



UPCOUNTRY

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

CONNECTED

EAT BETTER
LIVE HEALTHIER

LEARN HOW AT
THE FREE CLINIC
FREE NOON LUNCH

EAT THE RAINBOW!

By eating a wide range of colorful plant foods, you can increase the diversity and amounts of phytochemicals in your diet. This is a good strategy for reducing chronic inflammation.

BLUE-PURPLE

Fruits: black currants, blackberries, blueberries, figs, plums, grapes
Vegetables: black beans, eggplant, purple potatoes, radicchio, red cabbage

GREEN

Fruits: avocados, green apples, green grapes, green pears, honeydew, kiwi, limes
Vegetables: asparagus, broccoli, brussels sprouts, green beans, green bell peppers, leafy greens, leeks, lettuce, okra, watercress, zucchini

White

Fruits: banana, white nectarines, white peaches, white grapes
Vegetables: cauliflower, carrots, corn, Jerusalem artichokes, jicama, kohlrabi, mushrooms, onions, parsnips, potatoes, shallots, turnips, white beans

Yellow-Orange

Fruits: apricots, cantaloupe, golden kiwi, grapefruit, lemons, mango, nectarines, oranges, papaya, peaches, persimmons, pineapple, tangerines, yellow apples, yellow figs, yellow pears, yellow watermelon
Vegetables: butternut squash, carrots, corn, golden beets, golden potatoes, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, yellow and orange tomatoes, yellow bell peppers, summer yellow squash

Vegetables: artichokes, beets, cranberries, pomegranates, radishes, red apples, red grapefruit, red grapes, red pears, rhubarb, tomatoes, yellow bell peppers, summer yellow squash

her 23, 2023
Desk



THE HIDING PLACE

WHAT A GIG
REALLY MEANS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Protecting the Vulnerable


The internet powers many indispensable resources, including educational opportunities, telehealth, deployment of smart ag tools and the ability to stay in touch with loved ones. However, it is also the most common place for the recruiting and selling of sex-trafficking victims.

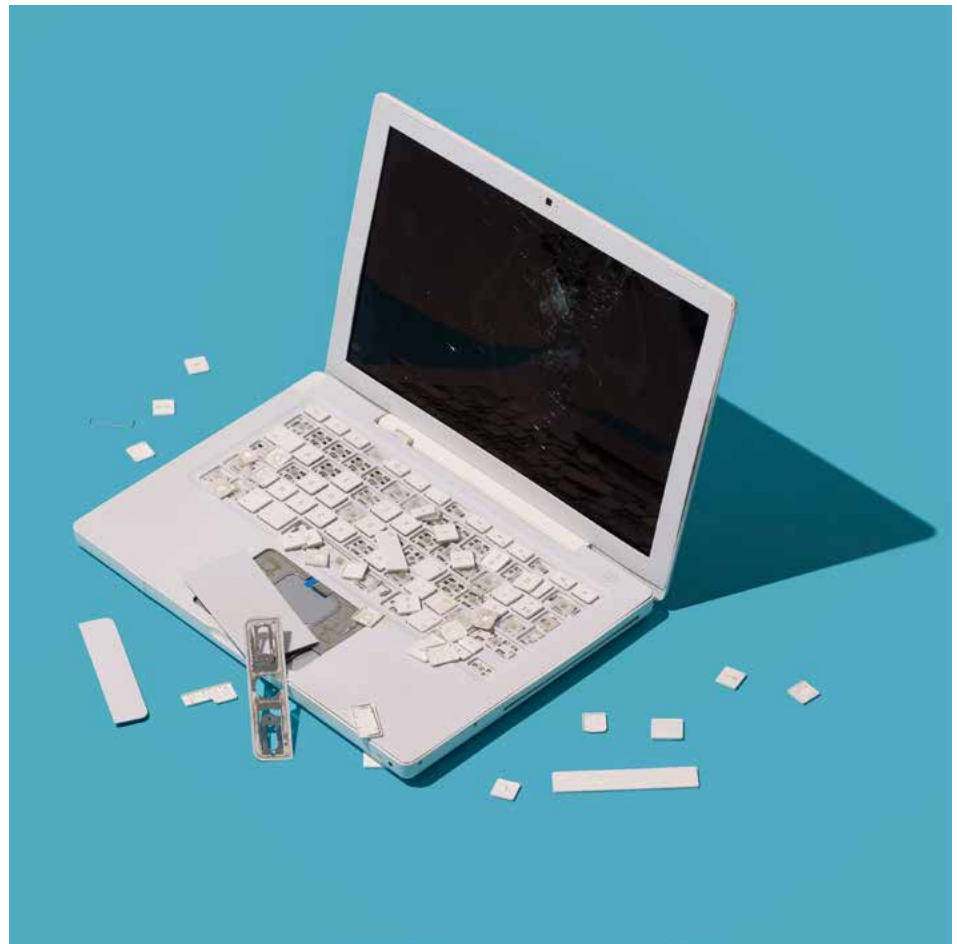
More than 150,000 new escort ads are posted online in America daily. Seventy-five percent of underaged victims report being sold online, and human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal activities in our country.

