



UPCOUNTRY

MARCH/APRIL 2024

CONNECTED

Connected campus

SWU embraces latest technology

CLOUD
CAPACITY

ECLIPSING
EXPECTATIONS

By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
 NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Agriculture thrives with broadband

Every day I hear examples of how the fast, reliable internet service provided by NTCA members brings telemedicine, rich entertainment resources, educational opportunities, jobs and far more to rural communities like yours.

But that’s just the beginning. These internet networks also create a vital foundation needed by a range of industries critical to the nation’s economy. While agriculture might not immediately come to mind when considering the internet, the \$4.4 billion ag tech market is a showcase for how broadband can bring farms and ranches the internet-connected tools that make agriculture more efficient, productive and sustainable.

Smart irrigation systems, farm management and automation software, drones and sensors that can remotely monitor factors such as soil moisture are just a few of the innovations used in modern agriculture. They make a real difference, too.

For example, consider just one part of the agricultural equation — water. Leveraging these high-tech tools can reduce water use by 4%. When considering the scope of the industry, that’s a tangible difference, the equivalent of filling 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Without reliable internet access, these tools wouldn’t be possible, nor would the benefits to consumers. When agricultural production is less expensive and yields are higher, we can all enjoy more favorable prices.

So, when you think about all your internet service provider does for you personally, take a moment to appreciate they’re making a difference for all of us, nationwide. 📶



The ag tech advantage

CONNECTED TOOLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Internet-connected technology makes a bottom-line difference in agriculture, responsible for as much as an **8% increase** in the value of corn crops alone. That’s an attention-getting result, and it makes it worth a closer look at ag tech.

THE DETAILS:



Ag tech includes smart irrigation farm management software, drones, remote sensing, biotech, automation and more. Many of these tools rely on the internet to share access and store and share data.

Value of the U.S. ag tech market:
\$4.4 billion

Value of agriculture, food and food-related industries:
\$1.26 trillion

Agriculture supports **43 million jobs**, **\$2 trillion** in wages and generates **\$718 billion** in taxes.

CURRENT AG TECH OFFERS:



9% reduction in chemical use



6% reduction in fossil fuel consumption



4% reduction in water use — enough to fill 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools



30-million-pound decrease in herbicide use

THE BOTTOM LINE: Ag tech enables farmers to lower costs while increasing yield and productivity.

Truly personal fitness

Online fitness offerings bring workouts to wherever you are

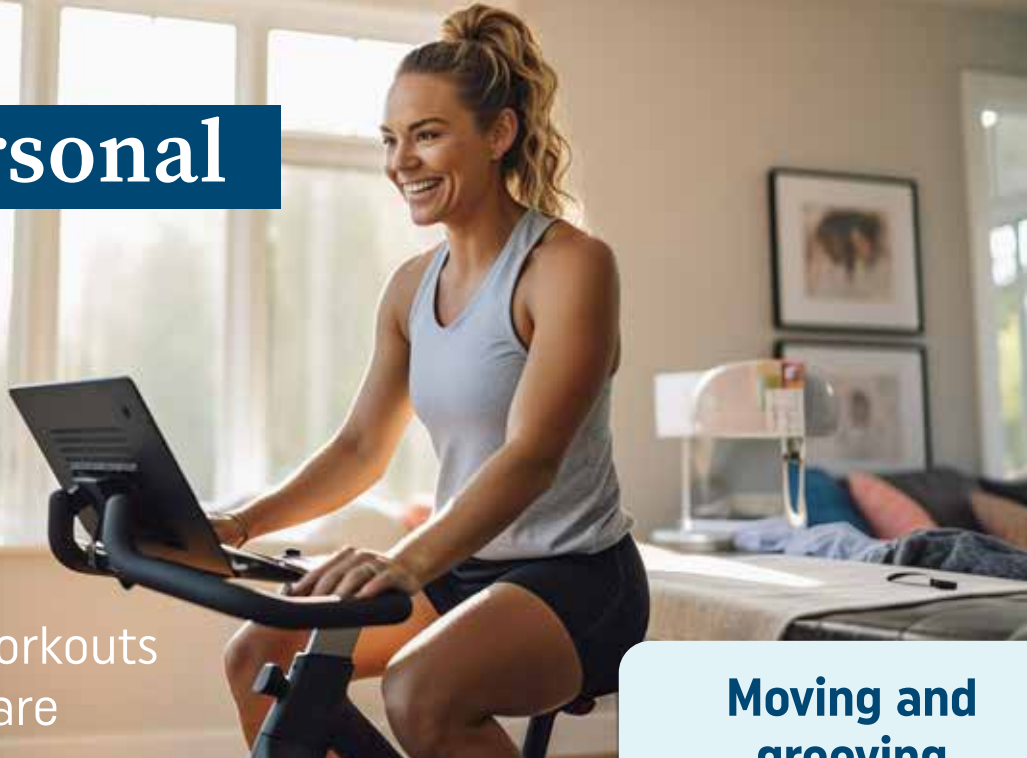


Photo by woffhain97/Adobe Stock

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

After an exhausting workday, heading to that boring fitness class that's way too expensive to skip sounds like about as much fun as a root canal. What if you could just click an app or website and join a class from home? Think of the time, energy and frustration you could save.

