

# CONNECTED

## Filling the knead

Peace of Pie takes pizza to another level

UNITED PIZZA STATES TEAM  
Nicholas Harper  
Peace of Pie on Harp

NETWORK CONTROL

GOURMET GADGET



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Take a BOLD step

### A new toolkit opens doors


Summer is finally here! That means barbecues, days at the pool and, if you have kids, reminding them to tackle their dreaded summer reading list before it is too late.

As they are doing their homework, I have an assignment for you. But don't worry, it's only a dozen pages.

The past few years have shown the world that broadband access is a necessity, not a luxury. As the demand and investment in broadband increases across rural America, so does the need for a skilled workforce to build and maintain these broadband networks.

NTCA's Smart Communities program recently teamed up with the National Rural Education Association to create the Broadband Opportunities and Leadership Development (BOLD) K-12 Career Awareness Toolkit, which is chock-full of new and creative ways to engage students and get them excited about careers in the broadband industry. Whether your student is interested in computer science, engineering and even accounting or marketing, there are opportunities for everyone in the broadband industry.

From guidance on organizing hands-on internships and site visits, to working with schools to develop curricula, or even ways to get involved with local esports and robotics teams, this toolkit is a wonderful resource for parents, educators and community-based broadband providers alike.

Summer may be in full swing, but back-to-school season will be here before you know it. Make sure you add the Smart Rural Community K-12 Career Awareness Toolkit to your summer reading list today! Read it here: [ntca.org/BOLDToolkit](https://ntca.org/BOLDToolkit). 




## Avoid QR mischief

### Scammers co-opt this handy code

QR codes — it stands for Quick Response — pop up frequently. TV ads, restaurant menus and much more rely on these little squares of blocky lines to quickly link a smartphone user to handy information, a download or as a way to digitally send money to someone.

The FBI, however, has warned that cybercriminals may tamper with the codes. The FBI offers a few tips so you can take advantage of QR codes while staying safe and secure:

- After scanning a QR code, check the URL to make sure it is the site you want. A malicious domain name may be similar to the intended URL but with typos or a misplaced letter.
- Be cautious when entering login, personal or financial information.
- If scanning a physical QR code, ensure the code shows no signs of tampering, such as a sticker placed over the original.
- Do not download an app from a QR code.
- If you receive an email asking you to complete a payment through a QR code, call the requesting company to verify. Look up the company's number on a trusted site — don't use a number from the email.
- Do not download a QR code scanner app — the built-in phone camera is a safer option.
- If you receive a QR code you believe to be from someone you know, contact them through a known number or address to verify.
- Avoid making payments through a site navigated to from a QR code. Instead, manually enter a known and trusted URL to complete the payment. 



# Seeding the future

## THE CLOUD UPLIFTS EDUCATION

The arrival of fast, reliable internet service in rural areas sparked innovation across businesses, health care providers and government resources, leading to more options and richer services. When it comes to education, how students interact now with schools and each other has evolved at a similarly blistering pace.

First, there was the growth of cloud-based services — multiple remote networked computers that handle storage and processing of information. Then, since the cloud was doing the heavy computing work, an entire class of low-power, lower-cost devices sprang up.

Together, this combo — low-cost Chromebooks, as well as similar devices, and cloud-based tools — have changed how many students learn.

**Collaboration:** The cloud allows students to work together on group projects after school or other times they're not physically in the same room. Cloud-based storage systems, such as Google Drive, Microsoft's OneDrive and others, allow the creation and sharing of documents, spreadsheets and presentations in real time — you can see the work of other members of your team as they're making changes.

Collaboration and brainstorming are easier than ever.

**Accessibility:** With their Chromebooks or similar devices students can access their work from any location, at any time. All their work is saved on the cloud, making it easily accessible and organized.

**Efficiency:** In many school systems, teachers use the cloud to grade assignments more efficiently and even easily share the results with parents. Students might receive immediate feedback, allowing them to improve their work and better understand the material.

**Personalization:** These cloud-based systems create the option for personalized learning experiences. Students can access online resources and tools that cater to their specific needs and learning styles. For families that home-school, online communities with similar educational interests and other resources also become more accessible.