January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month, and as we raise awareness to combat these crimes, NTCA members, and the association as a whole, are proud to collaborate with Guardian Group and Operation IFAST—ISPs Fight Against Sex Trafficking. It has been beyond gratifying to see the number of NTCA members step up to be the front line of defense with their “boots on the ground” staff.

Originating with CLtel in Clear Lake, Iowa, and in coordination with Guardian Group, a team of former intelligence professionals, Operation IFAST works to prevent and disrupt sex trafficking of women and children in the United States. Over 100 companies in 22 states and over 1,400 of their employees participate in the program, which helps educate and train their teams to report potential trafficking situations to local law enforcement or the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

NTCA members are committed to helping keep their communities safe and being part of the solution.

To learn more about Operation IFAST, visit guardiangroup.org/operation-ifest. 



Adobe Stock image by stokkete

Hard Reset

What to do with old, broken devices


Many people have outdated or unused electronic devices they aren't sure what to do with after the holidays. While recycling is good for the environment, many phones and tablets also contain rare materials that are much more useful in another device than sitting in a landfill.

Here's how to dispose of your old devices properly:

Phones: Most phone manufacturers will let you trade in your old phone when you buy a new one. But if you still have old devices, retailers like Best Buy, Staples and Home Depot offer in-store drop-off for unused devices. EcoATM also has more than 6,000 kiosks across the country where you get cash for your old phone.

Computers: If you can't upgrade your computer to extend its lifespan, many manufacturers have take-back programs. Barring that, Best Buy has a trade-in calculator for PCs, while Apple offers its own recycling program for Macs. You can also donate your computer to an organization like Computers with Causes that will find students, foster homes or shelters where your computer can make a difference.

TVs: Often, finding a new home for your TV is the best option if it still works. Consider Goodwill, schools and libraries. If it's completely dead, Best Buy has a haul-away service that can send your old TV to one of its recycling partners.

Looking for a recycling center near you? Visit earth911.com to find the closest e-waste center. 

GAME ON



Adobe Stock Image by Milijan Zivkovic

Growing numbers of seniors are playing video games to stay sharp

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Today's gamers might not fit the picture many people have in their heads. As the generation that grew up with Sega and Nintendo has come of age, the Entertainment Software Association's 2025 annual study found that the average gamer is 36 years old. The same study found that 28% of gamers in the United States are over the age of 50.

"It's easier to play video games now than at any other time in history. You don't have to go to an arcade. You don't have to buy a console or PC, although many players still do," says Aubrey Quinn, senior vice president of communications and public affairs at the ESA. "Video games can be played anytime, anywhere, with devices almost everyone has on them all the time—smartphones and tablets."

Other than having fun, older gamers say they're drawn to the pastime because it helps them keep their minds sharp. And, as our world becomes increasingly digital, more people are turning to video games as a way to support their mental, social and emotional health.

IMPROVED COGNITIVE ABILITY

While everyone can benefit from enhanced attention, short-term memory

and hand-eye coordination, these can be especially important for seniors looking to keep their minds active. Puzzle games can help improve recall and mental agility, while action and adventure games can encourage problem-solving and support spatial reasoning, particularly those games that require navigating 3D spaces.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Over the last decade, social interaction has become an essential part of gaming for many players. Connection with players online or on the couch can help older individuals improve their social relationships and build healthier emotional lives. A comprehensive literature review in the journal *Brain Sciences* in 2024 found that older people who played games showed a significant improvement in sleep quality and psychiatric symptoms.

BETTER BALANCE AND MOVEMENT

As motion controls have become standard for modern gaming consoles, games built around movement have also become more popular. These games provide a fun way for older players to stay active and can improve balance, all in a safe and low-stakes environment. 🎮

PRESS START

Haven't touched a video game since the heyday of arcade cabinets? Don't worry. It has never been easier to get in the game.

One-stop shop—Much like a smartphone, every major console has its own digital storefront with access to thousands of games. Once you're set up, you can start playing without leaving the house to buy physical games.

Play your way—Accessibility for games is at an all-time high. "Aging often includes the need for extra support in games," says Aubrey Quinn, senior vice president of communications and public affairs for the Entertainment Software Association. "Accessibility features like large text, clear subtitles and chat speech-to-text are making it easier for older players to experience the benefits of play." Even if players have limited dexterity or mobility, there is a wide array of customized game pads and adaptive joysticks that can help anyone play without frustration.

What to play—Aubrey finds that baby boomers and Silent Generation gamers are often drawn to puzzle games like *Candy Crush*, *Wordle* and *Tetris* that are easily available on mobile platforms. A significant portion of those players also enjoy simulation games, action games and shooters. If you're jumping in for the first time, games like the *Portal* series and *Journey* offer engaging problem-solving and exploration at your own pace.

