

# BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

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## Teaming up for a successful Wide Area Network

*Brent Keith, Outside Sales Executive of SkyLine/SkyBest;  
Dr. Scarlet Davis, Assistant Superintendent of Watauga County Schools;  
and Dr. Marty Hemric, Superintendent of Watauga County Schools*



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SkyLine was established in 1951 and we'll be celebrating our anniversary throughout 2011. See page 7 for a brief look at our history.



# BUSINESS CONNECTIONS



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**Partnerships** are at the core of what we do at SkyLine/SkyBest. We continually strive to build successful partnerships with our customers and community by developing strong relationships, exploring opportunities for win-win situations, and joining forces to achieve common goals.

An integral component of these partnerships is the process of determining needs and forming solutions. The SkyLine/SkyBest team used this collaborative approach when we helped Watauga County Schools upgrade its Wide Area Network (WAN) for improved speed and reliability. You can read more about how technology enhances education on pages 4 and 5.

The coming year will be a special one for SkyLine/SkyBest, as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of SkyLine's founding in 1951. We owe our longevity, in large part, to the partnerships we've formed with our customers and communities, and we thank you for trusting us with your communications needs. We take a trip down memory lane to 1951 on page 7. Also in this issue, we recognize the value of outstanding customer service and remind you that a little humor can result in big rewards for your business.

How can SkyLine/SkyBest partner with you? Give us a call and we'll get to work.

Sincerely,

**Jimmy C. Blevins**  
Chief Executive Officer



# Create a Customer Service Culture

Start at the top and involve every single employee

A common characteristic of highly successful businesses is the ability to deliver excellent customer service, which builds lasting customer relationships and fosters word-of-mouth advertising. To create a stronger customer service culture at your company, keep these five fundamentals in mind:

## 1. Make It a Clear Priority

The focus on customer service should begin with upper management and spread throughout your company. Employees must understand that they work for the customer, no matter what their job title. Don't rely solely on your sales people or customer service representatives to keep your customers happy.

## 2. Train Your Entire Staff

All employees contribute in some way to customer service, so provide training for your entire staff. When customers have a problem, they don't want to be shuffled between employees that are not trained to assist them. Use role-playing to help your staff handle even difficult customer service challenges.

## 3. Recognize and Reward

Celebrate the times when employees go the extra mile for your customers. Acknowledge them at staff meetings. Put an article in the company newsletter. Give them extra time off, tickets to a special event, or a plaque at a recognition dinner.

## 4. Empower Employees

Discourage your customer service representatives from saying, "Those are the rules; there's nothing I can do about it." There is always a way to satisfy a disgruntled customer. To do so, however, employees must be given the latitude to take the necessary action to provide exceptional service.

## 5. Listen to Your Customers

Whether through in-person conversations or social media comments, make sure you pay attention to what your customers are saying about your service. Look for patterns in customer comments and use them to guide your future performance.

## Chamber Recognizes Great Customer Service

Five SkyLine/SkyBest representatives were among those recognized by the Ashe County Chamber of Commerce during its second annual Outstanding Customer Service Awards on October 6, 2010. The chamber developed the program to focus attention on excellent customer service and the successful attributes of small businesses in Ashe County.

We congratulate these members of the SkyLine/SkyBest team for their outstanding work on behalf of our customers:

**Craig Poe**, *Field Services Technician*

**Josh Lyalls**, *Field Services Technician*

**Brent Keith**, *Outside Sales Executive*

**Robin Miller**, *Inside Sales Coordinator*

**Graham Brown**, *Contract Sales Executive*

Poe and Lyalls were nominated by Christi Wagoner, a local CPA who recently changed office locations. Wagoner appreciated that these SkyLine/SkyBest technicians worked after hours to make sure her phone and Internet service were connected and fully operating for her first official day at the new address. Family Central, a provider of support and educational services, nominated Keith, Miller and Brown for their professionalism and patience during a particularly challenging WiFi installation.



Front row, left to right: Robin Miller (SkyLine); Tiffany Shatley (Sweet & Savory Bakery & Deli); Louella Baldwin (Lowes Foods); Kristen Pruitt (LifeStore); Carla Johnson (Sweet Aromas). Second row, left to right: Brent Keith, Graham Brown, Josh Lyalls and Craig Poe (SkyLine); Beth Miller (LifeStore); and Paula Williams (Sweet Aromas). Not pictured: Becky Absher (Becky & Company).