**Productivity:** Thanks to the cloud and low-cost computing devices, students can be more productive, organized and collaborative. And because the tools are far less expensive than traditional computers, more people can affordably access them. 📧

### Looking ahead to a new school year?

*Make sure you're prepared.*

- **The essential computer:** If your student needs a basic laptop to do homework and access online learning platforms, try the Lenovo Flex 5i Chromebook. "It's comparatively inexpensive, and it offers fast performance plus an excellent keyboard and trackpad. The Flex 5i is also compact and light, and its 1080p touchscreen is vivid and bright," according to a review by Wirecutter, a website operated by The New York Times offering reviews of a range of devices. Prices vary, but expect to pay about \$350.
- **Quality web cam:** From education to work, video calls are common. If your computer isn't already equipped, consider adding a camera. The Logitech C270 HD, often available for less than \$30, is a good choice for students required to attend lessons online. It delivers quality and clarity.



# A sizzling summer

## Fiber construction is heating up

**G**reetings! We hope this issue finds your summer comfortable with plenty of sweet tea to cool you down during this South Carolina heat.



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

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

The heat of summer is not slowing the speed at which we are working to bring fiber to the Upstate. We have aggressive construction schedules, and we're committed to meeting them. While our crews are challenged by the wooded and remote areas, we all agree that this year will be one of incredible accomplishment and fulfillment.

We're serving the unserved and underserved. One by one, we're connecting you to the world. We're pleased the South Carolina Office of Regulatory Services' Rural Broadband Office, or ORS, has entrusted us to build multiple projects throughout the Upstate. We do not take this responsibility lightly. We share the same commitment as ORS — to leave no one behind in this great digital evolution.

We update UpcountryFiber.com regularly so you can see in real time where we are working. Additionally, if you haven't done so already, please register your interest on the site so we can keep you updated on our progress.

Also, on the home page you'll find links to three new helpful videos:

- Our commitment to connecting you.
- What does it take to build out our service area?
- We're in your neighborhood. Now what?

We understand many of you have waited a long time. We formed Upcountry Fiber with the intention to bring fiber internet to Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative's membership area. We've made good progress, but in many ways, our work has just begun. We're not letting up, and we are backed by hundreds of employees who are personally committed to serving you.

We've received letters and notes from several new customers whose lives have been changed because of fast internet service. Telecommuting is suddenly possible. Virtual learning is a reality. Streaming their favorite shows is no longer an unattainable luxury. These notes energize us. They also motivate us.

Serving you is our mission. So is bettering our communities. Through the Upcountry Fiber Foundation, we recently awarded three grants totaling about \$25,000 to area organizations serving the Upstate. The Upcountry Fiber Foundation Board meets quarterly to review applications and make awards. We hosted a golf tournament last fall that provided seed money for the foundation, and on July 28, we will launch Southern Fried Circuit, featuring Darius Rucker at the William A. Floyd Amphitheater at the Anderson Civic Center. This isn't your average concert. We will have music, food and Southern hospitality on the menu. We encourage you to join us! Not only will this be a great event, but your ticket purchase will provide direct benefit to our communities. To learn more, go to [southernfriedcircuit.com](http://southernfriedcircuit.com).

Thank you and have a great summer! 📧

The Upcountry Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by Upcountry Fiber, ©2023. It is distributed without charge to all its customers.



is a high-speed fiber internet provider to the five counties of Anderson, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens and Spartanburg. Founded by Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER, Upcountry Fiber was created to bridge the digital divide across rural areas of South Carolina. Offering symmetrical internet speeds up to 1 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](http://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:



Nicholas Harper learned the art of crafting a pizza as he launched his business, Peace of Pie on Hartwell, in 2020. See story Page 8.

Photo by Matt Ledger

# Investing in our communities

In May, Upcountry Fiber Foundation awarded its initial round of grant funds to local nonprofit organizations.

Golden Corner Food Pantry, of Seneca, received \$10,000 to provide much-needed groceries for individuals and families dealing with food insecurity.

Lakes and Bridges Charter School, of Easley, received \$5,000 for its Learn, Experience, Apply, Participate Program. Also known as

LEAP, it offers students with dyslexia opportunities to strengthen their creative interests and natural gifts through weekly clubs that could lead to future vocational and professional pursuits.

Upstate Institute of Youth Programs Inc., of Seneca, received \$9,320 to provide pre-college and career explorational programming to first-generation, limited-income high school students and their parents in Oconee County.



Gathered at the recent grant presentation are, from left, Blue Ridge Electric V.P. of Economic Development and Support Services Zach Hinton, Upcountry Fiber Area District Manager Max Crawford, WCFIBER CEO Jeff Wilson, Upstate Institute of Youth Programs Upward Bound Program Coordinator Tequisha Whitener, Golden Corner Food Pantry Board of Directors Chairman Mike Harmon, Lakes and Bridges Charter School Principal Heidi Bishop, Blue Ridge Electric Coop Marketing Specialist Daja Davidson and Blue Ridge Electric CEO Jim Lovinggood.



