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Fiber Takes Off

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Thanks to fiber, things are looking up for our service area.

SkyLine/SkyBest is committed to providing the communications services that communities must have in order to thrive. There's no better example of this than our fiber expansion projects, which now provide fiber internet access to nearly all of our customers.

Funding Helps Bring Fiber to More Rural Areas, as you'll learn on page 3. Federal and state grants have been instrumental in our ability to bring fiber to underserved markets.

Pages 4 and 5 feature a **Business Spotlight on Johnson County Airport**. When you work with planes, looking up is part of the job. But things are also looking up in terms of airport activity and population growth. Manager Dave Garris credits SkyLine/SkyBest fiber internet for helping to make the Mountain City, Tennessee area more attractive.

On page 6, we remind you why **Small Businesses Have Big Impact** on communities, from job creation to the support of local nonprofits. Then on page 7, we provide guidance to help you answer the often-asked internet question, **How Much Speed Do We Need?**

Sometimes the difference between things staying the same and things looking up is your attitude and persistence. Sometimes you need more advanced technology. For state-of-the-art technology solutions, contact SkyLine/SkyBest.

Sincerely,

Kim Shepherd

Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

ON THE COVER:
(L to R) Mike Taylor, Johnson County Mayor; Dustin Shearin, Purchasing Agent for Johnson County Government; Dave Garris, Johnson County Airport Manager; Zara Worley, SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive; Haleigh Hogg, SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive; Robin Miller, SkyLine/SkyBest Inside Sales Coordinator and Darren Main, SkyLine/SkyBest Field Services Technician

Funding Helps
Bring Fiber to More Rural Areas

Fiber optics is the "gold standard" for broadband service, and the cost of installing fiber optics is substantially higher than traditional DSL (digital line service) and cable.

One reason many rural areas lack fiber is that it's not financially viable for big internet service providers to expand into these communities. In urban communities, a mile-long cable might pass dozens, or even hundreds, of homes and businesses. Rural internet requires longer wires with fewer potential customers from whom to recoup the costs.

However, large amounts of federal and state government funding have made it possible for fiber expansion in rural areas to take place. Along with investing significant capital to deploy fiber infrastructure across the service area, SkyLine/SkyBest has applied for additional funding to help close the fiber gap for those in our service area who need it most. There's much more to the process than simply filling out an application and receiving the money. It's a large undertaking that involves many people and a great deal of time.

In 2010, SkyLine/SkyBest was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help accelerate the timeline of our planned Fiber-To-The-Premise build-out that began in 2004. What normally would have taken 20 years to complete, we achieved in 12. We also became one of the first rural telecom companies in the country designated as a Gig-capable broadband provider by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association.

Most recently, we expanded into Sutherland, a community in Johnson County, Tennessee. We received funding for this project in August 2020 through the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security) Act. A stipulation of this grant required that the project be completed by December of that same year. With help from Treeline Helicopters, we were able to deploy 2.5 miles of the project's 9.27 total fiber miles through the Cherokee National Forest in under four months, giving the Sutherland Community access to high speed internet.

Mike Taylor, Johnson County Mayer, said, "I am truly thankful for the longstanding partnership that exists between Johnson County and SkyBest. It's more like a family than a business deal. They know us and our needs and are always seeking opportunity to improve the lives of the folks living in this rural mountain community."

SkyLine/SkyBest will continue to pursue any available funding and be good stewards of every dollar.
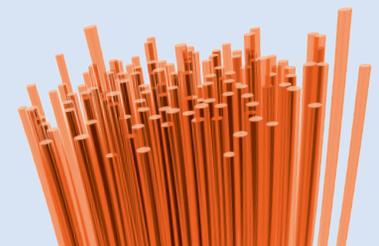
History of Our Fiber Expansion Projects

Having achieved FTTP (Fiber-to-the-Premise) deployment across the areas served by our co-op in 2016, SkyLine/SkyBest has been focused since then on extending much-needed fiber connectivity to new communities whose residents would benefit greatly from faster broadband speeds. The need has only been accentuated since the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the essential value of fiber internet to the forefront of national, state and local priorities.

This timeline shares the locations of these fiber projects in Tennesee along with the month and year of their completion.