Building Beyond the Network

Expanding access and elevating the broadband experience

At Upcountry Fiber, we believe that every home, business and farm deserves access to fast, reliable broadband no matter how rural the road or remote the community. Connectivity is no longer a luxury. It's essential for education, health care, small businesses and daily life. Our mission has always been clear—to close the digital divide across the Upstate and deliver the broadband experience our customers deserve.



CHRIS TOWNSON (L)
Chief Executive Officer
West Carolina

JIM LOVINGGOOD (R)
Chief Executive Officer
Blue Ridge Electric

Today, our network spans more than 3,500 miles of fiber, serving 24,000 customers and passing over 40,000 addresses. Each connection represents a step toward a more connected, empowered region, one where families can learn, farmers can compete and businesses can grow. But our work is far from finished. Through the end of 2026, we're investing heavily in expanding our reach, adding another 1,000 miles of fiber across the Upstate, including major new projects in northwestern Anderson County, northern Greenville County and central Pickens County.

These efforts are investments in people and communities. The most intensive work ahead centers on our large-scale initiative spanning northwestern Anderson County and central Pickens County, where we plan to construct approximately 500 miles of new fiber. This expansion will be a major focus into early 2026, further extending reliable, high-speed broadband to areas that have long been underserved.

We're also preparing for a significant project in northern Greenville County, where an additional 150 miles of new fiber—supported by a \$7.5 million investment—will bring fast, dependable broadband to even more families and businesses. Each new connection brings us closer to our goal: Ensuring no corner of our Upstate community is left without access to the opportunities that connectivity provides.

But for us, expanding access isn't just about laying fiber. It's about delivering a broadband experience designed around real lives. From outdoor WiFi extenders that keep you connected across your property to enhanced network security that safeguards your data, our services are built to fit the way you live, work and play.

We also continue to expand our suite of security and support services. Whether it's protecting families online, enabling parents to manage screen time or ensuring local businesses can operate with confidence, we're committed to making connectivity both powerful and safe. Every service we offer is grounded in value, helping our customers make the most of their connection, without compromise.

As we look ahead, we're proud of the progress we've made and are even more excited about what's to come. Every new mile of fiber represents access, opportunity and growth for the communities we serve. Together, we're building more than a network. We're building the future of rural broadband in the Upstate.

Because for us, connectivity isn't just about speed. It's about bringing the world home, one family, one farm and one community at a time. ☺

Jim Lovinggood *Chris E. Townson*

The Upcountry Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by Upcountry Fiber, ©2026. 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 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.

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:



The Anderson Free Clinic teaches healthy habits and provides fresh food to uninsured and low-income residents of Anderson County. See story Page 8.

Photos courtesy of
Anderson Free Clinic

GIVE BIG *Get Gig*

Upcountry Fiber held the annual Give Big Get Gig holiday food drive in November, delivering food and support to nine local organizations assisting families in need. Employees reinforced the effort by bringing in donations and contributing more than \$800 toward additional food purchases.

Throughout the monthlong drive, customers were invited to drop off three or more nonperishable, unexpired food items at any Upcountry Fiber or West Carolina office. In appreciation, participants received a free internet

speed boost for 12 months. Every donation helped stock shelves at food banks across the region and helped ensure families had meals for the holiday season.

"Every year, the Give Big Get Gig food drive reminds us what's possible when a community comes together," West Carolina CEO Chris Townson says.

This year's campaign once again highlights the power of local giving and Upcountry Fiber's commitment to supporting families close to home.



Photo courtesy of Upcountry Fiber

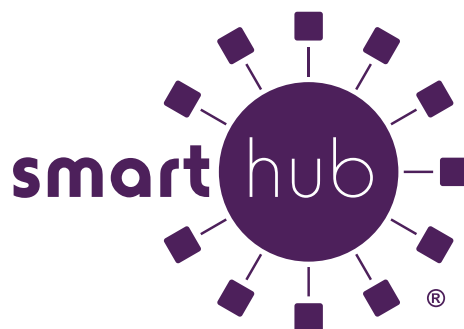
The annual Give Big Get Gig food drive helps stock the shelves at local food pantries.

TAKE THE WORRY OUT OF PAYING YOUR BILL

Resolve to save some time in 2026 by signing up for SmartHub.

SmartHub lets you manage your Upcountry Fiber account and pay your bill from anywhere. Download the SmartHub app from your app store. Have your account number and most recent billing statement handy to register or call our team for assistance.

To register for SmartHub go to upcountryfiber.com/bill-pay.



Discovering Hidden Gems

Travel vlogger highlights off-the-beaten-path destinations

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS

Gems exist in small towns all around you, but you might not know it. Take some time to explore interesting locales within a short drive or take a longer trip to make memories. YouTubers are traversing the country and taking audiences along for the ride—join them in uncovering the magic in places others may overlook.

BUILD THE DREAM

“There are so many things around me within driving distance that I had no idea about. And I believe that’s also the same for everybody else,” says Tony Hossri of the YouTube channel Build the Dream. Based in Georgia, Tony films his outdoor explorations and city tours for his vlog, or video blog.