Upcountry Fiber Foundation grant winners are, from left, Upstate Institute of Youth Programs Upward Bound Program Coordinator Tequisha Whitener, Golden Corner Food Pantry Board Chairman Mike Harmon and Lakes and Bridges Charter School Principal Heidi Bishop.

## MUSIC IS ON THE MENU

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BENEFITTING

UPCOUNTRY FIBER FOUNDATION

## HAPPY Fourth of July!

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Upcountry Fiber offices will be closed on Tuesday, July 4, in observance of Independence Day.

# SHIVER ME TIMBERS!

Family fun sets sail at pirate-themed attractions



The American Star pirate ship sets sail from Orange Beach, Alabama.

Photo courtesy of Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism

Story by ANNE BRALY

For generations, kids and adults alike have been captivated by legendary tales of pirates' treasure-hunting and swashbuckling adventures. If your family loves the story of Peter Pan and the misadventures of Captain Kidd, you're in luck! There's a bounty of places around the South where your crew can get its pirate on.

## PARADISE LAGOON

*Lexington, Kentucky*

Woodland Aquatic Center's brand-new Paradise Lagoon, which opened in May,

is a pirate ship and water attraction that brings high seas adventures to Kentucky.

While the Paradise Lagoon pirate ship is new, it replaces the USS Woodland that generations of people grew up with. That ship sailed the waters of Woodland's pool for decades before being decommissioned when it was no longer seaworthy. The folks from Lexington's Parks and Recreation Department let the public vote on what they wanted to see replace the old vessel.

"Those results clearly indicated that the public wanted to keep the theme of

a pirate ship," says Michelle Kosieniak, parks and recreation superintendent of planning and design.

The new USS Woodland reimagines pirate life by letting kids and adults climb aboard — they can try to find a hidden periscope. They can also use a waterslide to make a quick getaway into the pool while sea creatures look on. The design offers fun sprayers and water cannons, too. But, Michelle says, "It has more gentle play features than the old USS Woodland, so that our youngest visitors can also interact without being overwhelmed."

- ▶ Admission: \$6 for adults, \$4 for kids 15 and under
- ▶ Information: [lexingtonky.gov/neighborhood-pools](http://lexingtonky.gov/neighborhood-pools)

### BLACK DAGGER PIRATE CRUISE

*Hilton Head, South Carolina*

Board the Black Dagger and set sail for a memorable day of adventure. Get your own pirate name, learn some pirate lingo, find sunken treasures, get a temporary tattoo and defeat Stinky Pete in a water cannon battle. It's an action-packed experience that lets kids live their pirate fantasies on the water while using their imaginations.



Visitors have a chance to play pirate aboard the American Star's pirate cruise in Orange Beach, Alabama.

The pirate ship cruises the calm waters of Calibogue Sound, so seasickness is rare. Wear comfortable clothes — bathing suits are not needed, but sunblock is wise. Reservations are strongly recommended.

- ▶ Admission: \$39 for adults and children, infants 11 months and younger are free
- ▶ Information: [piratesofhiltonhead.com](http://piratesofhiltonhead.com)

### CANOE THE CANEY

*Silver Point, Tennessee*

It's said treasure abounds on the banks of the Caney, a river that flows deep in the mountains of East Tennessee. There's a legend about a crew of pirates who stole a cursed treasure belonging to dastardly Captain JaBez and fled, spreading his ill-gotten gains across the water as they went.

Now, boaters — wearing pirate hats and carrying swords — can travel the river in canoes, searching for JaBez's gold coins and sparkling jewels, while keeping their eyes peeled for the captain and his crew who may be disguised as local fishermen.

The Pirate Adventure is one of two pirate-themed trips offered by Canoe the Caney. The Pirate's Dinner and Sunset River Cruise is new this season. The youngest allowed in a canoe or kayak solo is 8 years old, depending on experience. The youngest age for a child with a parent on board is 3 years old.

- ▶ Admission: Starts at \$29
- ▶ Information: [canoethecaney.com](http://canoethecaney.com)

Pirates battle on ship at the Pirate's Voyage Dinner and Show in Pigeon Forge.



Photo courtesy of Hollywood Company

### PIRATE VOYAGE DINNER SHOW

*Pigeon Forge, Tennessee*

You'll have a four-course feast that even the pickiest of pirates will enjoy. The menu includes Cracklin' Pan-Fried Chicken, Swashbucklin' Sugar-Cured Ham, Cob-O' Butter Corn, Pirate Herb-Basted Potato, Walk the Plank dessert and unlimited Coca-Cola, tea or coffee. And just to make sure all pirates are satisfied, gluten-free, vegan and vegetarian meals are available.

