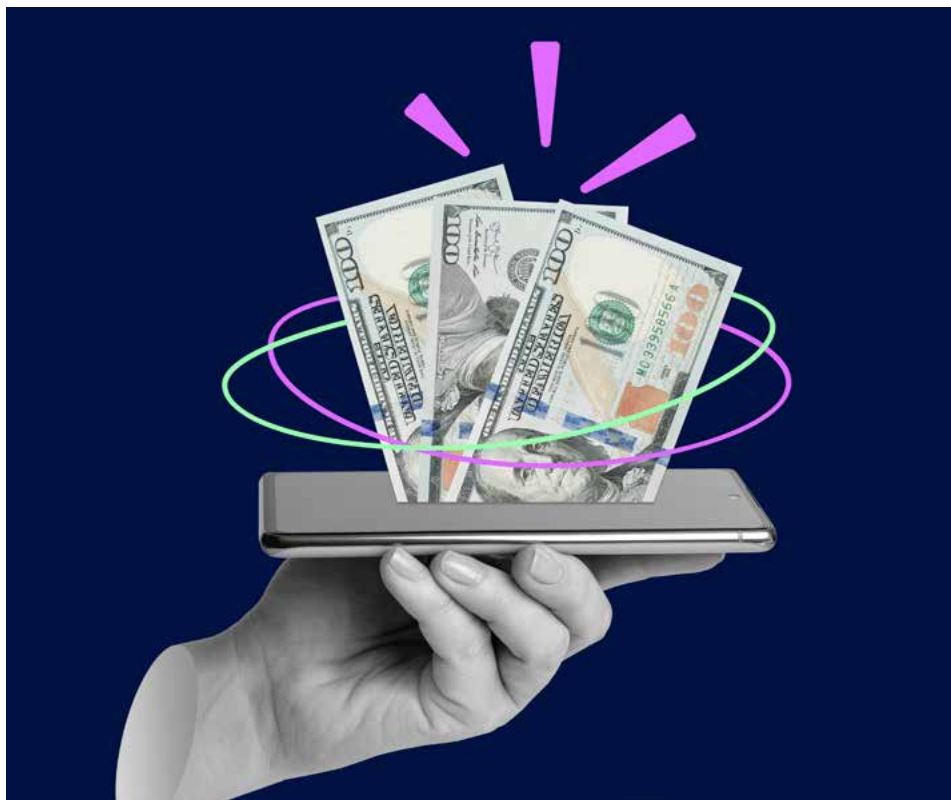
Many of you stream movies, music, short videos or interactive games, and there's always online shopping. NTCA members provide rural communities with the networks vital for all of this and so much more, from banking to education, telehealth and beyond.

Unfortunately, online risks do exist. Scammers may try to capture your personal information, or malicious websites might lead to insecure transactions. There are even attempts to disrupt the infrastructure itself.

Monitoring threats and vigilantly updating everything from software to security strategies is central to the day-to-day job of rural broadband providers. To help with this, NTCA created CyberShare: The Small Broadband Provider ISAC, an information-sharing network that allows participating providers to collaborate and share critical information. Whether it's learning about vulnerable equipment, software exploits, recent cyberattack attempts or mitigation strategies, this information sharing helps members proactively strengthen their defenses to keep you and your family safe online.

You play a role, too. When you're shopping online, make smart choices, such as relying on websites with addresses that begin with https, shop on well-established sites and lean on strong, secure passwords.

Together we can enjoy happy, safe holidays. 📱



Adobe Stock image by LariBat

Use Caution With Cash Apps

While mobile payment apps like PayPal or Venmo make it easy to send and receive money online or through an app on a phone, scammers are also waiting to take advantage.

This service becomes an intermediary between your money and whoever is on the other end of a transaction, which can create an added layer of security.

But if a scammer tricks you into sending money, it's hard to get it back. The Federal Trade Commission notes the risks and offers tips for staying safe.

- Don't send a payment to claim a prize or collect sweepstakes winnings.
- Never give your account credentials to anyone who contacts you.
- Protect your account with multifactor authentication or a personal identification number.
- Before paying, double-check the recipient's information to make sure you're sending money to the right person.
- If you get an unexpected request for money from someone you do recognize, speak with that person directly to make sure the request really is valid, not a scam by a hacker who got access to their account.

If you find unauthorized payments or think you paid a scammer, immediately report the transaction to the service providing the payment app. Instructions should be available on the service's website. Also, report the scam to reportfraud.ftc.gov. 📱

Outside the Box

Personalized presents extend gift-giving beyond holidays

Looking for that gift that keeps on giving long after they've tossed the wrapping paper and bows? With a little online exploration, a nontraditional gift is out there for just about everyone on your list.

GAMING SUBSCRIPTIONS

Just like movie and music services, game subscriptions offer unlimited access to huge catalogs of titles for players who would rather not put up the \$70-\$80 average price for each individual game. Paying a part of the most popular subscriptions—Xbox Game Pass at \$9.99-\$19.99 per month, PlayStation Plus at \$17.99 or Apple Arcade at \$6.99—is a great way to show your gamers some love.