With a little research, you can also find beautiful hikes and fun small towns. Tony searches the name of a building or other historic

sites on Google when he’s looking for places to experience. He also uses the AllTrails app to find great hiking destinations.

See what you can find and start making memories. While visiting Cincinnati, Tony saw around 50 people riding scooters. He joined up with the group on his bicycle. “They got to this random tunnel area where they had this giant scooter trick fest,” he says.

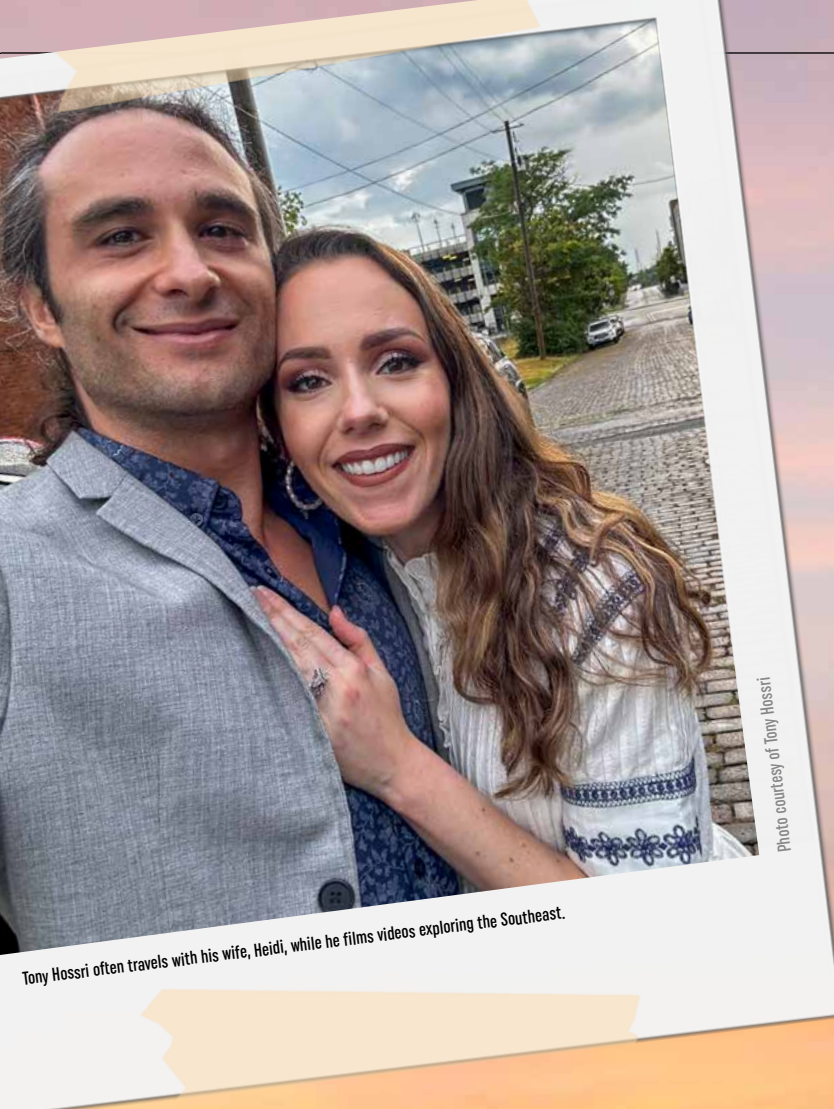
While researching online is a good place to start, Tony says, “Let your phone be a tool to give you a better life, not a way to waste your life by endlessly scrolling.” If using distracting apps gets in the way of having new adventures, consider deleting them like Tony did.

“Look up a neighboring town, neighboring city, neighboring hike,” Tony recommends. “Do everything you can to get out of the matrix to live a more fulfilling, memorable life.”

Visit buildthedreamnow.com and follow Build the Dream on YouTube to start getting ideas for your next adventure. 

The South Carolina Lowcountry is a great destination for travelers looking for adventures on the water and culinary experiences.

Adobe Stock photo by makasana photo



Tony Hossri often travels with his wife, Heidi, while he films videos exploring the Southeast.



Travel Safely

Did you know posting your vacation on social media can pose a risk to you and your home? Consider waiting to post about your travels until after you've returned.



Nearby Adventures



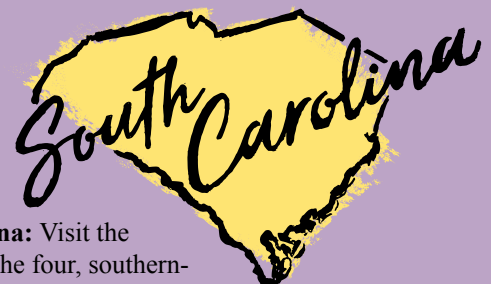
Alabama: Monte Sano means “mountain of health” in Spanish. Since the late 1800s, visitors have been coming to Monte Sano State Park in Huntsville for hiking, biking, climbing and bouldering. Go to alapark.com.