While you dine, Blackbeard and his quartermaster, Calico Jack, will lead the Crimson and Sapphire crews in a battle on land and sea in full-size pirate ships.

- ▶ Admission: \$29.99 for kids, \$49.99 for adults and free for children under 3
- ▶ Information: [piratesvoyage.com](http://piratesvoyage.com)

### PIRATE SHIP CRUISE

*Orange Beach, Alabama*

Bring your buccaneers aboard the American Star for a Pirate Adventure on Terry Cove, where they can get their faces painted, learn a little pirate lingo and even sing a sea shanty or two. Visitors get to help defend the ship in a "gun" battle, hear true stories of pirate and privateer attacks in the legendary Pirate's Cove and hunt for the captain's lost gold and treasure chest while keeping their eyes out for any surprise attacks! As an added bonus, you may see some dolphins, too.

- ▶ Admission: Starts at \$29, free for children 1 and under
- ▶ Information: [hudsonmarina.net/Pirate-Adventure.htm](http://hudsonmarina.net/Pirate-Adventure.htm)



Pirates circle the treasure map aboard the American Star's pirate cruise in Orange Beach, Alabama.

Photos courtesy of Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism

# CAREER TOPPING GOALS

A SLICE OF HEAVEN FOR  
LOCAL PIZZAIOLO

Nicholas Harper is a self-described “pizza nut.”

He’s a certified pizzaiolo — a chef trained to make Italian-style pizzas — via the Pizza University & Culinary Arts Center in Beltsville, Maryland. Harper is also a competing member of the United States Pizza Team and, as the owner of Peace of Pie on Hartwell, serves more than 100 pizzas to customers each day.

And though he worked in restaurants for years, Harper never actually worked in a pizza-focused eatery until he purchased what would become Peace of Pie in 2020. But, thanks to an educational trip to Italy and his drive to operate a destination for even the most discerning pizza lovers, the family-run restaurant is poised to expand and bring its pies to even more hungry mouths in Fair Play and beyond.

“We actually do everything in-house,” Harper says. “We make dough in-house every single day. We make our sauce in-house every day. All of our vegetables are actually from a local produce guy just about a mile up the street. We cook all of our proteins in-house. Other pizza places that have ever been here always used frozen dough, just because it’s a lot easier. So I went one step further.”

## ‘EVERYTHING FELL INTO PLACE’

Harper worked several restaurant jobs over the years, including a stint at a friend’s barbecue joint just up the street from what is now Peace of Pie. After a move to Greenville and plans to start a food truck, he eventually heard a restaurant owner in Fair Play wanted to sell. “I came up, sat down and spoke with him, and everything fell into place,” Harper says.

He bought the restaurant on Highway 11 in November 2020 and spent a few weeks learning about the restaurant’s operations before shutting it down to head to the Pizza University & Culinary Arts Center. Harper’s specialties are New York and Neapolitan pizza. At Peace of Pie, he serves New York-style pizza.





**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** The staff at Peace of Pie is proud to bring authentic New York-style pizza to South Carolina. From left are Nicholas Harper, Emily Harper, Scottie Harper, Marianne Ippolito, William Howard, Danielle Matson, Cassidy Duncan and Ava Craig.

An order of the award-winning bruschetta is a tasty start to any meal at Peace of Pie.

Peace of Pie delivers on flavorful and filling meals, including chicken and basil stromboli, left, a Greek salad and a Carolina Philly sub.

He had long been making pizza at home, but making four dough balls for himself was very different from making hundreds for the public. “I went to school and mastered my craft,” Harper says. “We reopened as Peace of Pie on Hartwell on Jan. 8, 2021.”

### INSPIRATIONAL TRIP

Peace of Pie’s first months in business were as a to-go-only restaurant, before going full service in November 2021.

The following April, Harper won a sweepstakes through his pepperoni brand which sent Harper and his wife, Emily, to Italy for 10 days with the U.S. Pizza Team. The team’s goal is to bring competition to the pizza industry. The couple toured Italy with the team, and Harper joined the team as a competing member upon his return. “Honestly, from that point on, this restaurant completely changed gears,” he says.

It was inspirational to meet the best of the best from today’s pizza industry. He also brought some things back, like a pesto recipe from a class he took in Portofino, and new techniques to make a better product, faster. He also imports all of his flour from Italy. He goes through around six or seven 55-pound bags a week, a number that will only increase when tourists flock to the nearby lake in the summer.