# Enhancing Education Through Technology

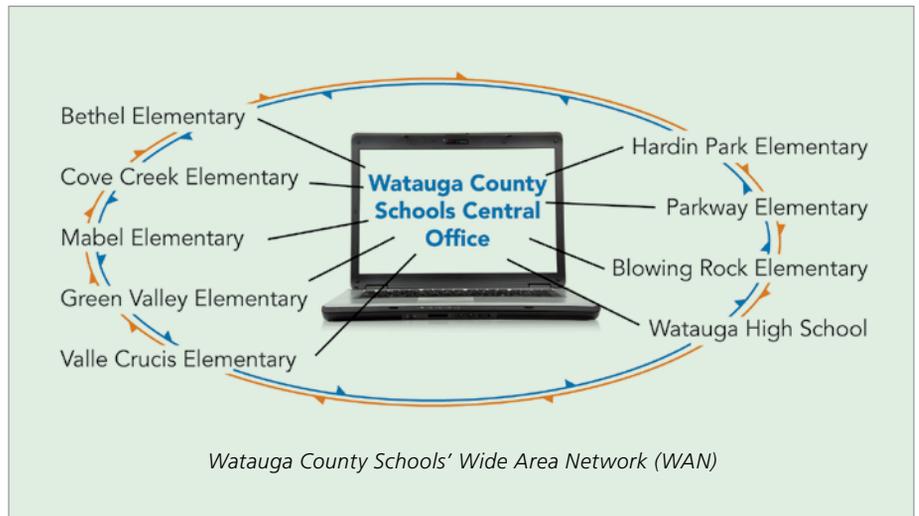
## Watauga County School System upgrades to a single-provider Wide Area Network

This past year, SkyLine/SkyBest was proud to work with Watauga County Schools to bring all nine of its schools and central office under one Wide Area Network (WAN). If you're not familiar with a WAN, it's a computer network that connects Local Area Networks (LANs) together, so that users and computers in one location can communicate with users and computers in other locations.

### Simplification and Speed

Prior to this WAN upgrade, Watauga County Schools had a fiber network but was working with two different vendors to keep everything connected. Brent Keith, Outside Sales Executive at SkyLine/SkyBest, notes, "Now the entire school system has one vendor to work with for WAN connectivity and this will simplify troubleshooting efforts if a service issue ever arises. The schools have gained the ability to get an immediate response and the personal attention of our top-level engineers and network staff. And with the cutover to the SkyBest Metro Ethernet Network, the school system upgraded its speed to full Gigabit connectivity for all nine schools."

Dr. Scarlet Davis, Assistant Superintendent of Watauga County Schools, appreciates the increased speed provided by SkyLine/SkyBest. Says Dr. Davis, "With the change in service, our school system has upgraded the symmetrical WAN speed to 1 Gbps—a generous gain from what we previously had. This allows our schools to take advantage of centralized resources, such as digital video and instructional Web-based tools as well as lesson plans and unique video libraries that reside at individual schools."



Watauga County High School.

In addition to this increased speed, the SkyLine/SkyBest WAN provides Watauga County Schools with a higher level of reliability as well as access to our other solutions such as SkyBest TV and telephone service. The improved WAN architecture also enables Watauga County Schools to provide broadband access through a single point of entry, allowing the school system to gauge bandwidth use and control content at all nine schools.

### Successful Collaboration

Says Keith, "When Watauga County Schools decided to work with SkyLine/SkyBest for all of its WAN Metro services, a change was needed to help the IT/Network staff be able to easily manage the vast amount of resources for which they are responsible. After collaborating on a solution to this challenge, we decided the best route would be to move the "hub" from its existing location at the Watauga

County Schools' Central Office to the New Watauga County High School, since that is where the majority of its network resources are needed and used."

"SkyLine/SkyBest continues to be a very integral partner in the enhancement of teaching and learning in the Watauga County Schools."

— DR. MARTY T. HEMRIC, SUPERINTENDENT,  
WATAUGA COUNTY SCHOOLS

Dr. Marty T. Hemric, Superintendent of Watauga County Schools, was delighted by the collaboration's results. He says,



Watauga County Schools' John Triplett and SkyLine's Kenny Church in the computer room at Watauga H.S.