- **April 2018** – Mountain City
- **December 2020** – Sutherland community (Funded by the Tennessee Emergency Broadband Fund)
- **August 2021** – McEwen community (South of TN 167 & Forge Creek Road)
- **September 2021** – Neva (TN 167)
- **November 2021** – Callalantee community (North of TN 167 & Forge Creek Rd)
- **January 2022** – Dry Hill (Neva extension down Watauga Lake)
- **April 2022** – The Harbour and William's Lane Additions (Surrounding communities of Watauga Lake)

Need ultra-fast fiber internet in your area? Visit https://fiber.skybest.com/ to submit your interest!

Manager Dave Garris stands proudly by the two-seater plane he built himself.

Johnson County Airport

Pilots and airport employees rely on the speed of our fiber internet

Johnson County is the place where the sun rises first over Tennessee, and to reach the scenic splendor of this area, pilots can fly into the Johnson County Airport. It's classified as a general aviation facility for public use and is located four miles south of Mountain City at 611 Airport Road.

The Johnson County Airport features a 4,498-foot by 75-foot paved runway, modern aircraft hangars and a fully furnished Fixed Base Operations office complete with rental and courtesy cars, fuel service and pilot supplies. The Dynon Avionics Service Center provides engine and airframe repair and inspections as well as airframe and power plant services. Camping sites are also available.

Manager Dave Garris is joined by a team of seven at the Johnson County Airport. Together they stay busy maintaining the facility and providing services.

Local Activity Taking Off

Garris said, "Last year's operational count from Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast numbers displayed approximately 3,200 aircraft operations. (A single takeoff is counted as one operation and landing is counted as another operation.) The different types of aircraft range from paragliders to 18-person jet charters."

Since the pandemic began, Garris has seen growth occur in the small community of Neva located in Johnson County between Mountain City and Watauga Lake.

"With more people working from home, I've witnessed the trend of populations moving toward more rural settings to enhance their quality of life. I mean, who wouldn't want to live amongst the trees and wildlife rather than asphalt and concrete? There were just a handful of aircraft utilizing the Johnson County Airport facility when I became manager in 2012. Now we're at capacity with a 33-aircraft waiting list for available space," he noted.

SkyLine/SkyBest Fiber Made the Difference

Fiber services from SkyLine/SkyBest, including internet speeds up to 1 Gig, help make it more attractive to live in Neva, Mountain City or other nearby communities. SkyLine/SkyBest services have also made a huge difference to the Johnson County Airport.

"With our previous communications provider, I struggled for years with attempts to send and receive the airport grant management documents of the federal and state agencies I'm required to work with on maintenance and improvement projects. I often ended up spending precious time traveling into town looking for a faster internet connection in order to send the large documents," said Garris.

He continued, "After SkyLine/SkyBest completed its fiber-optic network in Mountain City, I signed up to get fiber internet and phone services at the Johnson County Airport. We no longer have internet speed issues, and I'm able to operate the airport facility with more efficiency and less stress. The fiber internet also enables pilots to get real-time National Weather Service information through their aviation applications, which is vital in the flight planning process. We have a dedicated line to our Automated Weather Observing System that's utilized by inbound and outgoing aircraft with vital weather information."

How would Garris describe the customer service from SkyLine/SkyBest? He replied, "To date, there hasn't been a problem at the airport that required any response by customer service. I have, however, had SkyLine/SkyBest representatives stop by out of the blue to make sure that I'm happy and all the equipment is operating as advertised. That's impressive."

> *After SkyLine/SkyBest completed its fiber-optic network in Mountain City, I signed up to get fiber internet and phone services at the Johnson County Airport. We no longer have internet speed issues, and I'm able to operate the airport facility with more efficiency and less stress."*
>
> — DAVE GARRIS, MANAGER, JOHNSON COUNTY AIRPORT

(L to R) Brent Keith, SkyLine/SkyBest Strategic Sales Supervisor; Dave Garris, Airport Manager; and Mayor Mike Taylor discuss recent growth and future plans in Johnson County.

What's at Stake When Your Internet Goes Down?

If you temporarily lose your internet connection at home, it may only be a minor inconvenience. But if internet downtime occurs at your business, it can have a major impact on your bottom line.

While downtime scenarios will vary depending on the type of business and its IT systems, the damaging and costly effects can include the following:

- Lost sales revenue by being unable to process orders and credit card payments
- Reduced employee productivity
- Inability to access critical data and core systems
- Potential employee overtime costs to meet deadlines following a period of disruption
- IT recovery costs
- Cost of restoring IT systems
- Where applicable, compliance violations or materials lost
- Customer dissatisfaction

A number of different factors can cause internet outages. They range from accidentally cut lines in a cable or fiber network to natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes and tornadoes.