WATCH 'EM PLAY

Video game streaming involves broadcasting live gameplay over the internet, allowing viewers to engage with and watch other players in real time. Like livestreaming on Facebook and TikTok, game streamers provide content for viewers worldwide, playing video games and offering commentary.

Twitch is by far the most popular service, with more than 240 million monthly subscribers who play, watch, create content and follow other gamers. Three subscription tiers with different levels of perks range from \$4.99 to \$24.99 per month. Steam is also huge. Discord, Kick, Caffeine and DLive are other popular choices for gifting your interactive gamers, just confirm the platform they prefer so you're sure to get them a gift they can use.

'OF THE MONTH' CLUBS

With a quick internet search, you can set

up a monthly delivery of everything from pickles to pet chews to bath gels, bacon and beyond. Look at sites like Amazing Clubs or Month Club Store to find multiple choices in one spot.

A monthly themed box or crate can satisfy all ages, from educational toys at Crunchlabs and a monthly Lego set through Brick Loot to a spa-in-a-box from Therabox. Visit Cratejoy for a wide selection.

Consider a gift subscription to Dear Holmes, which mails weekly clues on fancy stationery for solving a Victorian-era crime. For \$50, six months' worth of mysteries will turn your person into a solo Sherlock or the leader of a team of Watsons who share stories on YouTube.

GIFT CARDS

You've no doubt noticed the columns of gift cards at your supermarket or drugstore. They look like colorful credit cards, and that's exactly what they are. These pieces of plastic can be applied toward almost anything from cash to food delivery services. The easiest way to give something everyone wants and by far the simplest to ship, gift cards are expected to generate \$447.1 billion in revenue this year.

You can grab gift cards toward recurring subscriptions, like a movie or music streaming service. You're sure to earn points by gifting a part of the monthly Netflix or Hulu charges. Or find a Spotify, Apple Music or SiriusXM gift card and keep the happy tunes flowing all year. 🎧

GIFT CARD SMARTS

Stick to stores you know and trust. Avoid buying online where shady sellers may promote fake or stolen gift cards.

Avoid cards with signs of tampering.

Pay with a credit card if possible. If you run into problems and have to file a chargeback, your credit card company will investigate.

Consider using the gift card quickly to avoid potential inactivity fees or issues like business closure.

Keep copies. If the gift card doesn't work, the number on the card and store receipt will help you file a report with the Federal Trade Commission at reportfraud.ftc.gov.

Source: Federal Trade Commission

One Connection at a Time

As the seasons change, we are reminded that giving is not bound to a single time of year. It is a constant opportunity to lift one another up. At Upcountry Fiber, we have long believed that being connected means more than fiber in the ground. It is about the people, the neighbors and the communities we serve.



CHRIS TOWNSON (L)
Chief Executive Officer
West Carolina

JIM LOVINGGOOD (R)
Chief Executive Officer
Blue Ridge Electric

That is why our Give Big campaign each November is one of the traditions we are most excited to celebrate together. Every year, we invite customers to bring three nonperishable food items into any of our offices. In exchange, we provide a speed upgrade or gift. What may seem like a small gesture adds up in powerful ways. Together, we have been able to supply meaningful donations across our service area, bringing the gift of food and hope to families right here at home.

We will admit, it is sobering to see the food shelves in our communities nearly bare. Hunger is not a distant problem. It is here. It is alive. And it is growing. But the good news is this: Together, we can

fill those shelves again. We can make sure no family goes without.

What inspires us even more is seeing how our employees carry this spirit of service into their own lives. From delivering meals with Meals on Wheels to volunteering in their schools and churches, they embody what it means to serve with heart. These acts of kindness are not just transactions. They are lasting connections that show children, seniors and neighbors alike that they are cared for and not forgotten. That kind of love changes lives, and we believe it changes communities too.

At Upcountry Fiber, our brand values guide how we show up every day: Serve with heart, take care of each other, be the area's biggest fan, work the dream and show up right. These are not just corporate words. They are principles we can live by at home, in our neighborhoods, in our schools and in our communities.

Yes, we provide the fiber that enables connection. But true connection is more than speed and bandwidth. It is about what we do with the gift of being connected. We all have the power to turn those connections into something meaningful, something better for our communities, our neighbors and our families.

On a related note, we'd be remiss not to point out the specialness of this season. Thanksgiving is special because it gives us a chance to slow down and remember what truly matters. And Christmas, which celebrates the birth of Christ, reminds us of the greatest gift ever given. These moments inspire us to be thankful, to have hope and to focus on something greater than ourselves. When we live with gratitude and share that hope, we strengthen the connections that hold our communities together.

This season, let us start with one connection at a time. Together. 

Jim Lovinggood *Chris A. E. Townson*

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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 8 Gbps over a fiber network, Upcountry Fiber offers the fastest and most reliable high-speed internet in the area.

