

BUSINESS

# connections



## Growing the Telework Economy

*Laura Paynter and Patrick Hollowell work from home on their farm in Allegheny County*



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# BUSINESS connections

**Working from home used to be something done by a small percentage of the workforce.** Then the pandemic hit, and employers and employees are realizing that telework is not only viable, it can be mutually beneficial.

Northwest NC is ahead of the curve when it comes to telework and is well positioned to become a telework hub, thanks in part to the fiber network investment by SkyLine/SkyBest. Our network is the reason your business can **Get Ready to Go Big and Go Gig** and boost productivity with much faster internet, as you'll learn on page 3.

We explore the telework topic in more detail in this issue's **Business Spotlight on the Telework Expansion Initiative** on pages 4 and 5. It takes a look at what's being done to expand telework in Alleghany, Ashe and Wilkes counties by leveraging the exceptional internet connectivity available in the area. You'll also hear from several people who have worked from home for years and want to spread the word about its work/life balance advantages.

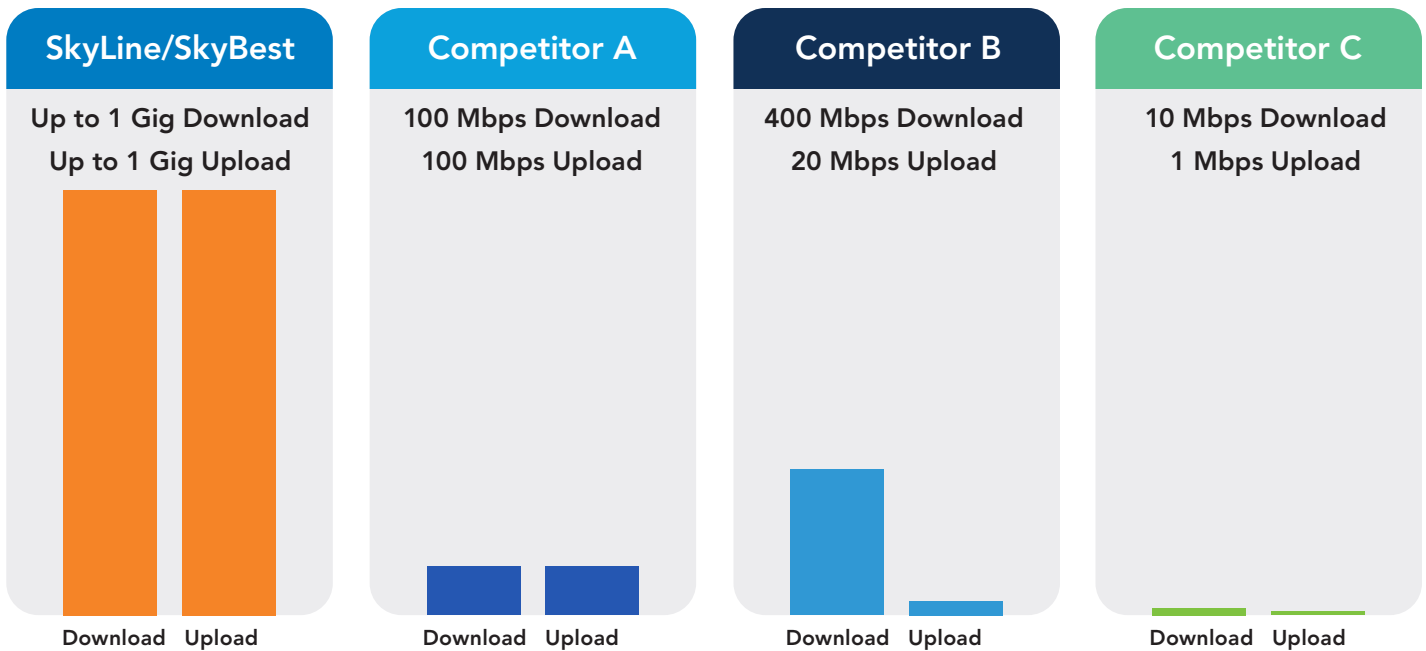
On page 6, we make the point that **Now More Than Ever, We Need Chambers of Commerce.** Our local chambers are busy keeping member businesses and visitors updated on community rules and resources related to COVID-19, along with their traditional networking and promotional roles. Then on page 7, you'll get **10 Tips for Better Video Conferences**—an activity you're probably doing more of these days.