With live and prerecorded classes and a fast and reliable internet connection, it's easy to turn any space into a gym. Thanks to apps and an array of online workout programs, you have the ability to exercise whenever, wherever and with whomever you want.

Some apps create personalized daily workout programs, while others provide a library of on-demand classes. Take a live class and become part of a community where everyone feels the burn.

PICKING THE PERFECT PLAN

As the popularity of online exercise programs continues to grow, so does the number of available options. Before choosing one, here are some factors worth considering.

Cost: Pricing can vary widely, but many apps and programs offer a free trial before requiring a subscription or financial commitment.

Instructors: Check their credentials to make sure they're certified in whatever they're teaching.

Variety: You'll maximize your results by

finding a program that keeps you interested while increasing the difficulty over time.

Devices: Make sure the program you choose works across all your devices. Compatibility is important since one of the biggest benefits of online fitness is the ability to take it with you anywhere.

FITNESS TO GO

While the at-home workout might seem isolating, it's actually a gateway to a digital community of like-minded fitness enthusiasts. The classes can provide a connection to a new whole world.

Onepeloton.com: Most famous for its much-advertised, in-home bike revolution, the Peloton digital app features on-demand and live classes of all kinds — no equipment needed.

Nike.com/ntc-app: This free app provides a variety of classes and styles for folks with busy schedules.

Apple.com/apple-fitness-plus: These classes, including yoga and Pilates, are personalized and perfected for Apple Watch users.

DailyBurn.com: This site offers the opportunity for one-on-one instruction. You can discover a favorite series or search for a specific workout depending on your mood.

Beachbody.com or BODi: This platform features '80s-style bootcamp classes, progress-tracking and nutrition hacks. 📱

Moving and grooving

Some mobile fitness fans are turning to more creative ways to work out at home. Harkening back to the days of Richard Simmons and Jazzercise, online dancing is fast becoming a personal fitness staple.

Online dance classes can be less expensive than in-person sessions and offer more style options. And, many people feel more comfortable staging a dance party in their own living rooms rather than in a studio full of strangers.

Zumba.com: The Latin-inspired cardio workout has motivated millions around the world to get moving since dancing into the spotlight in 2001.

Obefitness.com: With more than 8,000 classes and 20 different class types to choose from, there's something for everyone. Up to 22 live classes are available, seven days a week, starting at 6 a.m. Eastern time.

Dancio.com: Here you'll find hundreds of recorded classes covering various dance styles.

Steezy.co: Work out while learning a variety of urban dance moves.



We've got the speed you need

Our next goal is offering an unmatched customer experience

Our days are getting longer. Spring is around the corner, but we're not there yet. We are still cherishing this season of darkness. There is a stillness that comes with the winter, and it's in those moments of quiet that we can take time to reflect on your service and the importance we place on delivering a superior customer experience.



JEFF WILSON (L)
Chief Executive Officer
WCFIBER

JIM LOVINGGOOD (R)
Chief Executive Officer
Blue Ridge Electric

We are now in year two of a two-year companywide customer experience initiative. We've conducted surveys, interviews and customer journey mapping, and we've pinpointed areas where we can improve on our promise to you.

We offer so much more than fast internet, and that is our promise to you.

Our commitment begins at the heart of your homes, where your internet service transforms into an experience. We understand that your internet connection is more than just fiber and routers. It's your gateway to your world and to each other.

That's why we are so excited about our managed WiFi service, WiFi X. This service not only puts the control of your home WiFi network at your fingertips, but it also acts as a guardian, blocking cyberthreats before they can breach your home. Your security is our top priority. Just in the past two months, WiFi X has blocked more than 343,936 threats from entering your homes.

What else sets us apart? We value simplicity and honesty. We don't have internet contracts binding you to our service, nor do we offer misleading pricing. We understand your needs may evolve, and we want our services to adapt with those changes. While we may not always claim to offer the lowest price, we are committed to providing the best service.

We care. Whether we are taking off our shoes and entering your homes or working with you through a service issue, we take your concerns seriously. And, while we may not always get it right the first time, we learn from every interaction and adjust course if necessary.

We live here. We're deeply rooted in our communities. We are the result of a partnership between Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER — two longtime service providers in South Carolina. We both have cooperative roots, and service and community are in our DNA. Furthermore, through the Upcountry Fiber Foundation, employee contributions and volunteerism, we actively participate in initiatives that uplift and support our communities. Our employees have the option to donate to area causes through payroll deductions and have Volunteer Time-Off, when they are encouraged to go and serve our communities.

Our employees understand our community because they are an integral part of it. When you reach out to us, you're not just talking to a faceless entity — you're talking to someone who understands your community, your needs and your perspective.

Thank you for choosing us as your internet provider. Our companies collectively have more than 150 years of service in this area, but Upcountry Fiber is only just beginning.