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On the Cover:



More than 400 children participate in the Young Appalachian Musicians program, which introduces them to musical heritage of the region. See story Page 12.

Photo by John Clayton

SHARING THE SPIRIT

The holiday season is a blend of cherished traditions. Upcountry Fiber's fast and reliable internet service can help your family keep those traditions going strong even when loved ones are miles away. With a little creative thinking, you can even create some new ones.

Digital greetings

Use a free online design platform to collaboratively create a digital Christmas card from the entire family.

Holiday playlists

Put together a family playlist on Spotify or YouTube Music, so everyone gets to hear their favorite holiday hits.

Virtual karaoke party

Use an app like Smule or simply find instrumental versions of holiday songs on YouTube. Each person can take a turn belting out a favorite carol.

Movie night classics

Schedule a movie night, and pick a holiday film everyone likes. Using a service like Teleparty, your family can watch at the same time no matter where they are and use the chat feature to share commentary, reactions and favorite lines. It's also great for trash talking during football games.



HOLIDAY OFFICE CLOSURES

May your holidays be filled with love, laughter and all the connections that matter most.

To allow our employees to spend the holidays with their families, Upcountry Fiber's offices will be closed on the following dates:

Thanksgiving: Thursday, Nov. 27, and Friday, Nov. 28

Christmas: Wednesday, Dec. 24, and Thursday, Dec. 25

New Year's Day: Thursday, Jan. 1

Wishing you a holiday season as bright as our fiber optic network.



SAVVY STREAMING

After that second helping of turkey, many holiday shoppers will hit their devices to get a jump on their gift lists. While bargain hunting, don't forget to check streaming services for seasonal discounts.

The mybundle.tv/upcountryfiber website is your streaming entertainment resource, listing all the holiday deals from platforms like Hulu, YouTube TV and even SiriusXM.

Go to mybundle.tv/upcountryfiber or get the app to check out this season's savings.

Speedway In Lights

Bristol gears up for Christmas festivities

Story by KATHY DENES

Ready to take a lap around the “The World’s Fastest Half-Mile” illuminated by 3 million Christmas lights? For the 29th year, Tennessee’s Bristol Motor Speedway and Dragway is inviting the public to come celebrate the season.

The route of the 4-mile-long Food City Speedway In Lights powered by TVA starts at Bristol Dragway, entered off Highway 394. About midway through, drivers enter the iconic “Last Great Colosseum” and circle its half-mile concrete oval. After taking that memorable lap, guests can park inside the track and treat the family to the Christmas Village, presented by HSN.

The Christmas Village, adorned in holiday decor, includes Santa’s Hut, where kids get the chance to meet the jolliest old elf. There are also carnival rides, vendors offering Christmas crafts and treats, a tubing slide and a snow maze.

After enjoying all the village has to offer, guests will get back in their vehicles and continue the drive, which concludes at the Dragway entrance.

ICE, ICE, BABY!

Finishing the drive doesn’t have to mean it’s time to leave the speedway, though. Adding to the holiday sparkle is the Tri-Cities Airport Ice Rink at Bristol

Motor Speedway, presented by Stateline Services and touted as the region’s best and longest-standing ice rink. Visitors can enjoy skating daily from Thursday, Nov. 20, through Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026. Admission is \$12 for guests who bring their own skates or \$15 for those who need to rent them.

The 120-by-60-foot ice rink is covered by a tent at the speedway’s North Entrance. Promotional nights and special events are offered, such as College Nights at the Ice Rink. On Tuesdays, students who present their valid college IDs at the ticket booth will get a free skate rental.

A LIGHT FOR CHILDREN

Proceeds from the Speedway In Lights and affiliated events benefit Bristol Speedway Children’s Charities, which funds agencies that have helped thousands of children. The charity was founded in 1996 when Bristol Speedway became part of Speedway Motorsports, which has a Speedway Children’s Charities chapter at each of its 11 racing venues.

Claudia Byrd, the executive director of the Bristol chapter, was charged with coming up with a signature fundraising event. Inspired by her family’s tradition of enjoying holiday light displays in her hometown, Claudia suggested the speedway present a Christmas lights show. It

quickly got the green light from track owner Bruton Smith. To date, thanks to the Christmas event and others throughout the year, the charity has distributed nearly \$20 million.

“Speedway In Lights is not only the flagship fundraiser for Speedway Children’s Charities but a tradition for so many in the Tri-Cities region,” says Betsy Holleman, the charity’s senior manager for development and events. “The event has accounted for a third of our annual budget for over 25 years. It’s an opportunity to bring family out for an evening of Christmas fun, while supporting kids in our area.”

FAST FACTS

Speedway In Lights begins on Friday, Nov. 21, and continues daily from 6-10 p.m. into the new year, concluding on Saturday, Jan. 3.