Kentucky: In Corbin, Cumberland Falls, measuring about 68 feet tall and 125 feet wide, earns the title of the Niagara of the South. Go to explorekywildlands.com.



Tennessee: Located three hours east of Nashville, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area includes 125,000 acres of the Cumberland Plateau. Go to nps.gov.



South Carolina: Visit the Lowcountry, the four, southernmost counties in the state, for water-based outdoor adventures. For ideas and destinations, go to southcarolinalowcountry.com.



GOOD MEDICINE

Anderson Free Clinic boosts healthy living

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

The Anderson Free Clinic is a health advocate for the community, delivering detailed advice that goes beyond simply “eat your vegetables.”

That’s just part of the message and the purpose of the nonprofit clinic, which turned 40 last year. It continues to help

the underserved in Anderson County with medical, dental and mental health appointments, prescriptions and, yes, fresh vegetables.

“Maybe this is where we start to change the mindset here in our community,” says Tammie Collins, the clinic’s executive director.

The clinic serves uninsured and income-qualified patients across Anderson County, providing a variety of medical and mental health services in addition to an on-site pharmacy at its Anderson location. A satellite clinic in Honea Path is open two Thursdays every month.

Those traditional services are coupled with the clinic’s Wellness Initiative, a proactive approach to overall health. Through the Wellness Initiative, patients can access fresh produce—some of which is grown on campus in a new hydroponic garden.

The Wellness Initiative pushes Blue Zones food guidelines for healthy eating, which emphasize the benefits of a plant-based diet. In addition to fresh food items, the clinic also provides recipes for using them. “Patients are welcome to come

to the Wellness Market once a week,” Tammie says. “We give them the food and the recipes because I can give you spaghetti squash all day long, but if you don’t know what to do with it, it’s not serving anybody well.”

Digital streamers will find a Netflix docuseries on the topic, “Live to 100: The Secrets of the Blue Zones” that shares healthy perspectives from around the globe.

A registered dietitian works with patients in the Wellness Initiative on a one-on-one basis, but there are plans for classes so people can sign up and learn together about healthy eating. Those classes may start this year.

Many of the clinic’s patients live in food deserts in rural Anderson County, where affordable, healthy options aren’t readily available. And even if they were, healthier foods can be cost-prohibitive for patients with financial and geographic challenges.

CHANGING HABITS

Dr. Harry Geisberg, board director for the Wellness Initiative, arrived in Anderson



The Anderson Free Clinic shares helpful nutritional information.

Photos courtesy of Anderson Free Clinic



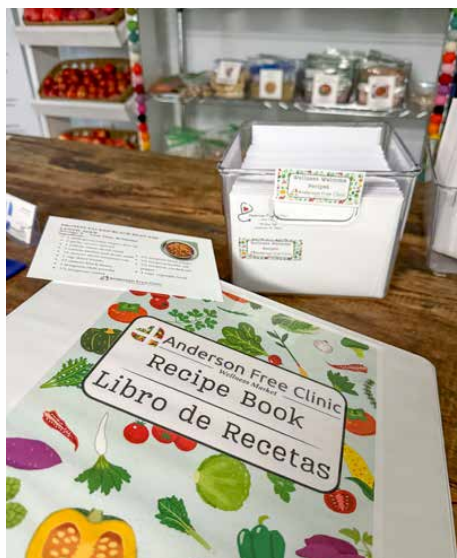
10 years before the Free Clinic opened in a small house on John Street downtown.

Harry says he took one course vaguely related to nutrition in medical school, but he now sees good nutrition as something of a magic bullet for health care. “Traditional medicine intervenes too late in the disease process and our chronic disease processes,” he says. “The old adage, ‘An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,’ is very true today. We have an epidemic of diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease, but there’s good science showing that if we can change the behavior of what we eat, we can impact all of those chronic diseases, including arthritis and cancer.”

Harry says the effort is meant to be multigenerational. There are no quick fixes when it comes to eating habits and human behavior.

“What we’re trying to do will take a couple of decades, and the Anderson Free Clinic is doing its part,” he says. “In fact, it’s the microcosm of what can be done when we change people’s eating habits and sedentary lifestyles to more active motion. The body weights among the 100-150 patients who have made more than four visits to the Wellness Initiatives are going down in a little less than a year.”

The Wellness Market offers sample sizes of different foods found in the Blue Zones. “It’s one or two servings of things like quinoa, whole oats—not sugared oatmeal—fresh produce and fruit and chia seeds,” the doctor says. “It has dry beans,



The Anderson Free Clinic shares a recipe book of healthier meal options.

lentils and things like that our folks can’t get where they live.”

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Anderson Free Clinic completed nearly 3,000 medical visits last year, but providing the care needed for underserved local residents takes a team, including AnMed health system, one of the clinic’s largest sponsors. The Upcountry Fiber Foundation also supports this program, awarding a \$5,000 grant in 2023.