The Upcountry Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by Upcountry Fiber, ©2024. It is distributed without charge to all its customers.



is a high-speed fiber internet provider to the five counties of Anderson, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens and Spartanburg. Founded by Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER, Upcountry Fiber was created to bridge the digital divide across rural areas of South Carolina. Offering symmetrical internet speeds up to 10 Gbps over a fiber network, Upcountry Fiber offers the fastest and most reliable high-speed internet in the area.

UpcountryFiber.com
888-760-2111
Email us at info@UpcountryFiber.com

Construction Updates & FAQs:
UpcountryFiber.com/Updates

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

BUSINESS CONTACTS:

Max Crawford
Area District Manager
Max.Crawford@wctel.com

Brandon Smith
Business Solutions Consultant
Brandon.Smith@wctel.com

Carter Burton
Broadband Deployment Manager
Carter.Burton@wctel.com

Produced for Upcountry Fiber by:



On the Cover:



The Southern Wesleyan University campus is rich in history, from its 19th century origin to 21st century campus technology. See story Page 8.

Ready to serve

Upcountry Fiber is growing at an amazing rate, both in residential and commercial broadband clients. As a result, our team is also expanding so we can continue to provide the best experience for our customers.

Please help us welcome these new employees!



CASSIE CROWE is an account service representative who lives in Iva. She and her husband, Matthew, have two sons, Kaden and Grady. She enjoys spending time with family and taking shopping trips.



PRESTON EVANS, a native of the Abbeville and Greenwood area, is a customer service representative. His

hobbies include hunting, fishing and golf.

Fun fact: Preston has played baseball his whole life, and he's a huge South Carolina Gamecocks, Atlanta Braves and Tennessee Titans fan.



RANDY EVITT is a network operations center tech 2. He lives in Easley with his wife, Tonya. The couple has two sons, Johnathan and

Justin. Randy enjoys outdoor projects and using online tutorials to repair things on his own.

Fun fact: Randy jokes about realizing how much energy he no longer has when his two grandsons come over for a visit.



TAYLOR GRIFFIN is a network operations field tech. He is originally from Abbeville but now lives in Clemson. He enjoys golf and snow skiing.

Fun fact: Taylor was a member of the fifth-oldest fraternity in the country, Psi Upsilon, and now serves as president of the Clemson University chapter's alumni board.



GRANT GRIFFIN, an installation and repair tech, lives in Abbeville. He likes to go fishing on his boat.



COREY JACKSON, from Westminster, is a construction tech 1. He has two dogs, a German shepherd named Grizz and a Labradoodle

named Ace. Corey enjoys running heavy equipment, hunting, playing baseball and football. He also likes the challenge of any DIY project.



CJ MCGAHA is a network operations center tech 1 who lives in Greenwood. He and his wife, Meaghan, have a son, Kason, a baby

daughter, Olivia, and a goldendoodle named Charlie. CJ's hobbies include collecting baseball cards, cooking and various sports.

Fun fact: CJ was once a co-host of a sports radio show.



ANDREW PRICE is a construction tech 1 who lives in Abbeville. He and his wife, Caroline, have a daughter, Maggie, and a second baby on the way.

Andrew's hobbies include woodworking and hunting.



COURTNI ROCHELLE is an account service representative who lives in Calhoun Falls. She and her husband, Matthew, have a son, Langston, a

daughter, Langleigh, and two dogs, Buck and Rooster. Courtni enjoys spending free time with family, riding side-by-sides and checking on their cows.

Fun fact: Courtni loves to bake.



HANNAH STEPHENSON is a marketing communications specialist. She is originally from Lexington and now lives in

Abbeville. She is engaged to Connor Patterson. Hannah likes crafting and golf.

Fun fact: Hannah played on the golf team at Lander University for five years while earning her bachelor's and master's degrees.



TRAVIS TAYLOR is a network operations field tech. He is originally from Greenwood and now lives in Donalds.

He and his wife, Tiffani, have a son, Weston, and a daughter, Sadie Mae. Travis enjoys hunting, fishing, traveling with the family and the occasional construction project.



BRADY WAITS is a business solutions tech 1. He's originally from Lexington, but he moved to Abbeville after graduating high school.

His hobbies include hunting, fishing and golf.

Fun fact: Brady fished on the Clemson University Bass Fishing Team when he was a student there.



KAYLA WHITE is an account service representative. Originally from Greenwood, she and her family moved

to Abbeville last spring. Kayla and her husband, Matthew, have two children, Hampton, and, Matty Kay. Kayla enjoys spending time with her family and watching Hampton play sports.

Fun fact: For their fifth wedding anniversary, Kayla and Matt went to Disney World.

TOTALLY AWESOME

APRIL ECLIPSE WILL WOW!

Story by KATHY DENES

The Southeast boasts plenty of beautiful scenery, but the heavens get credit for two of the region's most spectacular sights in a span of less than six months. For three hours on Oct. 14, an annular eclipse created a "ring of fire" visible along its path from Oregon down through Texas. April 8 will bring yet another eclipse, this time plunging all beneath its route from Texas up to Maine and beyond into total darkness.