Prices for cars range between \$25-\$35. Vans are \$85, and buses are \$150. Visitors can take advantage of Fast Lane presented by Citi, a speedy \$75 option that provides a shorter wait time on select nights when traffic lines get long.

For details about Fast Lane presented by Citi and all other Speedway In Lights event and pricing updates, go to bristolmotorspeedway.com. 📱



ABOVE: The display of Speedway In Lights sponsor Food City brightens up a section of the route.

LEFT: Skaters enjoy the covered ice rink outside Bristol Motor Speedway.



OLD CONCEPTS

for a **NEW AGE**

Patrick Square embraces the past while looking toward the future

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Kevin Collins always preferred wide-open spaces with lakefront and Blue Ridge Mountain views. He didn't think life in Patrick Square would be for him and his family, but Patrick Square won him over.

"I never pictured myself living in a community like this, but it's been enjoyable," says Kevin, a builder and real estate developer. "It's just a good community. Clemson is a nice area, and the people are friendly for the most part, and it just creates a good, good community."

Patrick Square sits on 173 acres and is just 3 miles from the Clemson University campus.

The seeds for the community were planted in 2007. The first homes were built the following year, but the concept for a residential community built around retail shops, businesses and services at its center is a much older idea that developer Mike Cheezem decided to revisit.

Mike, the CEO of JMC Communities, developed Patrick Square with his father, Charles, a Clemson graduate who always

had a soft spot for the university and the surrounding area.

"We used traditional neighborhood design principles, and those principles kind of go back to a time when the automobile was not so present and dominant," Mike says. "The idea is to have everything within a 10-minute walk and to integrate both the commercial and residential uses and to be multigenerational."

So, the Patrick Square community includes first-time homebuyers, retirees and the second homes of Clemson alumni



Premier amenities create a space for families to unwind and neighbors to become friends.

who want a weekend retreat for games and other activities at the university.

“We have different homes and home types for just about every segment of the market,” Mike says. “That diversity really creates a very vibrant and interconnected neighborhood.”

DOWN TO BUSINESS

There are 75 businesses at the heart of Patrick Square, all of them within walking distance or a quick bike or golf cart ride from the residential neighborhood.

That means a short commute for folks like Kevin.

Creseda Riccardi is a therapist who has an office in the heart of the village, which also features restaurants, pubs, micro-breweries and other gathering places. “If I walk, I have a five-minute commute. Two minutes if I drive,” Creseda says. “In all the major cities I’ve lived in, I’ve never commuted less than an hour, so I feel this is just remarkable.”

Convenience is only part of the story for Creseda, who has found a home among other medical professionals who hung their shingles at Patrick Square. “It’s a chance to be part of a business community, not just

a neighborhood,” she says. “I’ve gotten to know all the people in the offices on my floor and in the downstairs floor, and I’m working my way across the street.”

Her dentist is her business neighbor. A pharmacy is nearby. There are massage therapists, optometrists and specialists with convenient locations near Creseda’s office.

“It’s become a bit of a health corridor,” she says. “We’re forming a tight little community for knowing each other, understanding what each other has to offer and referrals, so it’s pretty great.”

PAST AND PRESENT

Patrick Square is JMC Communities’ first and only development in South Carolina, and Mike says it is special because of its connection with his parents, both small-town South Carolina natives from communities where neighbors knew one another by name and greeted each other with friendly smiles and waves. “That traditional feel has resonated with so many people,” Mike says. “It reminds them of their hometowns, and the architecture is meaningful because it’s authentic in the Southeast and the Carolinas.”

Tradition is met with modern amenities

PATRICK SQUARE

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patricksquare.com

Follow Patrick Square on Facebook and Instagram.



Therapist Creseda Riccardi is one of several medical professionals with an office in Patrick Square.

like high-speed internet provided by Upcountry Fiber. While internet connections are a selling point for most, the real connections happen in the community itself. Mike calls it a “front porch” community, where neighbors wave, smile and care.

“I have those memories of people being on their front porches—neighbors dropping by in those small towns where everybody knew everybody and you never lock your door,” he says. “This kind of community fosters that kind of environment. The one thing I hear over and over again is how friendly and how many organic activities the residents do themselves with different groups and clubs, as well as just meeting people on the streets.”

That’s where the front porches help, Mike says, calling them an “extension of the living rooms.”

That extension turned into Kevin’s favorite room in the Collins household. “We weren’t too picky on the house but ended up in a house we enjoyed, and our favorite room in the entire house is the front porch,” Kevin says. “We got to know a lot of neighbors by sitting on the front porch. We said hi to them, talked to them and got to know them.” 🗨️



HEALING BONDS

Pets for Vets makes the perfect match

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Clarissa Black first took Bear, her husky-malamute, to visit patients at a Veterans Administration medical center, she had no idea he was about to change hundreds of lives.

Of course, she knew Bear was special. He had a way about him. When someone needed quiet company, Bear could lie perfectly still for hours. If someone was working on mobility, Bear would position himself at the perfect distance, paws up, as if to offer encouragement. And when people looked into the dog's eyes and spoke to him, he'd cock his head and let out one of his husky "woos" right on cue.