"The time commitment and sincerity demonstrated by SkyLine/SkyBest employees represents their willingness to learn about the vision of our system. The

collaborative planning for our service upgrades with the Metro-E broadband design has aligned our data capacity with our vision, and improved infrastructure to support our efforts to provide a state-of-the-art, 21st century education for our youth. SkyLine/SkyBest continues to be a very integral partner in the enhancement of teaching and learning in the Watauga County Schools."

Adds Dr. Davis, "We are very excited about the recent expansion of our partnership with SkyLine/SkyBest, and we look forward to growing with them in the future."

## Safeguard Your Wireless Network

Take steps to protect your business from unauthorized Internet use

Wireless networks definitely add convenience to the workplace. Employees can work from anywhere and your visitors can get online as well. It's important, however, to pay attention to security. An unsecured wireless network allows people outside your building to "leech" off the services you've paid for and get free access to the Internet. These individuals could also use your connection for illegal activity such as identity theft.

To enhance the security of your wireless network, take these precautions:

### Change the Default Password

Routers typically come with a weak default password like the manufacturer's name. Change this password to a stronger one that combines both letters and numbers.

### Enable Security on Your Router

Instructions should be included with your router or you can usually find this information online.

### Place the Wireless Base Unit in the Center of Your Space

Doing so will spread your coverage evenly throughout your space while limiting the range of potential signal leakage outside your building.

### Disable SSID Broadcasting

Many times, wireless routers automatically broadcast your network's name or SSID (Service Set Identifier) to make it easier to locate the network. By disabling this feature, you'll make your network invisible to neighboring businesses and people driving by.



### Consider WEP Encryption as a Partial Solution

WEP (Wired Equivalency Privacy) offers a basic level of security with an encrypted key made of numbers and letters. In order to use your network, people will need to have access to that key. While WEP is better than nothing, be aware that it's still not entirely secure from hackers.

### Choose WPA Encryption for More Security

WPA (WiFi Protected Access) adds greater security because you assign a personal password that's harder for hackers to crack.

## In With the New, Out With the Old

### New 2010-11 Directories Coming in December

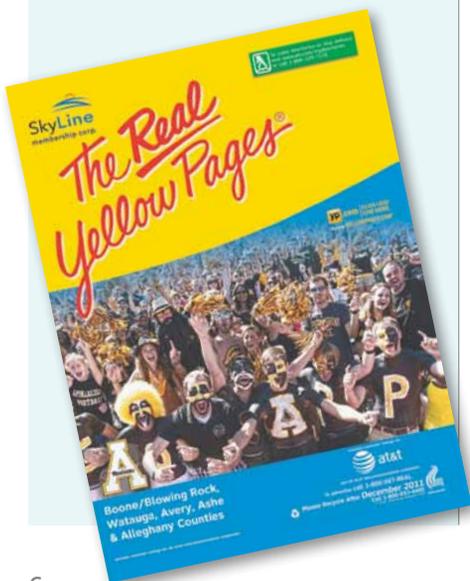
At the end of this month, you'll be receiving copies of the new 2010-11 SkyLine/SkyBest regional telephone directory. In addition to updated listings and community information, it contains "The Real Yellow Pages."

If you need additional directory copies, you can pick them up at any SkyLine/SkyBest Customer Service Center.

### Old Directories Can Be Recycled Through March 31

Please save your old SkyLine/SkyBest directories for the 19th Annual Directory Collection Drive sponsored by SkyLine. Nineteen area public schools are participating in this year's drive, and for each old directory collected, SkyLine will donate 25 cents to the participating schools. Since the program began in 1993, SkyLine has donated over \$87,000 to the schools for their recycling efforts.

Directories can be dropped off at any of the participating public schools in our five-county service area or at any SkyLine/SkyBest Customer Service Center. For more information, please contact your local SkyLine Customer Service Center at 118.



# Make Room for Humor at Work

## Laughter reduces stress and builds camaraderie

In recent years, more companies have come to appreciate the value of a little levity around the office. Not surprising, since laughter has positive effects on both our physical and mental health; it enhances the immune system, lowers blood pressure, and even releases natural antidepressants and painkillers in the body. For employers, this can result in less illness among employees, fewer missed workdays, and reduced stress — and that's no laughing matter.