Except for Southwest Kentucky, very little of the Southeastern U.S. will be in the path of totality. The shadow will barely hit the northwest corner of Tennessee as it cuts through the Kentucky Band region, skims Mayfield and then darkens Paducah and Henderson around 2 p.m. EDT.

For those not in the path of totality, even the partial eclipse will be awesome to behold. Starting around 1:55 p.m. in areas east of totality, the orbiting moon will obscure the sun's bottom-right section and make it look like a crescent by around 3 p.m. By about 4:20 p.m., the sun will again be a complete ball of fire.



Photo by Aditi/Adobe Stock

Illustration by James Threw/Adobe Stock

*“And the moon
in haste eclipsed
her, and the sun in
anger swore.”*

— Aristophanes, Greek writer, 450-385 B.C.,
after observing an eclipse

ECLIPSE 101

TOTAL ECLIPSE: When the moon passes between the Earth and the sun and briefly covers the sun’s disk completely, areas within the narrow path of the moon’s shadow will experience total darkness. Those outside the path of totality will see a partial eclipse. Go to greatamericaneclipse.com or eclipse2024.org to see how the eclipse will look in your area and to find loads of other information.

VIEWING AN ECLIPSE: The only time it is safe to look at the sun with the naked eye is during the brief totality phase of a total solar eclipse, so that only applies to those directly in its path. At all other times, eclipse phases and locations, direct viewing of the sun is only safe through special solar filters and viewers. Look for the ISO 12312-2 standard, and make sure they are free of scratches or flaws. No. 13 or 14 welder’s glass also provides protection.

EVENTFUL OPTIONS

Events for seeing and celebrating the eclipse include Paducah’s two-day downtown street fair and a viewing party at its National Quilt Museum. Louisville’s Kentucky Science Center is chartering buses to take eclipse fans to Evansville for a riverfront view of totality.

U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, home to the INTUITIVE planetarium, is setting up solar telescopes. Many educational activities are planned, including NASA’s livestream of the eclipse which will be shown throughout the center.



Photo by supertramp8/Adobe Stock

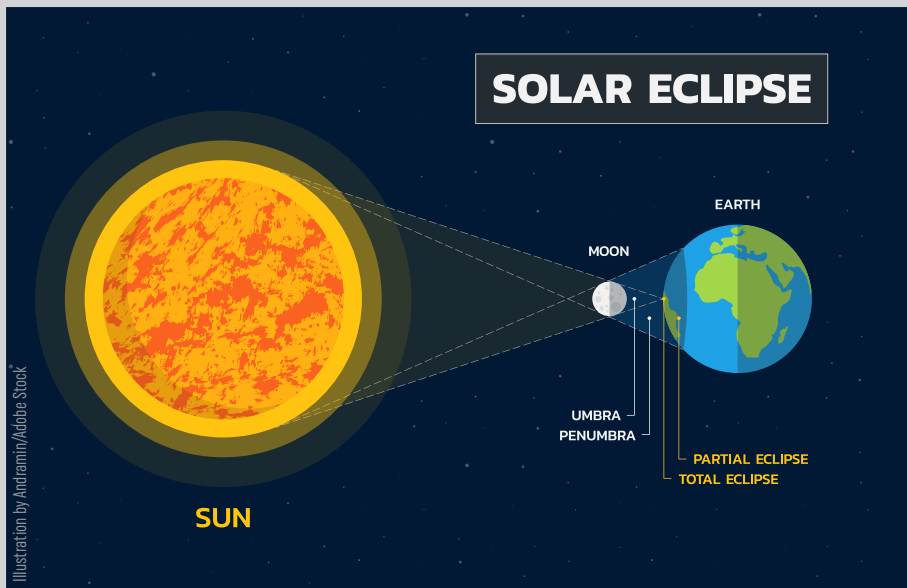


Illustration by Andramini/Adobe Stock

Of the 350-plus permanent planetariums in the U.S., six are in Alabama, eight in Kentucky, four in South Carolina and five call Tennessee home. Find one near you at go-astronomy.com/planetariums.htm.



Illustration by Jiva Dore/Adobe Stock

CONNECTIONS ACROSS CAMPUS

Fiber keeps Southern Wesleyan University faculty and students online

Southern Wesleyan University's campus has wireless access points in every building, making it easy for students, from left, Divinity Ervin, Sierra Raven and Mallory Wheeler to stay connected.

Story by PATRICK SMITH

Whether it's early morning or long after the traditional work-day ends, a president's work is never done. And for Southern Wesleyan University President William Barker, Ph.D., transitioning from the office to working from home in the evening became increasingly difficult.

"When my family and I first moved into the president's house on campus, we didn't have reliable internet access," Barker says. "With four young children and a home office, we really needed fast, dependable broadband. We tried several mobile hotspots, but it just wasn't cutting it. With service from Upcountry Fiber, I can work from home and still manage to read a bedtime story to my kids in between Zoom meetings and late-night emails."

After the switch to Upcountry Fiber about 18 months ago, the university has not only experienced additional fast

broadband connections across campus, SWU now has a partner to ensure success for faculty and students.