"People really felt like he was talking to them," says Clarissa, whose background in animal science and anthrozoology gave her a deeper insight into the interactions. "They felt seen, and they felt heard."

Clarissa's experience with Bear at the VA hospital sparked the idea for Pets for Vets, a nonprofit organization that matches veterans with specially trained companion animals. Since she founded it more than 15 years ago, the organization has matched more than 800 animals with veterans.

WANT TO HELP?

Pets for Vets is a four-star rated, not-for-profit organization that relies on donations to provide free services to veterans. There are several ways to donate.

Donate online: Visit petsforvets.com/donate to make a secure online donation.

Donate by mail: Pets for Vets Inc., P.O. Box 10860, Wilmington, NC 28404.

Other ways to give: The organization also accepts cryptocurrency and vehicle donations that include cars, trucks, boats and motorcycles.

Volunteer: Fill out the volunteer form at petsforvets.com to offer your time and expertise.

For more information about the program, or to apply for a companion animal, visit petsforvets.com or send an email to contactus@petsforvets.com.



LEFT: Spyder's tendency to jump in laps and lick faces helped calm and center Leif Mesinger when he became frustrated.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Clarissa Black, founder and executive director of Pets for Vets, with her late dog, Bear, who sparked the idea for the not-for-profit organization.

We're looking for that reciprocal match where both are getting exactly what they want."

MAKING A MATCH

Once the group approves a veteran's application for a companion animal, the search gets underway. Clarissa's experience as a marine mammal trainer taught her the most powerful relationships happen when both parties get exactly what they need. The process isn't about finding a good dog. It's about finding exactly the right dog.

The matching process is not only thorough, it's personal. Veterans work closely with trainers to identify their needs and prepare for pet ownership. "We spend a lot of time getting to know our veterans, finding out what it is they need, what they're looking for and what would be a good fit for them," she says.

Meanwhile, trainers visit shelters and rescue groups to conduct one-on-one "interviews" with potential animal companions, which can include cats, rabbits and other species, as well. If a veteran enjoys outdoor activities, for example, the trainer might look for a more active dog that loves to fetch and hike. On

the other hand, a more sedentary vet might need a peaceful pooch or calm cat.

From there, each animal undergoes foundation training customized for its future human. During this time, which often takes place in a foster situation, trainers enhance what Clarissa calls the animal's "superpowers," or the natural behaviors that made them perfect for their veteran in the first place.

"We're really trying to make this connection where both are getting exactly what they want," she says. "Ultimately, that connection is what's going to fulfill them and maybe even heal them. There's some research out there that suggests that it's not just any dog, it's the right dog—the dog that people feel connected to—that can help mitigate anxiety and depression." 🐾

SECOND CHANCES

After Leif Mesinger returned home from Iraq, the world felt different. It was harder to navigate and harder to understand. The Army infantryman and gunner suffered a traumatic brain injury from an improvised explosive device blast, and it changed everything.

"My mind was racing, and I struggled to communicate," Leif says in a Pets for Vets testimonial video. "I felt disconnected from everything I used to know."

But help arrived in the form of a tiny, hairless waif of a dog named Spyder. Clarissa Black, founder of Pets for Vets, discovered the dog after meeting with Leif and finding out what he needed in a companion animal.

Spyder's superpower was that he loved to jump into people's laps and lick them. It was a trait Clarissa intentionally honed in Spyder before presenting him to Leif. She knew that kind of gentle, rhythmic contact could ground a person dealing with anxiety.

In time, Spyder's constant presence gave Leif a growing sense of purpose and a deepening bond. Thanks to his more than 15 years with Spyder, Leif's communication with others has improved and his life is more fulfilling than ever. "Spyder was kind of like that saving grace that centered me again and brought me back," he says.

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

The program generally serves veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries, but the organization is open to helping any vet who could benefit from a deep connection with a pet. And while the service is completely free to the veterans, it relies on donations from the public and a network of more than 100 volunteer animal trainers across the country.

It's important to note that Pets for Vets animals aren't service dogs that have been highly trained to assist people with disabilities. Still, the organization works hard to meet the veterans' needs as well as the animals'.

"We're not just asking what the dog gives the veteran," Clarissa says. "We want to know what the veteran gives the dog."

Sweet Harmo

YAM passes down bluegrass, Americana music to new

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

There are no microphones, so young voices are like soprano whispers under a chorus of guitar, mandolin, banjo and fiddle strings.

The Sweet Potato Pie Kids are rehearsing at the Hagood Community Center. The budding musicians are a dozen of the roughly 500 School District of Pickens County students involved in the Young Appalachian Musicians program—affectionately known as YAM—that introduces students to traditional bluegrass and Americana music.

Since YAM launched in 2008, thousands of elementary- and middle school-aged students have gone through the

program during the school year and attended YAM summer camps.