The restaurant was already doing well before the trip, but thanks to some good press, business exploded upon Harper’s return. Regular events, like live music every other Saturday and Music Bingo every Wednesday, are also popular draws for customers.

Harper’s end goal, though, is just to



make really good pizza. Peace of Pie is located in a space where different owners sold pizza for some 15 years, Harper says, but those pies were just run of the mill. “We wanted to amplify everything to bring literally some of the best pizza you can get in the state of South Carolina,” he says.

Peace of Pie doesn’t just offer pizza. The restaurant, which serves wine and beer, also offers calzones, strombolis, subs, burgers, salads, desserts and more. Its bruschetta is award-winning — the secret, Harper says, is topping it with feta cheese.

### A GROWING BUSINESS

Peace of Pie has had one recent setback — On Christmas Day last year during an unusual cold spell, six pipes burst and completely flooded the restaurant. It closed until early March, but Harper used the time to rebuild the restaurant. He’s also planning for expansion.

The restaurant currently operates in two storefront locations in the same shopping plaza. Harper has secured a third and intends to use it as a banquet hall. When the expansion is complete, some new kitchen equipment will give



Photos by Matt Ledger

Harper the chance to put freshly made pasta on the menu.

Soon, Peace of Pie will start to deliver, and Harper is working on marketing and selling the restaurant’s sauce and dough.

Harper is looking toward an additional location in the future, one which will undoubtedly embrace the hippie spirit of the original Peace of Pie — the name is no accident, tie-dye is the norm, and one of the restaurant’s best-selling shirts is emblazoned with the slogan, “Legalize Marinara.”

“We love pizza, and we love pizza-loving people,” Harper says. 🍕

## COME GRAB A SLICE!

### Peace of Pie on Hartwell

17016 S. Highway 11, Fair Play

864-972-1955

peaceofpieonhartwell.com

Follow the restaurant on Facebook and Yelp.



# FELLOW TRAVELERS

Digital communities keep travelers connected on the go

Story by DREW WOOLLEY



The internet was a much different place when Peter Daams started Travellerspoint.com with his brother, Samuel, in 2002. Back then, they were looking at sites like FriendsReunited and classmates.com for inspiration — places for people who had lost touch to reconnect.

“We wanted to make something similar for travelers who had lost track of people they met on trips,” Peter says. “Our tagline was ‘Travel Friends Reunited.’ Our initial launch included a service to help with that, as well as a very basic trip log and a basic travel diary feature.”

The site attracted some attention, but it soon became apparent that Travellerspoint wasn’t giving visitors many reasons to hang around after they had searched for or found their missing travel buddies. The next year, the brothers added travel forums to the site, with a little extra help from a Geocities project that was about to be shuttered.

“That really kick-started the community side of the site and has set the tone for how it’s grown since then,” Peter says. “The owner of that project agreed to let us take it over, so we instantly were able to kick-start our forums with a great group of users who were experts on many travel destinations.”

Today, the site has grown into one of the largest and most active travel communities on the internet with more than 1 million users sharing photos, blog posts and mapping trips. Travellerspoint and other online travel communities like it are also the perfect hubs for the growing number of travelers looking to share their adventures with other enthusiasts.

## NEW DESTINATIONS

Since the end of travel restrictions around the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans have been eager to get out and see more than their backyards. Data from the U.S. Travel Association showed that travel spending in March 2023 was up nearly 10% over the previous year and 5% over spending in 2019.

That enthusiasm shows no sign of slowing down as more than half of Americans say they plan to make travel a priority this year. But how they travel is starting to change. More travelers are putting an emphasis on finding destinations that are off the beaten path, family-friendly and environmentally responsible.

Online communities provide the perfect place for travelers to research these new adventures and get recommendations from others who have tried them. Many of these communities have migrated to social media platforms like Facebook, where they can cater to the specific needs of different groups.

Communities like Wanderful and Girls Love Travel, for example, provide a network of women who can support and even join other women in their travels. The TravelAwaits community offers stories, deals and advice geared toward travelers ages 50 and up. Digital Nomads Around the World, on the other hand, offers inspiration and advice for younger travelers living and working on the go.

While many of these groups rely on social media to maintain their communities, Peter still sees sites like his playing an important role for dedicated travelers. The rise of Facebook initially saw some of the more off-topic banter on Travellerspoint forums shift to the social media channel. But as other communities have shut down, Travellerspoint has become a haven for hardcore travelers looking for a place to discuss their passion.