"Fiber allows us to strengthen our network and potentially grow our student base on campus without any needed upgrades," says Warren Dennis, SWU manager of technical services. "We have the resources we need to continue our technology growth."

BROADBAND CONVENIENCE

Founded in 1906 as Wesleyan Methodist Bible Institute, SWU is home to over 1,000 students studying in more than 40 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degree programs. Affiliated with the Wesleyan Church, SWU provides a faith-integrated academic curriculum and boasts nearly 12 Division II NCAA athletic teams on its 300-acre campus in Central South Carolina.

"If you were to draw a line from

Charlotte to Atlanta, and go right to the center, that's Central," Chaplain Emeritus Ken Dill says. "The school has a long history of producing ministers, teachers, school administrators, musicians and a wide variety of professionals. The school has changed over time, but we've retained our values as a Christian liberal arts school."

As the university continues to grow, so too has its need for technology resources to keep students and faculty connected.

"Today, the average student brings five to six devices that connect to the network," Dennis says. "This generation of students has never known a time without internet connectivity, and there's a huge demand for bandwidth. From the dorms to classrooms and across common areas, there's an expectation from students to be able to connect no matter where they're located."

Aside from the student demand for fast

broadband, connecting dozens of buildings across a large college campus is no easy feat, especially when some buildings predate the Civil War and others are state of the art.

“Our main chapel is Newton Hobson Chapel and Fine Arts Center. It’s a 1,200-seat auditorium,” Dill says. “All our chapel services are broadcast on YouTube. Then we have a smaller chapel that seats about 200 people, and during COVID we’d broadcast the service from the main chapel so students could stay socially distant. SWU also has a very small chapel, Freedom’s Hill Church, built in 1848 that only holds about 50 people.”

Not only is it the smallest chapel listed on the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, it’s also a popular stop for Civil War education.

“Oftentimes area elementary school teachers will bring young students to the church to talk about abolitionists,” Dill says. “The original door has musket ball holes in it. People shot at those inside because the congregation opposed slavery. So that’s a very integral part of the history of the Wesleyan Church. And those are three spaces that are very different in terms of age, but we still use modern technology to connect them all.”

Photo by Matt Ledger



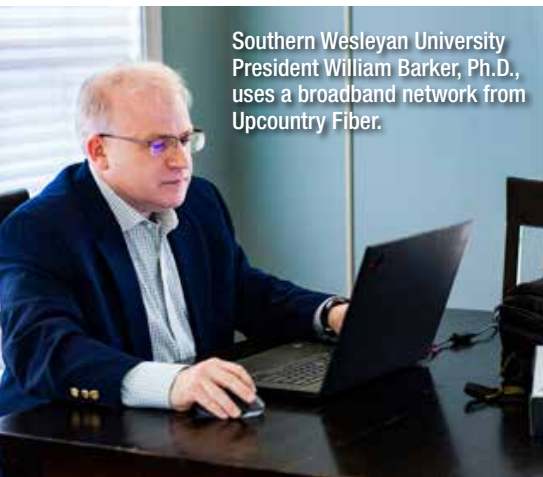
Chaplain Emeritus Ken Dill sometimes leads services at Freedom’s Hill Church.

DIGITALLY ENABLED CLASSROOMS

As the demand for flexibility grows for working adults, it’s also extended to classrooms. Equipped with fiber, SWU professors use online video services to include students attending virtually because of illness or other needs. SWU also has a robust online degree program tailored toward working adults, including business administration, special education, psychology degrees and more.

“The pandemic taught us a lot about different ways of working,” Dill says. “Now almost every class that’s taught is in a classroom with cameras, so professors can teach, and students who are remote can watch the class and participate like they’re in the room.”

Photo courtesy of Southern Wesleyan University



Southern Wesleyan University President William Barker, Ph.D., uses a broadband network from Upcountry Fiber.

SWU also uses technology to take attendance for various required programming on campus.

“We take attendance through an app students can download to their phone,” Dill says. “Then they’ll scan a QR code that changes every 12 seconds on an iPad. It’s really interesting to walk into a church that was built in 1848 and scan a QR code to get credit for attending an event.”

THE UPCOUNTRY FIBER DIFFERENCES

Like with any technology, sometimes things can go awry. The difference is that customers can call a local company to get the help they need. It’s something SWU is grateful for as it’s partnered with Upcountry Fiber.

“It was very cost-effective for the university,” Dennis says. “It was more bandwidth for basically the same price. Working with an organization like Upcountry Fiber, not only are they very responsive, but we’re also lucky we haven’t had any major issues. Honestly, given the experience we’ve had with other service providers, I think we could have been without connectivity for days. Whereas now, we’re able to make a phone call and we’ve got someone to help us immediately so we can resolve the issue quickly and keep everything up and running.”


Whether broadband connects a single-family home or an entire college campus, it’s the kind of quality service and partnership customers can expect from Upcountry Fiber. 

Photo courtesy of Southern Wesleyan University



SWU students Adrian Guzman and Miranda Kelly use their laptops to work on an assignment.

FUNKY CHICKENS

Ornamental poultry are not your basic backyard birds



Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

Light Brahma bantams are Turner's favorite chickens to breed and show.