“We try to be all-inclusive, and what we can’t offer here, we are very blessed in Anderson to have the nonprofits play well together in the sandbox,” Tammie says. “We really share resources and support each other.”

ANDERSON FREE CLINIC IN 2024: BY THE NUMBERS

- 677 patients received services
- 44 patient eye exams
- 4,032 volunteer hours
- 46 students received training
- 2,943 medical visits scheduled
- 430 patients received mental health services
- \$3.1 million in patient services delivered

That includes help from AnMed for emergency and specialist visits, and Anderson University sends students from its physical therapy program and their advisers to treat patients at the clinic.

“We’re trying to meet as many needs as we’re able, either through direct service or through one of our nonprofit partners,” Tammie says. “That’s what we’re about. The other nonprofits in town refer to us, and we refer to them. We share resources, and we’re very fortunate. That’s not the case everywhere.”

ANDERSON FREE CLINIC

414 N. Fant St., Anderson
864-512-7820
andersonfreeclinic.org

FORGED IN FIRE

Metalworking opens opportunities for rural farriers

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

There have always been parts of metalworking that feel a little bit supernatural to Jim Poor. While most of the craft is the product of diligent training and hard work, some elements of working with heat and metal are stubbornly unpredictable and come down to a touch of each smith's own personal sorcery.

"In my world of making tools, lastability is the most important thing," he says. "There's a lot of heat treating that goes into tooling, and that's magical stuff because you can't see it. You do it, but you can't really know the results until you send it out to the customer. So, it becomes kind of like black magic."

Jim has been trying to unravel the mysteries of metalworking since he was 12 years old. When he was growing up in Abilene, Texas, his father shod horses on the racetrack circuit, and Jim helped him after school. Once he graduated from high school, Jim found himself shoeing horses after work to make extra cash. It was at one of those jobs that he heard about the Texas Professional Farriers Association.

"One of my customers used to read the local news to me while I was shoeing his horses. And one day he read that this group was going to be at the Abilene County Fair shoeing horses for \$40," Jim says. "I was only getting \$25, so I thought I should see what these guys were doing."

Meeting other local farriers and blacksmiths opened up new opportunities to turn his side gig into a full-time job, hone his craft and even compete across the globe.

"I love competing the most. It's a small community, but it allowed me to travel all over the world and have so many

experiences," Jim says. "I don't think anything else I could've done with my limited education would allow that."

HEAT TESTING

Despite his years of experience, Jim remembers having plenty of nerves the first time he smithed competitively. It was 1985, three years since he started shoeing professionally, when he decided to take part in an event in his hometown.

"I thought it was pretty interesting, but it was scary at the same time," he says. "There were people there who knew a whole lot more about this craft than I did. I was still pretty young, but I just loved it."

A few months later, Jim joined some of his TPFA colleagues at a competition in Oklahoma, followed shortly by a trip to the nationals in Jackson, Mississippi. Farrier competition is divided into novice, intermediate and open divisions, with competitors earning points based on how well they finish and how many others are in their division. Farriers face off in classes where they have a set time to complete a task. Judges rate their performance.

For all his lack of experience, Jim climbed the ranks in short order. After just three competitions, he was already shoeing in the open class. Those competitions quickly became highlights of his year, regularly testing himself against hundreds of other farriers as part of major competitions in Texas, California, Florida and Calgary. At one of those events in California, Jim met Kathleen, the woman who would become his wife.

"She can do just about anything, but she does more of the artistic work than I do," Jim says. "We met each other out there



Competitors race the clock to get their work ready for judging.

and just became inseparable from that day forward. We dated but could only meet at competitions for several years. Of course, that was another reason to go.”

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Over the course of his competitive career, Jim earned a position on the American Farriers Team nine times, while Kathleen helped establish the first women’s international team, Women Horseshoers of America. After years of traveling the world to compete and teach, they established Flatland Forge in Tuscola, Texas, where they now focus on making farrier tools like tongs, punches and 27 different styles of hammers.

“Most people are pretty surprised we produce that many different hammers. But I’ve found out that some people are just collectors,” Jim says. “They may not even use them. They just like the look of them and the craft of them.”

In many ways, Jim envies aspiring farriers and blacksmiths today. With the rise of the internet, it is much easier to discover new techniques and learn from the best artisans in the world. Even before the internet, that accessibility was what drew him back to the craft as a young man. But the best advice he can give to anyone forging their path now is the same as it was then.

HAMMER DOWN

For anyone looking to build a career as a farrier or blacksmith, Jim Poor’s advice is simple: “Find people who are close by to you, and don’t be a jerk. You’ll get a lot of help.”