SkyLine/SkyBest is proud to support the efforts to expand telework in northwest NC. Please let us know if you have questions about this initiative or want to adjust your communications services to accommodate telework.



Sincerely,

Kim Shepherd  
Chief Executive Officer



# Get Ready to **Go Big** and **Go Gig**

*SkyBest outperforms the competition with new symmetrical speeds up to 1 Gig*

**B**usinesses in the SkyBest service area now have access to some of the fastest internet in the nation, with symmetrical speeds (download and upload) up to 1 Gig. Just how fast is that? An internet speed of 1 Gig (or Gigabit per second) is equal to 1,000 Mbps (or Megabits per second).

To give you a frame of reference, let's say a small office currently has a 10 Mbps internet connection. A speed upgrade from 10 Mbps to 1 Gig would be the equivalent of going from driving a car at 1 mph to driving it at 100 mph—quite a difference!

Businesses of all sizes and types are expressing interest in Gig internet. Which may leave you wondering, "What can you do with a Gig?" The simple answer is this: You can do whatever your business is doing now but it will get done in seconds instead of minutes, or minutes instead of hours. SkyBest's symmetrical speeds up to 1 Gig are a huge timesaver and productivity booster. To start with, they enable you to download large files and videos much more quickly and connect more users with more devices.

**In addition, you'll have the upload speed to support applications including:**

- Hard drive backups
- In-house web hosting
- Cloud applications such as Google Docs, Dropbox and iCloud
- Voice over IP (VoIP) telephone service
- Video conferencing
- Medical billing

But it's not only about moving files faster. It's also about enhancing performance. SkyBest's symmetrical speeds up to 1 Gig will improve the quality of streaming video by virtually eliminating buffering and opening the door to the optimal use of real-time collaboration tools.

We've shared what businesses can do with Gig speeds. Now let's think about what communities can do. This level of internet speed helps attract new businesses to a community, enables existing businesses to grow and expands opportunities for telework. In addition, it can lay the groundwork for more telehealth services, online education and other online resources.

**SkyBest offers a range of internet speeds to meet your requirements today and tomorrow, including Gig speeds in our fiber-served areas.\* To learn more, call 1-844-SKYBEST or contact [BusinessSolutions@skyline.org](mailto:BusinessSolutions@skyline.org).**

\*Gig speeds available only in fiber-optic service areas.

# Collaborative Leadership

## Forges Telework Expansion Initiative

*SkyLine/SkyBest lays the foundation for growing the telework economy in northwest NC*



Due to our foresight to move deliberately and aggressively in a 12-year buildout of a Fiber-to-the-Premise (FTTP) network across the SkyLine/SkyBest service footprint that culminated in 2016, northwest NC is well positioned to attract teleworkers to our area for years to come. Fast and reliable internet service is essential to work from home, and that's what our company provides. In fact, SkyLine/SkyBest was among the nation's first rural telecom providers to offer Gig-capable internet.

While COVID-19 brought the topic of telework to the forefront, it's been on the minds of local education, business and community leaders for some time. On February 10, 2020, the ReCONNECT to Technological Opportunity Forum was presented by the Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI) at NC State University. Five community initiatives from throughout NC were highlighted, including an initiative led by Wilkes Community College (WCC) to expand the telework economy in Alleghany, Ashe and Wilkes counties. Telework is industry diverse, provides a tremendous economic opportunity for rural citizens of this area and offers benefits to both employers and employees.