Logan Redding was one of those early members, choosing the banjo because his father had bought one years earlier that sat unplayed in a closet.

“Just as soon as I had my first lesson, it just kind of clicked,” Logan says. “It’s great to play a sport or whatever, but playing an instrument is kind of like getting a friend for life. You can be 80 or 85 years old and still playing your banjo.”

Logan is now the YAM After-School Program assistant director and instructor for Sweet Potato Pie Kids, a group of middle schoolers who audition for the

group and perform traditional bluegrass numbers like “Rocky Top” and “Wildwood Flower” and gospel songs like “Will the Circle Be Unbroken.”

GENERATIONAL TALENT

YAM is funded by grants from a variety of sources, including Blue Ridge Electric, Cliffs Residents Outreach and Upcountry Fiber.

Founder and past president Betty McDaniel modeled YAM after the Virginia-based Junior Appalachian Musicians, or JAM, bringing the concept to an area she believed would embrace both the music and the children.

Guitarist Gannon Bates rehearses with the Sweet Potato Pie Kids.



nies

generations

“So many of them had grandparents or parents or somebody in the family that played,” says Betty, a retired teacher and clogger. “People call me Pollyanna or something like that, but I knew how the people here are about their heritage and traditional arts.”

She was right.

This year, YAM will expand into every elementary school in Pickens County for the first time with plans to move into Oconee County in the future.

“I’m a former teacher, so I’m more tuned into what the program does for the students’ lifelong love of music,” Betty says. “I think it gives them a feeling of confidence that if they can do this, they can go do other things in life. They can build on success here, and hopefully that’ll carry over.”

PAST MEETS FUTURE

YAM may have started out in a Pickens County classroom, but it has opened doors and led to unexpected roads for some of its students.

“It’s opened up a massive world because I really didn’t know a lot about bluegrass,” Judson Stone says. “It’s opened up a great world of music, and now it’s a big part of my life, going to festivals most weekends. It’s a whole new experience.”

Judson plays mandolin in the band Creekwater Collective, which also includes former YAM kids Ethan Chappell, Lilly Anne Svrlinga and Ayden Chappell, along with JonPaul Sepulveda of Travelers Rest.

Molly Johnson honed her talents on the banjo with YAM and the Sweet Potato Pie Kids, but she grew up



Photo courtesy of Kirby Allen

The Winter Bluegrass Jubilee features jam sessions and workshops in addition to performances.

WINTER BLUEGRASS JUBILEE RETURNS

The annual Winter Bluegrass Jubilee is set for Jan. 31 at the Pickens High School Performing Arts Center.

The event, which debuted in 2011, drew record crowds last year and features performances, jams, workshops and additional live entertainment.

“It’s great because they have workshops with the bands, including the headliners that come, so those band members will work with you on guitar or fiddle or banjo—whatever you play,” Young Appalachian Musicians Assistant Director Logan Reddick says.

The ticket price covers admission to any workshop and other events at the jubilee. Tickets can be bought at the door and online at yamupstate.com.

“It’s spread out through the whole fine arts center, so there’s a lot of different things to come look at and experience,” Logan says.

around bluegrass. She tagged along as her father, Josh, played bluegrass festivals. Eventually he taught Molly the clawhammer style she now performs to accolades as a solo artist and as part of the trio The Wilder Flower, along with YAM alum Danielle Yother on guitar and Madeline Dierauf on fiddle.

Molly calls the trio’s music a “just right mix of old-time and bluegrass sounds.”

The Wilder Flower has played popular summer festivals in New York, Montana and Oregon and released its debut album, “If I Wait Any More,” in 2024.

Molly and Judson also teach other YAM students—a tradition of alumni returning to the program to teach the novices—and give private lessons, passing down the music to younger students.

“It’s so cool to see the kids who really enjoy it, because it’s something that’s part of their heritage in this area of the foothills and Appalachia,” Molly says. “A lot of them wouldn’t know about that part of where they’re from if it wasn’t for YAM showing them this music and teaching them stories and traditions.”

Share a Pizza

Share Your Heart

Start a new holiday meal tradition

Turkey, ham, lamb—tradition gives them all a place on the holiday table. But gather the family together for a pizza party, and you can roll out a whole new tradition.

Make your own pizza dough with just a handful of ingredients, and you'll know that there are no preservatives and other unhealthy additives. For a family affair and fun for the kids, create a bar with pizza toppings—pepperoni, sausage, onions, peppers, cheese and the like—and let them make their own.

A preheated pizza stone will crisp the crust, but a cookie sheet also works.

A pizza salad with Italian herbs and a creamy vinaigrette dressing is the perfect pairing.

A dessert pizza with fresh berries and other fruits available year-round delivers a refreshing finish. Make the crust the day before and layer on the cream cheese spread. But wait until shortly before serving to add the fruits so they will stay colorful and fresh.



