

BUSINESS connections



Smiles Abound at Wilderness Run Alpine Coaster and High Country Pie

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BUSINESS connections

Life has its ups and downs, so just enjoy the ride. I'm starting my letter with this advice because our October 2025 *Business Connections* features a popular coaster in Banner Elk.

Turn to the **Business Spotlight on Wilderness Run Alpine Coaster and High Country Pie** on pages 4 and 5 for a fun look at these businesses as well as Wilderness Run Adventure Course, which is also on the property. Guests enjoy the up-and-down excitement, and SkyLine/SkyBest makes sure the hosted voice and internet services stay on track.

How Much Internet Speed Do We Need? We often hear this question from customers, and we share our tips on page 3. It's important for your business to have sufficient speed in both directions—upload and download—and to reassess your needs regularly.

It's also important to know **How to Help Other Small Businesses**, as we explore on page 6. Even something simple like promoting them on social media can help. On page 7, you're encouraged to **Have More Fun, Get More Done**. Humor in the workplace can boost morale and help turn a down atmosphere into one that's looking up.

Whatever ups and downs you face in your business, know that SkyLine/SkyBest is always here to help with communications solutions. Please contact us with your questions.



Sincerely,

Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

ON THE COVER:

Back row (L to R): Katie Eldreth, Cameron Stewart, Paul Alcazar, Drew Piscopo

Front row (L to R): Zara Blevins, London Griffin, Athena Ferrance, Wendy Harris, Brittany McCormick, Hollie Brown, Haleigh Seamon

Photo credit for local images: Todd Bush

How Much Internet Speed Do We Need?

SkyLine/SkyBest hears this question frequently from our business customers, and there's no single right answer. For some small businesses, a download speed of up to 200 Mbps may work fine. Larger businesses with many devices and data-intensive applications may need a download speed of up to 1 Gig (1,000 Mbps) for optimal performance.

To select the right internet speed for your business, it's important to consider these factors:

- **How many devices are using your internet service?** Add up all the desktop computers, tablets, smartphones, Point of Sale (POS) terminals, security systems and other internet-connected devices at your business location. Remember to also include devices used by visitors and customers on your Wi-Fi network, if applicable. The more devices you have, the more speed you need.
- **How do your employees use the internet?** If your employees' online activities consist mainly of email, web browsing and POS terminals, then a moderate internet speed may suffice. However, if you have many employees simultaneously streaming HD video, engaging in video conferences, uploading and downloading large files and using cloud-based applications and storage, then your business may be a candidate for upper-level speeds.
- **What are your performance requirements?** Think about the impact to your business if your internet service were to slow down from heavy use on insufficient bandwidth. Would your employees be able to do their jobs? Would customer service be adversely affected? It's important to equip your business with plenty of internet speed for your current usage and upgrade your plan as your needs grow.

SkyLine/SkyBest offers internet plans up to 2 Gig, dedicated fiber-optic connections, symmetrical speeds and knowledgeable local support. If you want to discuss an internet speed upgrade for your business, please contact us at BusinessSolutions@skyline.org or 336-876-6175.

Welcome to the New Executive Director of the Avery Chamber

A new chapter for the Avery County Chamber of Commerce has begun. Victoria Bowman is now the executive director, and the Chamber plans to adopt a new strategic approach regarding community partnerships, tourism promotion, member relations and local business advocacy. She replaces Robin Morgan as executive director, who announced her resignation earlier this summer.

Bowman brings more than two decades of experience to this leadership position, including expertise in strategic planning, brand building, connecting communities, marketing and event organization. She was previously chief experience officer for Structall Building Systems, based in Oldsmar, Florida, where she directed all branding and marketing efforts, developed and implemented customer service protocols and built a high-performing leadership team. A resident of Avery County since 2021, Bowman has served as board chair for the Chamber. This gave her valuable insight into the organization's strengths and areas of opportunity.

All of us at SkyLine/SkyBest congratulate Bowman and wish her the best in her new role. We look forward to seeing what's ahead for the Avery County Chamber of Commerce.





Wendy Harris



Wilderness Run Alpine Coaster and High Country Pie

Where to go when you're hungry for excitement (or pie)

Tara and Eric Bechard spent years living overseas with the military, which is where Tara's goal of owning a mountain coaster began. When they returned to the Appalachian Mountains, they knew the right place for it was in Banner Elk, North Carolina.