### WCC Cohort Leads the Way

To guide the telework expansion initiative, WCC formed a cohort comprised of these leaders:

- **Dr. Jeff Cox**, WCC President
- **Zach Barricklow**, WCC Vice President for Strategy
- **Karen Powell**, SkyLine/SkyBest Public Relations Administrator
- **Greg Galifianakis**, Managing Partner of Gria Consulting
- **Ricky Brown**, Alleghany Chamber of Commerce President-Elect
- **Chris Robinson**, WCC Vice President for Workforce Development and Community Education and the Ashe Campus

The goals of this WCC cohort are to build awareness of telework, leverage the exceptional internet connectivity available in northwest NC and coordinate efforts with individuals and companies that recognize the untapped potential and appeal of the telework economy. Activities completed to date include creating a catalog

of current entrepreneurs and business professionals who are utilizing the internet infrastructure resources in this area to put telework into practice.

Moving forward, the cohort will continue to catalogue the telework stories shared by entrepreneurs, teleworkers and freelancers. It will also identify ways to complement the recent launch of Startup Northwest NC, an online platform for business startups that hosts resources, provides support and tells additional stories of entrepreneurship in the area.



*Pictured at the ReCONNECT to Technological Opportunity Forum at NC State University (left to right): WCC President Dr. Jeff Cox, WCC Vice President for Strategy Zach Barricklow, SkyLine PR Administrator Karen Powell, Mountain Biz Works Business Coach Gia Galifianakis and Gria Consulting Managing Partner Greg Galifianakis.*

## Northwest NC is Ideal for Telework

This area of the state brings a lot to the table to attract and support teleworkers, including:

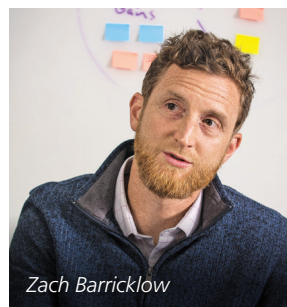
- High percentage of housing units with access to fiber and symmetrical Gig speeds
- Destination area featuring the natural beauty of rural mountains
- Low population density and low crime
- Growing cultural and consumer amenities
- Better quality of life with a slower pace, away from the rat race and long commutes
- Ability to work from home on weekends or telework here full time

Cohort member Zach Barricklow noted, “Northwest NC is telework ready. We have access to stronger residential internet connectivity here than our friends in Raleigh, Charlotte, Asheville, Wilmington and almost every rural community in between. Even the friends who have good internet in those places don’t have access to the open spaces—mountains, valleys, rivers, creeks, trails and the like—that we have in our backyard.”

## Telework Gets Rave Reviews

Barricklow is an example of how well telework can work. He and his siblings cofounded Versado Training to provide custom learning solutions for the life sciences industry. The company is based in Raleigh, but Barricklow worked remotely from his home in Alleghany County for the majority of his eight-year tenure as partner in the company. Now, as WCC Vice President for Strategy, Barricklow frequently works remotely in that role as well.

“Telework means having breakfast, lunch and dinner with my family. It means up to two hours a day saved in commute time. It means time to get outside for a run, mow the lawn or play catch with the kids in the evening instead of sitting in the car. Telework also allows me to focus. My role often requires focused time to develop reports and proposals. Though it seems counterintuitive, my home office often has less distractions and disruptions than my office on our main campus,” said Barricklow.



Zach Barricklow

Another telework success story is that of Laura Paynter and her partner Patrick Hollowell, who live on a 35-acre farm in Alleghany County. Paynter is a Senior Analytic Specialist for a financial services company and tracks the way commercial customers use the



(Top) Laura Paynter shows off her home office with farm ambiance.

(Bottom) Patrick Hollowell takes a work break with his four-legged office mates.

company’s website in order to optimize its applications. Hollowell is self-employed as an IT/Telecom consultant for large manufacturers, financial services companies and medical practices.

What do they like best about working from home? Paynter replied, “I like working in a more comfortable space that’s set up just for me, with all the things I need close by. There’s no commute, except for walking from our cabin to the barn, and I can be on a conference call while I’m weeding.”

Hollowell said, “Having no commute is worth a lot, since car time is time you never get back. Telework gives me schedule flexibility, and I get to enjoy my four-legged office mates—two dogs and a cat.”

Both Paynter and Hollowell are grateful for the 100/100 Mbps fiber internet service they get from SkyBest. He noted, “SkyBest brought fiber to our property six years ago at no cost to us. It’s been great to have such rock-solid fiber internet. Our service here is faster, cheaper and more reliable than the 30 Mbps DSL line in Charlotte. I bill by the hour, so service downtime would be lost revenue. Fortunately, we’ve never had an internet blip. Not one.”