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



FAMILY NIGHT PIZZA

- 1 cup warm water (105 F)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast
- 1 tablespoon olive or avocado oil
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 to 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

Preheat oven to 500 F. Put a pizza stone or cookie sheet in the oven while it preheats, and let it warm for at least 10 minutes.

MAKE THE DOUGH

In a large mixing bowl, stir water, yeast and sugar to combine. Let mixture sit for 5 minutes or until it becomes frothy and bubbles form. Gently stir in olive oil.

Add 2 cups of flour and salt and mix with a spatula until a ball begins to form. The

dough will still be slightly sticky. Add more flour as needed to form a dough ball.

Transfer to a floured surface and knead into a smooth dough, adding up to 1/2 cup extra flour if needed.

Cover the bowl with a damp tea towel, and let it rise for 10 minutes or up to 1 hour.

ASSEMBLE THE PIZZA

Roll the dough into your desired shape and put it on a piece of parchment paper. Add pizza sauce, cheese and toppings of choice. Transfer the pizza to the preheated pizza stone or cookie sheet in the oven.

Bake for 12-15 minutes or until the bottom of the crust is golden brown. Remove the pizza from the oven, and let it cool for 5-10 minutes before serving.

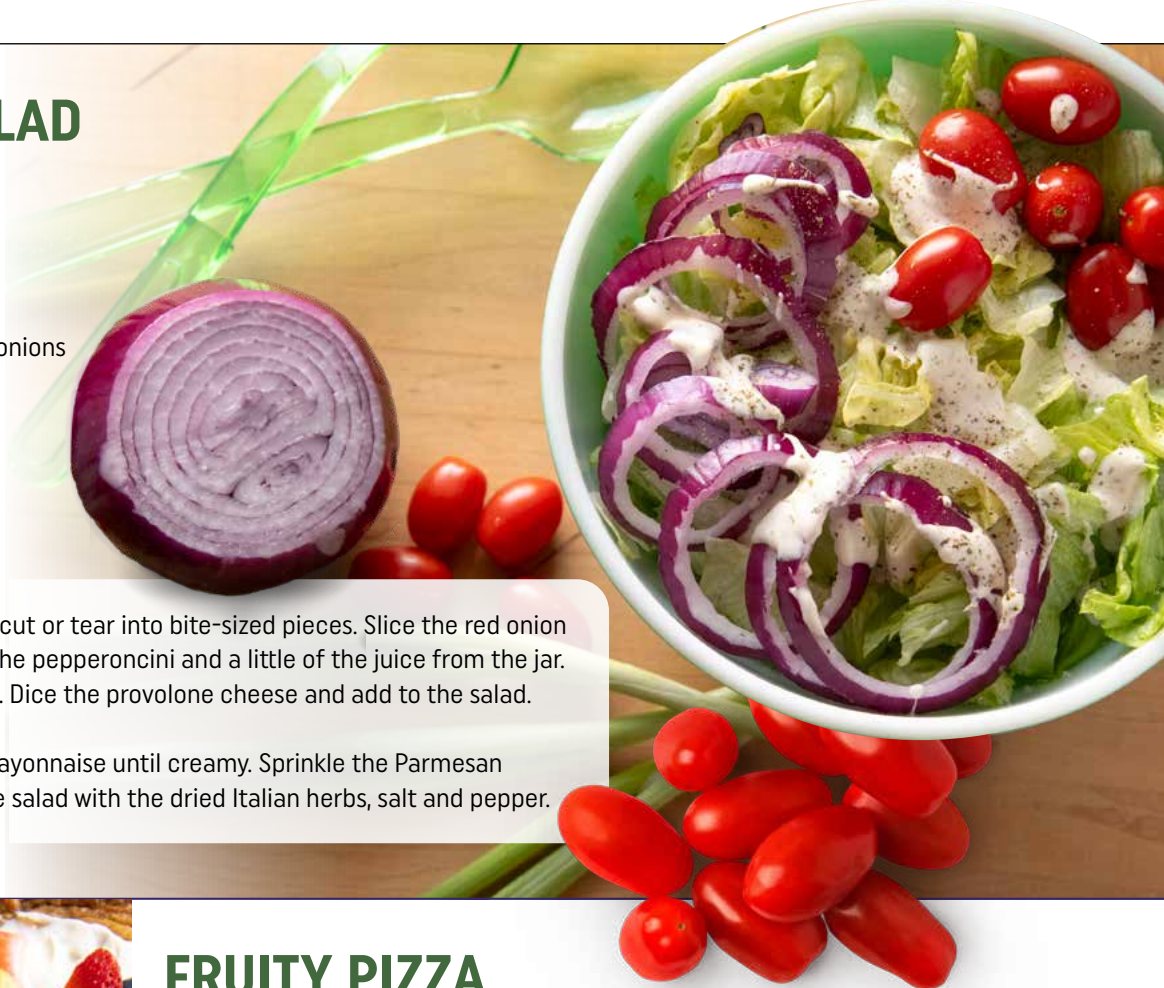
PIZZA NIGHT SALAD

- 1 head iceberg lettuce
- 1 medium red onion
- 6-8 pepperoncini peppers
- Chopped tomatoes to taste
- 8 slices provolone cheese
- 1 bunch fresh chives or green onions
- 1 1/3 cup favorite vinaigrette
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon or more dried Italian herbs
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Wash and air dry the lettuce and cut or tear into bite-sized pieces. Slice the red onion and add to the lettuce, along with the pepperoncini and a little of the juice from the jar.