Loops, Waves and Twists

Wilderness Run Alpine Coaster, the first of its kind in the state, opened in 2019. It was built by Germany's top alpine coaster company and modeled after popular coasters in Europe. The track's length of 3,160 feet includes three circular loops, a series of waves and several twists and turns. Riders navigate the track in individual carts with handles that serve as brakes, and they can use as little or as much braking as desired.

Each ride begins with a cable-pulled ascent of 770 feet to the top. At that point, the alpine coaster differs from a roller coaster because the remainder of the ride is gravity-fed. The top speed is 27 miles per hour, and the average ride takes about five minutes.

Wendy Harris has been close friends with Tara and Eric for many years and worked with Tara at another business. She was hired to oversee general operations of Wilderness Run Alpine Coaster as

well as the two other businesses on the property—Wilderness Run Adventure Course (see sidebar) and High Country Pie. Depending on the time of year, there are 40-50 employees.

Everybody Loves Pie

"The Adventure Course was the second business to open and High Country Pie came next. High Country Pie officially opened in 2025, although we had a soft launch in 2024 and were delayed by the hurricane. All things happen when they are meant to, however. Because we were not fully opened, we were able to use High Country Pie's commercial kitchen after the hurricane to benefit nonprofits in the area working with recovery," said Wendy.

She continued, "While tourism is the stalwart of our coaster business model, our local community is what really makes us successful year after year. We opened the pie shop realizing our visitors to the area would love it, but we also knew locals

wanted great quality food to be convenient and affordable. We work every day to accomplish those goals.”

High Country Pie serves a variety of freshly baked, New Zealand-style savory pies. They include meat varieties such as King of the Mountain with ground beef, bacon, vegetables and seasonings as well as the all-vegetable Forager pie.

Wendy said, “We are so excited about our pie shop as our newest addition. Look for soups and weekly features to come soon. We have already been supplying customers with bulk purchases and shipping pies to them, catering events, etc. It has been a lot of fun, and there is more to come!”

Community Connections

Behind the scenes of all this fun is serious technology to keep the businesses operating efficiently and productively. SkyLine/SkyBest provides hosted voice and internet services.

“Connectivity and communication are the hallmarks of a community business. Without our SkyLine/SkyBest services, our ability to reach people locally and globally would be hindered, as well as our ability to grow, prosper and employ. Of course, if you are in business long enough, there will occasionally be glitches and challenges. The SkyLine/SkyBest team is there to answer our call, listen to our concerns and help correct any issues. I could not ask for more,” Wendy said.



Drew Piscopo, Zara Blevins and Brittany McCormick

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— WENDY HARRIS, WILDERNESS RUN ALPINE COASTER

What is the team most proud of about Wilderness Run Alpine Coaster, Wilderness Run Adventure Course and High Country Pie? Wendy replied, “Besides the community support and our awesome staff, we are most proud when our customers come back and visit. You know you are doing something right when people want to continue to visit and share the experience with other people they know.”

Dare to Climb at Wilderness Run Adventure Course

Wilderness Ridge Alpine Coaster isn’t the only adventurous option on this scenic property. Wilderness Run Adventure Course offers a unique experience in the treetops that consists of ropes, logs and planks secured to, and suspended from, giant wooden tripods. The course features 28 obstacles with three levels of difficulty, and activities include scrambling over cargo nets, scaling rock-climbing structures and traversing swinging bridges and logs. At the highest point, approximately 40 feet above the ground, participants can enjoy views from the crow’s nest and hop in a swing to get the feeling of floating in midair.

Ready for the challenge? It takes an hour and a half to complete the Wilderness Run Adventure Course, and participants must register online for a check-in time. You’ll receive a harness and helmet upon arrival, and the adventure begins with 10-15 minutes of ground school instruction on technique and safety. A children’s course, recommended for ages 2 to 5, is also available and includes netted tubes, bridges and platforms.

Wilderness Run Adventure Course is open seven days a week seasonally from May through October. Learn more at www.wildernessrunadventurecourse.com.



Need a Hand to Reach Higher Levels of Small Business Growth?

The Small Business Administration offers a free learning platform for entrepreneurs called Ascent, which is available at ascent.sba.gov.

Ascent is packed with in-depth information developed by experts to help you grow your business. It's divided into major topics called Journeys, with topics including Disaster and Economic Recovery, Strategic Marketing and Access to Capital.