“Many of those members are now very active on Travellerspoint,” Peter says. “We became something of a refuge for the people who lost their previous online communities.” 🗨️



# TRAVEL TROUPES

Whether you never stop traveling or you're planning each course for your next foodcation, you can find a community that has the same passions.

**Digital Nomads Around the World** — Digital nomads are people who travel freely while using the internet to work remotely. They tend to travel light and live out of temporary housing while they're on the move. It isn't a lifestyle for everyone, but if it piques your interest this group can answer your questions.

**TravelAwaits** — Traveling in your 50s and beyond often comes with the benefit of more time and resources to explore your interests. But it can also present unique challenges. TravelAwaits is a community by and for older travelers, so you can trust that every deal, recommendation and discussion keeps your needs in mind.

**Wanderful** — Whether you're a woman eager to explore solo or looking for a supportive group of fellow travelers, Wanderful has everything you need. Learn about safe travel practices, pick up inspiration for your next excursion or connect with other adventurous women at online and offline events.

**Food Travelist** — Everyone loves a great meal on vacation. But for some travelers, the food is the point. If that's you, Food Travelist has your back with tasty recommendations and mouth-watering photos. When your wanderlust kicks in back home, you can even find recipe ideas to take your taste buds on a trip instead.



# The ultimate home network experience

Story by JOHN CLAYTON

Household and business WiFi networks have become increasingly larger and more complex with the ability to run just about anything — from security systems to thermostats.

With our ever-increasing dependency on WiFi connections comes the potential of additional security threats, but Upcountry Fiber recently introduced a solution with its WiFi X service.

“Everything from baby monitors to video to doorbells to cameras are all WiFi enabled,” says Mary Miller, Upcountry Fiber marketing communications manager. “With that comes the unfortunate need to protect them and fortify them because these threats and viruses are only growing, so WiFi X just gives people a little more peace of mind.”

## CONNECT, PROTECT AND CONTROL

The WiFi X app is a tool that provides that security for Upcountry Fiber customers, using a high-end WiFi 6 router. WiFi 6 is the latest generation of wireless communications technology. It is faster and more secure than its predecessors, allows for more devices to be connected to the network



Upcountry Fiber uses the Calix GigaSpire Blast router to provide superior broadband connectivity and WiFi coverage.

Photo by Matt Ledger

and can reduce battery drain on mobile devices. WiFi 6 routers will work with WiFi 5 devices, as well as many older devices.

The average home now has more than 10 devices connected to its WiFi network, giving clever cybercriminals multiple access points. WiFi X is the front line of protection for Upcountry Fiber customers against increased potential malware and virus attacks.

“We want our customers to have the best WiFi experience that they can have,” says Upcountry Fiber’s Director of Commercial Operations Shannon Sears. “When we talk about the average number of devices on networks increasing, almost 100% of those are WiFi enabled — and those numbers are going to continue

to go up. As that happens, more bandwidth is required, more apps are being developed and more streaming is being done. All of those things equate to having a good solid router and being protected.”

All the enhanced protections and controls available to customers through the WiFi X app cost just \$7.95 per month.

“It blocks threats before they can even access the laptop or anything else — whether it’s a smart lightbulb, a smart appliance or what have you,” Mary says. “I think it’s the biggest game changer. The app will send notifications to people when threats have been blocked.”

Beyond offering improved security, WiFi X provides additional tools, including parental

and bandwidth controls, which allow customers to prioritize the bandwidth used by certain devices.

Through the WiFi X app, customers have the ability to set up profiles for children, filter content, websites and apps and set appropriate time limits for usage.

“There’s just a whole slew of enhancements that come with WiFi X that make this an overall better customer experience. At the end of the day, it’s giving customers more hands-on control,” Mary says.