Joe, Meagan, Turner and Kaiser Holland have found a home in the world of exhibition poultry.

Seven-year-old Turner Holland wanted to keep busy outside of school, but he knew he wasn't athletic and couldn't stand sports. That's when his dad, Joe, brought home a half-dozen baby chickens from Tractor Supply.

Those first six chicks led to hundreds more as Turner and his family jumped into the world of backyard poultry at their home in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Now known as Chicken Hill Farm, they are a go-to source of the rare blue Araucana, as well as several other breeds of ornamental chickens.

Their clientele is a growing group that finds joy in raising chickens. More than 12 million people — about twice the population of Arizona — share their yards with a flock, according to The American Pet Products Association's most recent national pet owner survey. The number of households with chickens rose from 8% in 2008 to 13% in 2020.

Many people choose to keep them as pets or as a steady source of fresh eggs.

But exhibition chickens like the Hollands' are often inconsistent layers. Instead, these flashy fowls have a different job — strutting their stuff.

The Hollands' signature Araucana chickens are recognizable by their poof of feathers — known as tufts — that grow at their ears instead of at their “rumpless” tail ends. While the “hilarious, friendly girls,” known for their pastel blue eggs, are Chicken Hill Farm's stars, they share the spotlight with many other funky chickens. There's the Muppet-like jet black Polish with their explosion of fluffy, white head feathers that often obscure their eyes. The Brahmas have abundant, soft feathers that cover their legs and feet. And then there are the small silkies, the most unique of all. Lacking the barbicels that hold a feather's shape, they look — and feel — like they're covered with fur rather than feathers.

Maintaining the chickens' genetics is fascinating, says Turner's mom, Meagan.

At first, she and Turner focused on breeding, but then they discovered the exhibition part of fancy poultry. They took a few of their favorites to a local county show in June 2022 and then to another one a week later. Turner is now 11 and a rising star on the exhibition poultry circuit.

“After that, it just snowballed, and he’s all in,” Meagan says. “He just fell into it and is obsessed. This is such a great activity for him and for us to do as a family.”

The family now spends most weekends in the summer and fall traveling to exhibitions where Turner is making a name for himself. Meagan handles the birds. Joe, an Army veteran, drives. And younger son, Kaiser, is beginning to join his brother in the show ring.

“I don’t know if my husband was as excited about our new lifestyle,” Meagan says with a laugh. “He’s not into the breeding like Turner and I are. But he enjoys the birds and the time we spend together as a family.”



ABOVE: Turner’s light Brahma bantam cockerel won champion of the Feather Legged Class in the junior show at the Ohio National Poultry Show.

LEFT: As more people become involved with raising fancy chickens at home, the number of exhibition poultry shows and entrants continues to grow.



Photo by Sara D. Patterson

Are you ready for backyard chickens?

Saving money and healthier eggs are the intent of many people who raise chickens, but those goals are often difficult to reach, says Gregory Archer, associate professor and extension specialist for Texas A&M Department of Poultry Science.

“I tell people it should be more about self-satisfaction and the desire to know exactly how and where your eggs came from. Chickens are also fun, and kids love them.”

Possible challenges include bird medical care, waste management or strategies for excess eggs. Similarly, predators can quickly be an issue.

Also, there are geographic-specific considerations. “Often, people don’t manage heat or get the correct breeds for Texas heat,” he says. “You need to make sure you have fresh water, shade and maybe some fans.”

A little research will help identify birds suitable for heat, cold or any environment.

CHICKEN CONSIDERATIONS



If you’re contemplating backyard chickens, consider these points before adopting the chicken lifestyle.

LOCAL LAWS AND NEIGHBORHOOD REGULATIONS

- Check for the latest rules on chicken ownership in your town and county. Many cities limit the number of chickens allowed per household and prohibit roosters entirely.
- Often, cities require chickens to be kept enclosed and that the coop is well maintained and cleaned frequently.
- If you decide to sell your eggs, ensure it’s legal where you live.

EXPENSES

Even small-scale chicken farming requires ongoing expenses after buying or building a coop and fencing.

- A 40-pound bag of feed can cost \$25 or more, depending on the brand, nutritional value and other factors.
- Dietary supplements are typically needed, so budget for extra proteins and treats, like dried insects — a 5-pound bag can cost at least \$50.
- Chickens require fresh bedding, like pine shavings or chopped straw, every time the coop is cleaned.

CARE

While caring for chickens isn’t a full-time job, do expect to invest time.

- Most people adopt a daily or twice-daily routine for feeding and watering.
- Many times, chickens need to be let out of a small coop in the morning and herded back in at night for safety.
- Remember, chickens can fly. Some people prefer to clip their wings regularly, while others choose a run with fencing or netting overhead.

Source: Osceola County Extension Agent Jessica Sullivan

Don't get caught in a phishing net

Strengthen your cybersecurity practices

The internet is an important part of modern life. Between work, school, entertainment, paying household bills, ordering groceries and so much more, we're online more than ever.