The easiest way to do that is connecting with a local group. Jim joined the Texas Professional Farriers Association as a young man, while his wife, Kathleen, connected with the Western States Farriers Association early on. If you’re looking for organizations in your state, start here:

ALABAMA

Alabama Professional Farriers Association
President Sam Howard
Email: sam.howard18@icloud.com

KENTUCKY

Derby City Horseshoeing Association
President Zeke Evans
Email: horseshoes92@gmail.com

INDIANA

Indiana Farriers Association
President Dustin Shuck
Email: dustinshuck@yahoo.com
Website: indianafarriers.org

SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina Farriers Association
President Dusty Newby
Email: dustynewby@gmail.com

TENNESSEE

Rutherford County Blacksmith Association
President Matt Clarady
Email: rcbablacksmiths@gmail.com
Website: rcbablacksmiths.org

“What I’ve always loved most is that blacksmithing is something that you don’t need money to learn. All it takes is effort,” Jim says. “You have to be a self-starter. You’ll work 10 times more hours than somebody with a day job. But all you need to succeed in this craft is a willingness to learn and work.” 📧

BREAKING THE CYCLE

The Hiding Place helps domestic violence survivors heal

Story by BRANDI DIXON

Creating safe spaces for survivors is the heartbeat of The Hiding Place. The Pickens-based nonprofit provides safe exit and support on the journey to healing for survivors of domestic violence.

“My best friend had been in a domestic violence relationship,” says Jennifer Looper, The Hiding Place’s co-founder and co-executive director. “Her story is what led us to begin and step out on our own.”

That friend, Breann Griffin, is now the program’s creator, co-founder and co-executive director.

“Our program is unlike any other in the country because it was written by a domestic violence survivor,” Jennifer shares. “Breann wrote the program based on what she experienced and needed during that time.”

BUILDING TRUST

Geared to support survivors, The Hiding Place knows no bounds when it comes to meeting needs. From the initial intake, the program is tailored to the experience

COMMUNITY MATTERS

With needs ever rising, The Hiding Place always welcomes community support. From volunteering time to giving financially, there are ways anyone can get involved. To learn more, contact co-founder and co-executive director Jennifer Looper and her team at 864-424-7865, ext. 2.

If you or someone you know is looking to make a safe exit from a domestic violence situation, contact The Hiding Place at thehidingplacepickens.org or call 888-341-9568.

and needs of each individual who comes through the door.

“Each survivor is different, so each need is different,” Jennifer says. “Some need housing, some need a job, some need further education or connection to government assistance programs like SNAP. We will help do any and all of that.”

Upcountry Fiber recognizes the invaluable service The Hiding Place provides. Upcountry Fiber awarded the nonprofit a \$5,000 grant in 2025.

“We love community, and that brings true healing,” Jennifer says of Upcountry’s support. “Listening to survivors’ stories helped us serve over 400 individuals and 200 children in 2025.”

There are about 2,000 victims of

THE HIDING PLACE

864-424-7865 ext. 2

thehidingplacepickens.org

Follow @thehidingplacepickens on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

domestic violence in Pickens County each year, Jennifer says. The Hiding Place’s goal is to offer those victims the support they need to escape the violence, begin healing and build new, safe lives for themselves and their children.

“These people are often at the lowest point in their lives, left with nothing. We were able to use those funds to help cover transportation, lodging and so much more,” Jennifer says. 🗨️



At the annual CrimeCon Conference, The Hiding Place’s executive directors Breann Griffin, left, and Jennifer Looper, right, meet with the late Gabby Petito’s mother, Nichole Schmidt. Gabby was killed by her fiancé. At the event, Jennifer and Breann shared how The Hiding Place helps individuals escape domestic violence.

Photo courtesy of The Hiding Place

What Does 1 Gig Really Get You?

Story by MAX CRAWFORD, AREA 5 DISTRICT MANAGER

I often get asked, “Max, do I really need a Gig?” I’ll tell you what I tell my neighbors and friends: “It’s not just about what you need today, it’s about getting your home ready for tomorrow.”

When people think about internet use, they picture one or two people watching Netflix or scrolling on their phones. If you count what’s connected in your home, you might be surprised. Most homes have dozens of WiFi-enabled devices humming along, including smart TVs, gaming consoles, security systems and thermostats.

Exercise bikes, refrigerators and even doorbells can connect to your network. Video doorbells and outdoor cameras use a surprising amount of bandwidth, constantly sending high-definition video to the cloud. It’s great technology, but it means your home network is working overtime.

Multiply that by a few family members doing their own thing at the same time. One person is gaming, another is watching a 4K movie, another is on a Zoom call, while smart appliances are updating themselves in the background. Before long, that “pretty fast” connection doesn’t seem so fast anymore. That’s where Gig internet steps in.

PREPARE FOR WHAT’S NEXT

How to prepare your home for what’s next? Maybe the grandkids are visiting with their devices and streaming habits. Or maybe you’re adding smart lights, voice-activated thermostats or cameras that send alerts to your phone.

All those things rely on one thing—a strong, reliable internet connection that can keep up. When you’ve got Gig-speed fiber, you don’t have to think twice about adding another device or two or even 10. You’re already ready.

With Upcountry Fiber’s Gig plan, you can upload just as fast as you download.

That means smoother video calls, faster file sharing and better performance for smart devices. It’s like having a two-lane highway—instead of a one-lane road—where traffic moves faster in both directions.