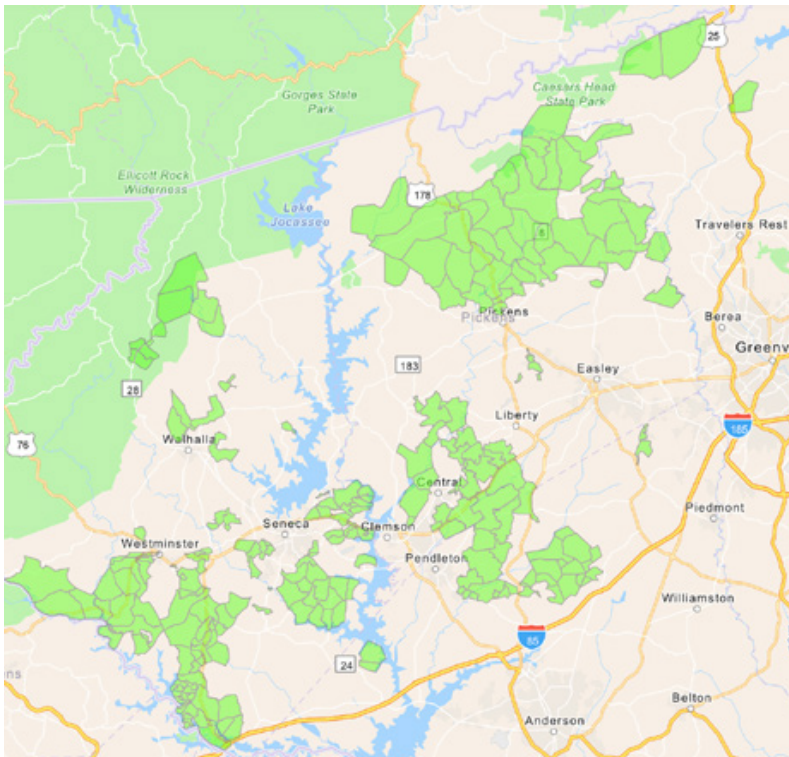
The response to WiFi X has been positive from Upcountry Fiber customers since the company introduced the service earlier this year. “What we’ve found so far with WiFi X is that people see the need for it and are excited about the product,” Shannon says. “They’re excited about being able to look at and control their home network through an app.”



Scan this QR code to get the WiFi X app on your phone.

# BUILDING BROADBAND in the Upstate

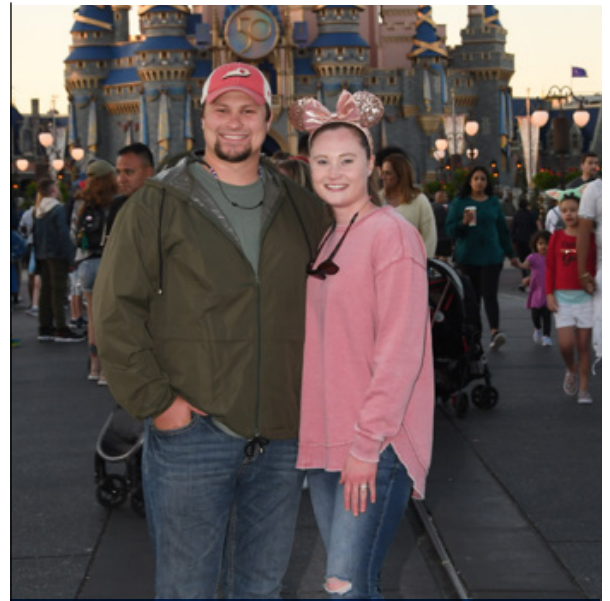
Since launching in 2021, Upcountry Fiber has, on average, deployed more than 100 miles of fiber optic cable each month. The collaboration of teams from Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER will continue as we deploy this vital utility to our neighbors and businesses. We are committed to expanding the reach of our high-speed internet to underserved and unserved areas.



Upcountry Fiber service is available in the green areas shown on our network map. Fiber crews continue to work hard to expand our broadband coverage area.



►► To learn more about Upcountry Fiber, and to register your interest in signing up for service, go to [upcountryfiber.com](https://upcountryfiber.com).



## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT *Carter Burton*


Carter Burton is the broadband deployment manager for Upcountry Fiber, primarily working from the Seneca office. He started with WCTEL in Abbeville as an intern when he was a college student and became a full-time employee four years ago.

He earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Clemson University in 2019 and a master's degree in engineering management from the University of Louisville in 2022.

Carter and his wife, Laine, have been married for two years. In May, they had their first child, a daughter they named Montgomery. The Burtons also have two German shorthaired pointers named Tilly and Belle.

Carter enjoys spending time with family, fishing and reading. "I particularly enjoy volunteering with local special education classes whenever I can," he says.

His two favorite series to stream are "The Blacklist" on Netflix and "The Mandalorian" on Disney+. Laine's favorite movie to stream is "The Proposal" on Hulu.

To manage daily tasks and track projects, Carter uses the Todoist app. He also uses Audible to listen to audiobooks and has spent the past few months learning American Sign Language using Lingvano. 

# Time-saving devices

Gourmet gadgets can make meals manageable

Instant pots became a “thing” in the 2010s, and people fell instantly in love with them. Combining an electric pressure cooker, slow cooker, rice cooker and yogurt maker in one, multicookers save space and cook meals quickly. What better time to hop on the bandwagon than now, when summer produce is at its height?