And with all that time online comes increased vulnerability to scammers and cybercriminals. Phishing, for example, is a deceptive practice to trick individuals into sharing their sensitive personal information. It's among the most common — and most successful — cybercrimes.

But, with a little knowledge, and by using some simple cybersecurity practices as you navigate your online life, you can help keep your bank account and identity safe.

WHAT IS PHISHING?

Phishing attacks often look like legitimate emails, messages or websites, but they're designed to trick recipients into revealing sensitive information such as passwords, financial details or personal data.

Upcountry Fiber believes knowledge is power, especially when it comes to cybersecurity. Our goal is to provide customers with the skills and information needed to recognize deceptive practices and avoid these traps.

UNUSUAL EMAIL ADDRESS

Pay careful attention to the sender's email address. Phishing emails often use addresses that mimic legitimate sources but contain slight misspellings or unfamiliar names.

GENERIC GREETINGS

"Dear Customer" is a generic greeting often used in phishing emails. Legitimate

organizations and companies often personalize their messaging by addressing the intended recipient by name.

URGENT OR THREATENING LANGUAGE

Phishing emails are often written in a way to stir up a sense of urgency or panic, pressuring recipients to take immediate action. Be skeptical of any messages that threaten consequences or demand urgent responses.

UNSOLICITED ATTACHMENTS OR LINKS

Avoid opening attachments or clicking links in unsolicited emails. These often contain malware, like viruses or spyware. Or they may direct users to fake websites designed to capture sensitive information.

REQUESTS FOR PERSONAL OR FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Legitimate organizations typically do not request sensitive information via email. Be wary of messages requesting your passwords, credit card details or other personal information.

MISMATCHED URLS

Hover over links in an email to preview the website's address. Phishing emails may display hyperlinked text that doesn't

match the link's actual destination. Verify the address before clicking any link.

SPELLING AND GRAMMAR ERRORS

Poor writing, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors can be indicators of a phishing attempt. Legitimate communications from reputable sources are usually well-written and professionally crafted.

UNUSUAL SENDER BEHAVIOR

Pay attention to unexpected requests or behavior from your contacts. Cybercriminals can compromise legitimate email accounts and use them to send phishing messages, so be wary of unexpected requests claiming to be from someone you know.

MISMATCHED LOGOS AND BRANDING

Examine the logos, fonts and overall branding. Phishing attempts often use poor-quality images or slightly altered logos to mimic legitimate organizations. Compare these details to official sources.

CHECK THE EMAIL SIGNATURE

Legitimate emails from reputable organizations typically include professional signatures with contact information. Be suspicious of emails lacking this information or containing inconsistent details. 📧



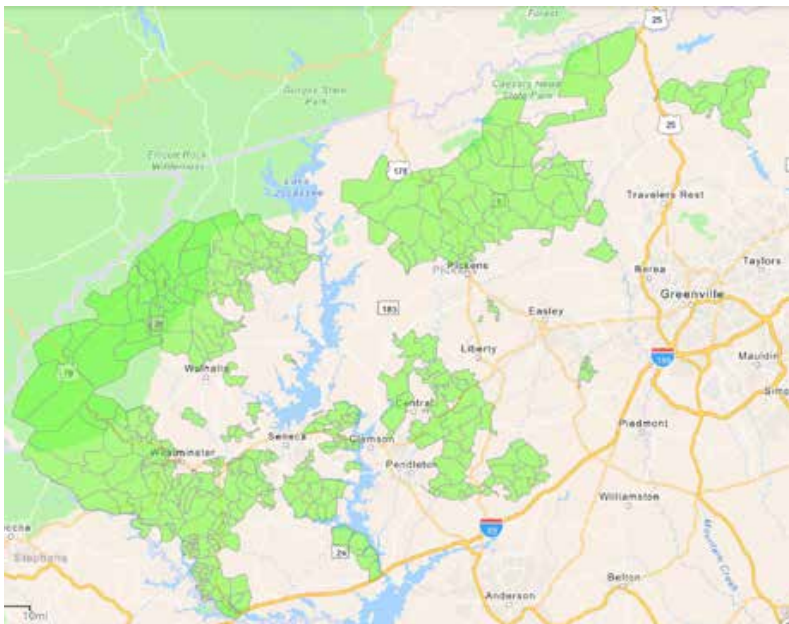
Adobe Stock/Niliz

Connecting the Upstate to **BROADBAND**

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

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

We are committed to expanding the reach of our high-speed internet to underserved and unserved areas. The collaboration of teams at Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER will continue as we deploy this vital utility to our neighbors and businesses.



▶▶ Upcountry Fiber service is available in the green areas shown on our network map. Fiber crews are currently working in other parts of our service area to further expand broadband availability.



TO LEARN MORE about Upcountry Fiber, and to register your interest in signing up for service, go to upcountryfiber.com.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Jacob Cook

NETWORK OPERATIONS
FIELD TECHNICIAN

Jacob Cook has been a network operations field technician for two years, serving as part of Upcountry Fiber’s install and repair department. He helps connect new customers during initial installations and responds when trouble calls arise.