Toss the tomatoes over the salad. Dice the provolone cheese and add to the salad. Sprinkle the salad with the chives.

Mix the salad dressing and the mayonnaise until creamy. Sprinkle the Parmesan cheese over the top and season the salad with the dried Italian herbs, salt and pepper.



FRUITY PIZZA

FOR THE CRUST

- 1 1/3 cups unsalted butter, softened
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 eggs, room temperature
- 2 tablespoons whole milk, room temperature
- 4 cups flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

FOR THE FROSTING

- 2 7-ounce jars marshmallow creme
- 2 8-ounce packages cream cheese

SUGGESTED TOPPINGS

- Kiwi, sliced
- Blueberries
- Raspberries
- Pears, cored and sliced
- Mango, peeled and cubed
- Strawberries, sliced

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

For the cookie crust: In a large bowl, cream the butter, sugar, orange zest and vanilla thoroughly. Add the eggs and beat until light and fluffy. Add the milk and mix.

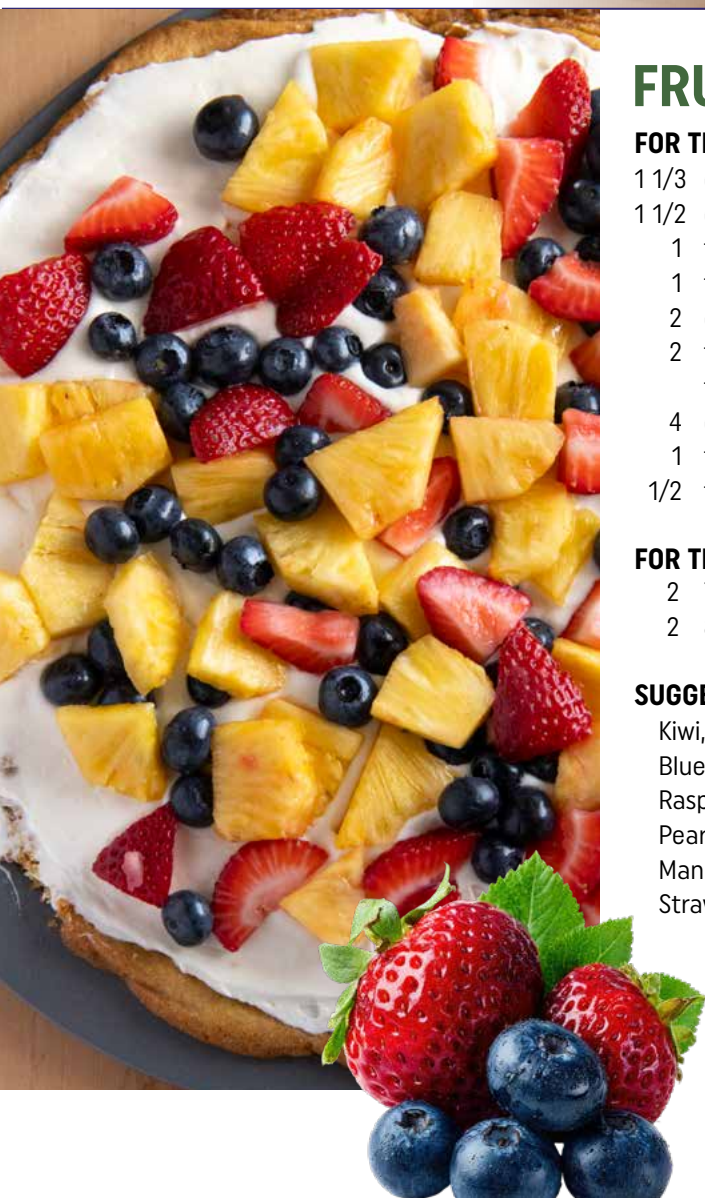
In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder and salt, then blend this into the butter mixture. Divide the dough into two disks and lightly flatten each disk between two sheets of parchment paper. If baking one large pizza, do not divide the dough. Refrigerate for 1 hour or freeze for 20 minutes.

Roll each dough half into an 11-inch round, then transfer to pizza pans. Or, press the dough into a large sheet cake pan.

Bake until the cookie dough is cooked and golden brown, but not overly crisp, 15-18 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool completely.

For the frosting: In a mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip together the marshmallow creme and cream cheese until light in texture. Spread onto each cooled crust.

To decorate: Top the pizza with prepared sliced fruit, as desired. Slice into squares or wedges and serve. 🍷





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