If you’re old enough to remember your grandmother’s pressure cooker, you may know horror stories of it blowing up and causing injuries. But don’t worry! Today’s electric pressure cookers have a slew of safety features, including sensors to monitor temperature and pressure.

The price of multicookers has come



down from north of \$500 to under \$65, an excellent price for beginners. If you want more functions or higher wattage, expect to spend upward of \$100. Here are some recipes to get you started.



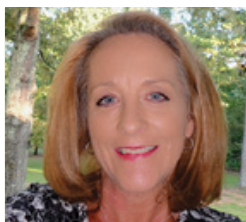
## SUMMER VEGETABLE SOUP

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 3 medium ears fresh corn, kernels removed (or 2 1/4 cups frozen corn)
- 2 pounds tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 sweet bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 2 medium zucchini, diced
- 1 cup fresh or frozen lima beans
- 8 ounces sliced mushrooms
- 1 small eggplant, peeled and diced
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon vinegar (red wine, balsamic or white)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- Ground black pepper, to taste

Press the saute button. Add olive oil to the stainless steel insert. Wait 2 minutes for it to preheat.

Add onion and garlic. Saute, stirring frequently, just until onion is tender (about 5 minutes). Press off/stop button. Add remaining ingredients. Place lid on the cooker and make sure the valve is set to sealing. Press soup and set the timer for 12 minutes.

The cooker will beep and start cooking. It may take about 20 minutes for it to come to pressure before the timer starts. When the cooking is done, allow the pressure to naturally release for about 5 minutes, then quick release any remaining pressure by switching the valve to venting. Carefully remove the lid, away from your face, and set aside. Stir and season with salt and pepper. Let cool a bit before serving.



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

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

## VEGGIE TOMATO SAUCE

Using canned tomatoes rather than fresh in this recipe from Instant Pot makes this recipe a breeze.

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 small to medium carrots, diced
- 2 celery sticks, diced
- 3 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon thyme leaves
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 small beets (canned or fresh), diced
- 1 cup diced red bell pepper
- 5 mushrooms, diced
- 1/2 of a medium zucchini, diced
- 2 cups fresh spinach leaves
- 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 jalapeno red chili (Use half or less if you don't like some heat.)
- 3 cans whole tomatoes in juice
- 1/2 cup water

Turn the multicooker on and press the saute key. Once hot, add the olive oil, onions, carrots and celery and cook for 5 minutes, stirring a few times.

Add the rest of the ingredients. Press cancel to stop the saute process. Stir the contents and pop the lid on top.

Lock the lid, making sure the top valve points to sealing. Set to manual/pressure cook on high pressure for 10 minutes. The cooker will take 5-10 minutes to build up the pressure and the timer will begin.

Once finished, allow the pressure to release naturally for 10 minutes and then move the top valve to venting to quickly release of the remaining pressure.



Open the lid and stir. Using an immersion blender, puree into a thick sauce. You can also do this in a blender or a food processor, but make sure to cool the sauce down slightly and do this in batches. Pour the sauce into containers or mason jars for storage or use right away as a sauce for pasta, pizza, enchiladas, meatballs and more.

## INSTANT POT ROAST

This recipe from Instapot is a cooker full of comfort.

- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1 (4-4 1/2-pound) boneless chuck roast, excess fat trimmed and cut into 6 pieces
- 1 cup beef stock
- 6-8 jarred pepperoncini salad peppers, plus 1/4 cup liquid from jar
- 1 (1-ounce) package dry onion soup mix
- 2 tablespoons dried parsley flakes
- 1 tablespoon dried chives
- 2 teaspoons dried dill
- 1 1/2 teaspoons onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch

Set a 6-quart cooker to the high saute setting. Heat oil then add beef and cook until evenly browned, about 2-3 minutes per side. Set aside.

Stir in beef stock, scraping any browned bits from the bottom. Stir in pepperoncini and liquid, onion soup mix, parsley flakes, chives, dill, onion powder, garlic powder and pepper. Return beef to the pot.

Select manual setting, adjust pressure to high, and set timer for 45 minutes. When finished cooking, naturally release pressure according to manufacturer's directions, 20-30 minutes.

Remove beef from the pot, then shred, using two forks.

In a small bowl, whisk together cornstarch and 3 tablespoons cold water and set aside.

Select high saute setting. Bring to a boil, stir in cornstarch mixture and cook, stirring frequently until slightly thickened, about 3-5 minutes. If the mixture is too thick, add more beef stock as needed until desired consistency is reached. Serve immediately. 🍴



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