TRY IT RISK-FREE IN 2026

In 2026, we’re offering our customers a free speed boost for a full year—no catch and no hidden fees. Try our 1 Gig plan for the price of our 500 Mbps plan for 12 months. If it’s not for you, just call us and we’ll switch you back, no questions asked. But once you experience Gig-speed fiber, I bet you won’t want to go back.

A BETTER WIFI EXPERIENCE

Even the best internet connection needs a strong WiFi setup. I recommend our WiFi X service. It’s a commercial-grade router we install and maintain for you. We run regular updates and replace it if it ever breaks. Best of all, it works 24/7 to block online threats and intrusions. It’s an extra investment we’re proud to make in your peace of mind.



Upcountry Fiber’s Area District Manager Max Crawford

If you’ve got questions or just want to talk about what speed is right for you, stop by our office in Seneca. We’re not just your internet provider, we’re your neighbors. Our local team would love to help.

That’s what Upcountry Fiber is all about—connecting our community, one home at a time. 🗨️



The Ultimate Comfort Food

Beans or no beans, chili always hits the spot



Is there any food in America that creates more of a stir than chili? It's certainly a bowlful of contention.

If your heart lies in Texas, beans take a hike. Southerners, though, love their beans. In the Midwest, it's all about comfort with ground beef, tomatoes and beans, or a simple, creamy chicken chili full of flavor. But every bowl of chili, no matter where you live, has one thing in common—each is a serving of comfort that wraps around you like a well-worn blanket.



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

WHITE CHICKEN CHILI

Prep time: 20-25 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour

- 4 boneless chicken breasts
 - 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
 - 3-4 cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
 - 2 teaspoons cumin
 - 1 cup sour cream
 - 1/2 cup heavy cream
 - 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
 - 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. Reserve the seasoned broth for the chili. Once chicken is cooled, chop and set aside.

In a large pot, add butter and olive oil, and saute onion, celery and bell pepper until vegetables are tender. 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, chicken, cumin and 1-2 more cans cannellini beans. Let simmer 30 minutes to 1 hour. If mixture becomes too thick, add more broth. Add sour cream, heavy cream and fresh cilantro. Stir well. Taste and adjust seasonings. Just before serving, stir in grated cheese and ladle into serving bowls.

TEXAS-STYLE CHILI

Prep time: 45 minutes

Cook time: 3-4 hours

- 1/4 cup ground ancho chile pepper
- 1 tablespoon ground chipotle chile pepper
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 cup cornmeal
- 1 4-pound beef chuck roast, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes
- 8 slices bacon, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 small yellow onions, large dice
- 5 garlic cloves, chopped
- 3 jalapeno chiles, cored, seeded and finely diced
- 4 cups low-sodium beef broth
- 2 cups water, plus more for the chili paste and deglazing the pan
- 1 1/4 cups dark beer
- 1 cup canned crushed tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon molasses

- 2 teaspoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- Additional chicken broth, if needed

Mix the chile powders, cumin, oregano, coriander, cinnamon and cornmeal in a small bowl and stir in 1/2 cup water to form a thick paste. Set aside.

Season the beef with the salt and set aside.

In a Dutch oven, fry bacon over medium heat until the fat renders and the bacon crisps, about 10 minutes. Remove the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate. Pour all but a few teaspoons of fat from the pot into a small bowl. Set aside.

Increase heat to medium high. Sear the meat in three batches in single layers until well browned on one side, adding more of the reserved bacon fat as necessary. Place the seared meat on a plate. Add about 1/4 cup of water to the pot and scrape the bottom with a wooden spoon to release all the flavorful brown bits. Pour the dark liquid over the seared meat.

Reduce heat to medium and add 3 tablespoons of the reserved bacon fat to the pot. Add the onions and cook, stirring frequently, until softened. Add garlic and jalapenos, and cook 2 minutes more. Add the reserved chile paste and saute until fragrant.

Add the broth and stir with a whisk until spice mixture is completely dissolved. Again, scrape the bottom of the pot to release any spices. Stir in the water, beer, crushed tomatoes, molasses and cocoa powder. Add reserved bacon and seared beef back to the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cover, leaving the lid just barely ajar. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the meat is tender and the juices are thickened, 2 1/2 to 3 hours. Taste and adjust seasonings. Ladle the chili into bowls and serve with desired toppings.



TWO-MEAT CHILI

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: 1-1 1/2 hours

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound ground pork
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 1-2 tablespoons flour
- 2 28-ounce cans chopped tomatoes
- 1/2 cup chili powder (more or less, to taste)
- Salt, to taste
- Cumin, to taste
- 1-2 8-ounce cans tomato sauce

Brown meats together in large chili pot with onion and green pepper. Drain grease and stir in flour. Add remaining ingredients, starting with 1 can tomato sauce. If it seems too thick, thin it out with more tomato sauce.

Simmer for at least 1 hour. Serve with sour cream, corn chips and shredded cheese. 🍴





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