In addition, many employers say that a good sense of humor is a key factor when choosing new hires. This trait is often reflective of a person's flexibility at work, an ability to build good rapport with colleagues, and greater levels of creativity.

To foster appropriate humor at your workplace, take a look at these tips:

### 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.

### Create a Humor Hangout

Whether it's a room filled with Dilbert cartoons or just a big box stuffed with



chattering teeth and other toys, your team should have access to things that will help break the ice, especially when deadlines are looming and stress is high.

### 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.

# What Happened in 1951?

Both SkyLine and “I Love Lucy” were launched

In 1951, SkyLine Membership Corporation was established as a local, member-owned cooperative to bring telephone service to rural residents of Alleghany, Ashe and Watauga counties. Also in 1951, the legendary comedy of “I Love Lucy” was first introduced to TV audiences. From phone lines to funny lines, 1951 was quite a year.

SkyLine will be celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2011, and it’s a great opportunity to look back at the many changes that have taken place since 1951. When SkyLine began, Harry S. Truman was President, a first-class stamp cost three cents, and color television was just being introduced in the U.S. It was a different world, and SkyLine was there with the telephone technology of the day to connect unserved, rural mountainous communities to the rest of the world.

In the ensuing years, SkyLine continued to grow, acquiring Central Telephone’s

Sparta facilities in 1958 and gaining territory in Avery and Johnson counties in 1961 after merging with Cherokee Telephone Membership Corporation. In 1987, the co-op began placing fiber optic cable into its network and by 1988, all SkyLine central offices had converted from electromechanical to digital technology. Internet services were introduced in 1995, and in 1998, SkyLine established SkyBest Communications, Inc., as a wholly-owned subsidiary to assume operations of the co-op’s deregulated services. New and expanded services have continued in recent years, including high-speed Internet and competitive local exchange service (CLEC). In late 2003, SkyLine announced plans to build a fully fiber-to-the-premise (FTTP) network, a long-term project which has allowed the company to offer digital television services. Last year, the company launched its latest service, SkyBest Security, for homes and businesses.



*Signing of the REA loan in 1951.*

Today, SkyLine/SkyBest is the second-largest of eight telephone cooperatives in North Carolina. We are proud to reach this 60-year milestone, and grateful to the customers and members that helped make it happen. What will the future bring? There will undoubtedly be new ways to keep you connected to the world, and we’ll be here to share the adventure with you.

Watch for details about a variety of upcoming SkyLine 60th anniversary activities. We look forward to having you join the celebration in the year ahead.



## SkyLine/SkyBest Spreads Holiday Cheer

All year, SkyLine/SkyBest actively supports worthy causes in all of the communities we serve. These efforts are especially meaningful now, as our employees help brighten the holiday season for those facing challenges. Some examples include:

### Ashe County Interagency Children’s Christmas Project

Organized by area churches, the Children’s Christmas Project provides holiday gifts to children through age 18. SkyLine/SkyBest employees choose from cards that detail the child’s age, sizes and wish list. They then purchase the gift items, and help wrap the packages at Family Central for distribution to area families. SkyLine employees in Avery, Watauga and Alleghany counties also give generously in their communities by providing Christmas for local families and individuals in need.

### Project Star

Project Star reaches out to senior citizens in Ashe County who are lonely and in need, and seeks to provide them with holiday gifts as well as personal contact. The project is coordinated through Appalachian Senior Programs and delivery is provided by several local agencies. SkyLine/SkyBest employees “adopt” individuals on the Project Star list and purchase practical holiday gifts for them.



**"Good communication is one main key in having a successful business, and SkyLine brings that to our company!" - Kathy Shore**



[www.skybest.com](http://www.skybest.com)

Zach Hartman & Kathy Shore, Owners

# Keeping You Connected

Kathy Shore Nursery recently purchased a Nortel phone system and 4.0 Mbps High-Speed Internet from SkyLine/SkyBest. With the new phone system and high-speed Internet, they are able to communicate faster and fax orders directly from their computer since their high-speed Internet is connected to their fax line. Owner Kathy Shore said, "Good communication is one main key in having a successful business, and SkyLine brings that to our company!"

If you have an interest in obtaining a quote for a key system, updating your current high-speed Internet connection or bundling your services, contact your local Inside Sales Coordinator.

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