Within each Journey, there are Excursions containing the resources you'll need to master a topic:

- **Exercises and Tools** – Learn and apply growth practices to your business.
- **Fireside Chats** – Learn from experts about how entrepreneurs grow their businesses.
- **Infographics** – Gain a snapshot view of growth concepts.
- **Success Stories** – Be inspired by stories from real-world entrepreneurs.
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- **Videos** – Grasp key concepts in just minutes.
- **Key Insights** – Understand key topics to support your business growth.
- **Self-Assessments** – Benchmark your current practices through self-focused inventories.

Being an entrepreneur can mean facing a mountain of challenges. Thanks to Ascent, you won't be climbing alone.



How to Help Other Small Businesses

“Buy local” campaigns typically encourage consumers to shop at small retail stores and dine at independent restaurants, and those messages are certainly important. However, don't forget how vital it is for businesses to purchase products and services locally and otherwise support the local community.

Here are a few ways you can help make a difference:

1. Buy from small businesses whenever possible.

Don't automatically assume a small business will be more expensive than a larger one. Although this is sometimes the case, partnering with a small business also has the potential to reduce your operational costs through added flexibility. In addition, by skipping the big-box stores and working with other local business owners, you'll make beneficial connections that may pay off in other ways down the road.

2. Refer customers to other small businesses.

Whenever a customer asks you for a product or service that your business doesn't provide, don't just suggest they “Google it.” That search will often lead to a mega-company to fill their need. Instead, recommend small businesses in the community that offer the product or service and will do a quality job. This small act goes a long way, since a referral can help that small business gain a sale (and a new customer). In addition, a referral makes your business look thoughtful and generous in the eyes of the customer.

3. Promote small businesses using social media.

This can be as simple as sharing the Facebook and Instagram posts of other local small businesses—especially new ones—to help them spread the word about their offerings or gain attendees for special events. They'll also appreciate it if you leave positive comments based on your experience working with that business.

SkyLine/SkyBest remains committed to supporting our local community and helping small businesses thrive. We do this by providing high-speed internet and other communications services as well as regularly choosing other local businesses to be our suppliers. To learn more, you can contact us at BusinessSolutions@skyline.org or 336-876-6175.



Have More Fun, Get More Done

Laughter can offer serious benefits to your workplace



In recent years, more and more companies have begun to recognize the need for a little levity around the office. So much so that many consultants now make a living offering advice on how to infuse humor and fun into the workplace. Why?

The answer is simple. Studies have demonstrated that laughter has positive effects on both our physical and mental health. In fact, laughing enhances the immune system, lowers blood pressure and even releases natural antidepressants and painkillers in the body. This boost to our systems can result in fewer missed days, less illness and reduced stress.

But those benefits are just the beginning. Creating an atmosphere that welcomes humor often leads to productivity-boosting effects. Laughter improves morale, cuts down on employee turnover, reduces conflict, strengthens teamwork, builds loyalty and fosters creativity.

What's more, laughing at work can help counteract the inevitable boredom that arises out of dull tasks and keeps people attentive during long meetings. Remember recess when you were a kid? Think of workplace humor as the adult equivalent of recess—a way to renew energy and focus. As comedian Milton Berle once said, "Laughter is an instant vacation."

Many employers now say that a good sense of humor is even a key factor when choosing new hires. This trait is seen as reflective of a person's flexibility at work and an ability to build good rapport with colleagues.

With just a little effort, you can make your workplace a little more fun for everyone. After all, Americans typically spend more waking hours at work than at home, so it's a good idea to find ways to enjoy it. And with all the benefits of laughter, you may be laughing your way to the bank.

Tips for Effectively Using Humor

While at work, you need to make sure your attempts at humor don't venture into offensive or disruptive territory. Keep these tips in mind:

- **Be self-deprecating.** We all appreciate people who can laugh at themselves from time to time. Don't take yourself too seriously!
- **Find humor in stressful situations.** By pointing out the funny side of a task or project your team is working on, your colleagues will easily relate—and no one will get their feelings hurt.
- **Add humor to the agenda.** Devote the first two or three minutes of each meeting to humor and lighten the conversation before getting down to business.
- **Avoid sarcasm.** Sarcasm may work with your closest friends but in a work environment, it can be misinterpreted as a put-down or a thinly veiled comment on someone's actual work habits or skills. Likewise, remarks and jokes related to race or gender are strictly off-limits.

Humor can play a valuable role at your business, as long as it's used appropriately.



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