SkyLine/SkyBest has built redundancies into our network and has systems in place to maximize our internet reliability. To learn more, call 1-844-SKYBEST.

Small Businesses
Have Big Impact
Local economies and communities benefit greatly from this business sector

The Small Business Administration defines small businesses as those with fewer than 500 employees, and its 2021 statistics show there are 32.5 million small businesses in the U.S. Nearly half of this country's workforce is employed by small businesses.

By the Numbers

Here are some additional noteworthy statistics:

- Women made up 47.3 percent of workers and owned 43.1 percent of small businesses.
- Milennials and Gen Zers are 188 percent more likely to have the aim of creating a side business, compared to Baby Boomers.
- Small businesses create 1.5 million jobs annually and account for 64 percent of new jobs created in the U.S.
- 70 percent of small businesses are owned and operated by a single person.

Impact on Communities

The impact of small businesses cannot be overstated. They often sponsor youth sports teams, support area nonprofits and contribute to the growth and vitality of local economies. Small businesses also pay a share of taxes that would otherwise be shifted to homeowners. Many provide leadership in such areas as environmentalism and ethics. In addition, they offer a personal touch that is hard for larger companies to replicate.

Supporting Small Businesses

Sadly, within five years of starting, about 50 percent of small businesses fail. Reasons for this failure include lack of market need for the products or services, poor budgeting and reluctance to seek assistance when needed. Some business failures are outside the control of business owners, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although most of the responsibility for the success of a business is on the owner and employees, consumers can do a lot to support small businesses they believe in. American Express launched Small Business Saturday in 2010, which falls on the Saturday after Thanksgiving each year and encourages holiday shoppers to purchase from small and local businesses on this day. Participating in Small Business Saturday is one way to support small businesses; another is to support them throughout the year.

When you purchase products or services from small businesses, let others know when you're especially pleased with the experience. This is an easy way to help them attract new customers, and can be done through word of mouth or by posting positive reviews on social media. By doing so, you're helping local small businesses as well as your community thrive.

How Much 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 100 Mbps may work fine. Larger business with many devices and data-intensive applications may need a symmetrical 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.
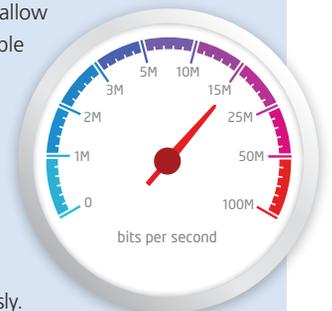
If you want to discuss an internet speed upgrade for your business, call 1-844-SKYBEST or contact BusinessSolutions@skyline.org. For answers to frequently asked questions about internet terms, visit www.skybest.com/speed.

Don't Forget About Upload Speeds

Download speeds often get the most attention when people talk about internet service. While important, they aren't the only metric to consider when determining which plan would be best for your business. Robust upload speeds are also required to support activities like these:

Collaboration Applications

When doing business in the cloud, the data you download and edit needs to be uploaded back to the cloud to be saved and accessed by others. That's why collaboration applications such as Google Drive and Google Docs, which allow multiple people to work on the same files, need an upload speed fast enough to update files nearly instantaneously.

Cloud Backup

Most backup solutions offer an off-site, cloud solution. The faster your upload speeds are, the faster your data can be backed up and stored safely and securely. This is particularly key during initial data retrieval processes which may entail uploading huge amounts of data.

VoIP Phone Calls and Video Conferencing

These services are two-way streets, meaning both download and upload speeds need to be fast. If your speeds are too low, your voice and/or video data could lag and cut out.

SkyLine/SkyBest offers symmetrical speeds up to 1 Gig, which means your upload speed will be as fast as your download speed.

SkyLine ⌣ SkyBest

Proudly Serving Your Community

#1 Fastest internet provider in NC according to Broadband Now.

Streamline your business with fast and reliable internet.

GIG!
Obtained Gigabit-capable status in 2015. 1 Gig is 1000 Mbps!

Friendly, local employees who live and work in your community!

Expanding fiber-optic internet into new and unserved areas monthly.

Call, visit us online or stop by and ask about our special offers.

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*Some restrictions may apply.