Paynter added, “I have friends who live elsewhere and have internet problems on a regular basis. We’re so lucky to have SkyBest here. It enables us to easily work remotely.”



alleghanycountychamber.com



ashechamber.com



averycounty.com



bannerelk.org



beechmntnchamber.com



blowingrock.com



caldwellchambernc.com



boonechamber.com



johnsoncountytncchamber.org

# Now More Than Ever, We Need Chambers of Commerce

*They're helping us through the pandemic and beyond*

These days, our local Chambers of Commerce are busy keeping member businesses and visitors updated on community rules and resources related to COVID-19. These educational activities are on top of their traditional role of encouraging tourism, fostering business growth and serving as advocates.

As a member, you have access to business-building benefits including these:

- 1. Added credibility to your business** – You can increase positive perception among consumers and business owners when you're identified as a Chamber of Commerce member.
- 2. Increased visibility in the community** – New members are listed in chamber publications such as newsletters and featured in social media. Your local Chamber of Commerce may also promote your grand opening or ribbon-cutting ceremony and assist with public relations efforts.

- 3. Many networking opportunities** – Take part in events to connect with other local professionals and meet potential customers, vendors and colleagues.
- 4. A voice in government** – Chambers of Commerce take on the tough issues and speak up for the interests of local businesses when faced with new regulations, taxes, fees or assessments.
- 5. Local business updates** – Receive new member information, important local information about operating a business, articles about developments in the area and more.
- 6. Promotion and publicity** – With a chamber membership, you can reach potential customers through member-exclusive advertising and opportunities for business-to-business advertising and publicity.

**SkyLine/SkyBest is grateful for the incredible work done by the Chambers of Commerce shown on this page, and we encourage you to learn more about your local chamber and get involved in its activities.**

# 10 Tips for Better Video Conferences

*What you do before and during the meeting can make a big difference*



With more people working from home, video conferences have become the go-to technology for meetings. To avoid common pitfalls, follow these best practices:

1. **If you're in charge of a video conference, send out an agenda beforehand.** Without an agenda, you may waste time and accomplish little. That said, plan for a few minutes of informal conversation at the beginning to help with team building and morale.
2. **Establish a system for asking questions.** Do you want participants to raise their hands or use the chat feature to write out questions? Video conferences will go more smoothly if your business figures this out ahead of time.
3. **Proactively manage potential technical difficulties.** Arrive a few minutes early to a video conference call, especially if it's the first time you're using a particular application. You may need to install something or address a microphone or camera issue.
4. **Place your camera at eye level.** A camera that's too high or too low can be distracting, not to mention unflattering.
5. **Sit in a well-lit space.** Use natural light from windows and/or a lamp in front of you or slightly to the side. If your room is too dark, fellow meeting participants will feel like they're talking to someone in a dungeon.
6. **Mute your microphone whenever you're not speaking.** Background noises—like coughs, sneezes and pets—can be disruptive.
7. **Stay focused and pay attention.** Don't check emails or try to get other work done during a video conference. It's easy for other participants to tell if you aren't fully engaged in the meeting.
8. **Wait for an opportunity to talk.** During in-person meetings, you can pick up on visual cues to help find the right time to speak. Things are more challenging during video conferences. Wait for a few moments of silence before speaking up in case there's a sound delay.
9. **Prepare before you share.** If you need to share your screen, take a few seconds to prepare before you hit that share button. Clear your desktop of any extra tabs or programs you may have open and make sure any private or sensitive information is hidden.
10. **Don't pull a disappearing act.** You may need to occasionally step away from a video conference at home, perhaps to attend to a child or answer the door. When you do, notify the group by politely excusing yourself verbally or via the chat feature in the video conference application.

# Featuring: Working from Home



In today's world, more and more people are working from home. Calling features such as Conference Calling, Auto Attendant, CallTree and Remote Call Forwarding are all essential when you have employees teleworking.

Contact us today and find out which calling features would benefit your business.

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