Jacob and his high school sweetheart, Katie, have been married since May 2016. They have a beautiful 5-year-old daughter, Paigelee, and three dogs, Ruger, Remi and Cubby. Jacob enjoys spending time with family and friends, watching college football and smoking meat in the backyard. He’s an avid outdoorsman, hunting and fishing when time allows. His favorite movies are “The Sandlot,” “A League of Their Own” and “American Sniper.” Jacob’s favorite series that he’s streamed include “Designated Survivor,” “The Last Kingdom” and “Suits.”



Regional Accents

Local favorites are
key ingredient of
America's melting pot

Every local dish has a story behind it, history heaped with flavor. One of the best ways to discover these is by stirring the nation's culinary pot to see what's cooking.

Certain dishes are common to us Americans across the board. We'll fry just about anything. From Twinkies to turkeys, they all go in the deep fryer. But, when it comes to comfort-food classics, states and regions have their own distinct accents. U.S. culinary traditions form a giant melting pot with regional flavors blended in for extra deliciousness.

Regional foods are some of the most fascinating bites one can experience. Here's a look at some of the ones that are favorites across our nation.



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

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

SMOKED GOUDA MAC AND CHEESE

You'd be hard-pressed to walk into a diner around the South and not see mac and cheese on the menu. This recipe just takes it up a notch.

- 1 pound short pasta, such as elbow macaroni or shells
- 1 pound smoked gouda cheese, grated
- 8 ounces extra-sharp white cheddar cheese, grated
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mustard
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- Salt, to taste
- 4 slices of bacon, crumbled (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Cook pasta according to package directions to al dente stage, then set aside.

In a large Dutch oven or other deep pot, heat butter over medium-low heat. Once butter has melted, add in flour and whisk until all flour disappears, then slowly add in heavy cream and whole milk. Stir and let mixture come to a slight boil. Add in all spices and stir again. Lastly, add in 8 ounces of smoked gouda cheese and white cheddar cheese. Whisk until all cheese has melted.

Add in pasta and mix everything together to fully incorporate, making sure all pasta is coated with sauce. Add salt, to taste.

Transfer mixture to a large, lightly greased baking dish, then top dish with remaining smoked gouda. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until mixture is golden and bubbly.

Let cool for 15 minutes and serve warm topped with crumbled bacon, if desired. Makes 8 servings.



WILD RICE CHICKEN CASSEROLE

Wild rice is found throughout the Midwest, where this recipe originates.

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) chicken broth
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 4 cups cubed, cooked chicken
- 4 cups cooked wild rice
- 2 jars (4 1/2 ounces each) sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1 jar (4 ounces) diced pimentos, drained
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
- 1/3 cup slivered almonds

In a large saucepan, saute onion in butter until tender. Stir in the flour, salt and pepper until blended. Gradually stir in broth. Bring to a boil. Boil and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Stir in the half-and-half, chicken, rice, mushrooms, pimentos and parsley. Heat through.

Transfer mixture to a greased 2 1/2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with almonds. Bake, uncovered, at 350 F for 30-35 minutes or until bubbly. Makes 6-8 servings.

SALMON PICCATA

This is a popular recipe in the Northwest where fresh salmon is easy to find. In other states, try to get your hands on the freshest fish possible to bring out the flavors in this dish.

- 4 salmon steaks, 1 inch thick
- All-purpose flour (for dredging)
- 1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 3 tablespoons onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 heaping tablespoon capers, drained
- 1/8 teaspoon dried Italian seasonings, crushed
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons beef broth

Preheat oven to 400 F. Rinse salmon steaks under cool water, pat dry and roll in flour.

In a large ovenproof frying pan or saute pan, heat 1/4 cup butter until it melts. Briefly saute the salmon steaks, browning them lightly on both sides.

Bake, covered, 10 to 15 minutes until a meat thermometer registers an internal temperature of 140 F, or until salmon is slightly opaque in the thickest part. You may need to cut to test. During this time the meat continues to cook because the meat temperature will rise 5 to 10 degrees after it is removed from the oven and the juices will redistribute. Remove from oven. Reserve liquid in the pan, and transfer salmon onto a warm serving platter.

Using the same pan over medium heat, stir into the reserved liquid the onion, garlic, capers and Italian seasonings. Simmer for 5 minutes. Add white wine, lemon juice and beef broth. Stir until well blended. Turn off the heat, whisk in the remaining 3 tablespoons butter until blended. Remove from heat, pour sauce over salmon and serve immediately. Makes 4 servings. 🍴

SALSA ROJAS

Salsa is the condiment of choice throughout Texas and many of the Western states.

- 1 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes with garlic and onion, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) stewed tomatoes (with Mexican seasonings, if you can find them), drained
- 1 can (10 ounces) diced tomatoes and green chilies, drained
- 1 medium onion, quartered
- 2 banana peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 cup minced fresh cilantro
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 2 ripe avocados, peeled and cubed
- Tortilla chips



Place the first 10 ingredients in a food processor; cover and process until chopped. Add cilantro and lime juice; cover and pulse until combined.

Transfer to a bowl; stir in avocados. Serve with tortilla chips or use as a condiment for your favorite Tex-Mex dishes.



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