

BUSINESS connections



Education and Collaboration at Lees-McRae College



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The best view comes after the hardest climb. Mountains are on my mind as I reflect on this issue, since it features Lees-McRae College whose motto is “In the Mountains, Of the Mountains, For the Mountains.”

You’ll find the **Business Spotlight on Lees-McRae College** on pages 4 and 5. Its programs to help students climb to higher levels of knowledge and skills are impressive, as is the college’s economic role in the Banner Elk town, county and region. SkyLine/SkyBest is honored to provide communications services to Lees-McRae as well as help support community programs including its Summer Theatre.

A Timeline of Workplace Evolution appears on page 3. It’s interesting to note how far we’ve come in recent decades thanks to the mountains of technology now available to enhance efficiency, productivity and flexibility.

Fiber is Fast Becoming an Asset for More SkyLine/SkyBest Communities, as you’ll discover on page 6. You could say we’ve “moved mountains” to build out fiber in our service area and give customers access to super-fast internet speeds. Our fiber network is the foundation for recognition from NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, and we’re **Celebrating Our SRC Showcase Award and Smart Rural Communities** on page 7.

While the climb toward goals can be long and challenging, the view at the top is often spectacular. Contact SkyLine/SkyBest for the communications tools to simplify the journey.



Sincerely,
Kim Shepherd

Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

Cover photo by Todd Bush, bushphoto.com

Front Row (left to right): SkyLine/SkyBest Strategic Sales Supervisor Brent Keith, SkyLine/SkyBest Chief Marketing & Sales Officer Edward Hinson, Lees-McRae President, Dr. Herbert Lee King, and Lees-McRae Vice President for Finance and Business Affairs Jon Kokos.

Back Row (left to right): SkyLine/SkyBest Inside Sales Representatives Robin Miller and Hollie Brown.

A Timeline of Workplace Evolution

Generally speaking, today's workplaces look much different than they did 30 or 40 years ago, due to both changes in technology and in the approach toward employee productivity. It's interesting to recall where we've been in recent decades and think about what workplaces will be like in the future.

1970s to 1990s

- Offices typically featured semi-enclosed cubicles for employees and private suites for executives. Employees were often encouraged to work independently.
- Work took place almost exclusively at the office building, and there was a "punch card mentality" which clearly delineated work time vs. personal time.
- During these decades, business communication went from taking place mostly over landlines or in-person meetings to an increasing reliance on computers and email.

2000 – Today

- Company culture becomes more social and collaborative, and group work spaces and multi-purpose areas start to replace separate cubicles and offices in an effort to increase conversation.
- There is an increased focus on comfort and ergonomics with furniture such as standing desks.
- New workplace tools and technology — such as tablets, high performance Wi-Fi, Internet Protocol (IP) business telephone systems, video communication software and social media platforms — are continually transforming work communication in terms of how we manage our office workloads.
- Work is increasingly agile, meaning it can be done virtually anywhere with a quality, high-speed internet connection. This leads to a rise in remote working, whether on a full-time or occasional basis.

Future Workplaces

- Significant changes in workplace location and design will continue as a reflection of technological innovation.
- Sensors may help to optimize how space is used, and robots could account for a growing proportion of the workforce.
- Virtual reality and hologram screens could facilitate communication between teams based in different locations.
- With the increase in remote working, fewer physical office buildings could be needed.

As technology for business communications evolves, SkyLine/SkyBest will continue to update our product and service offerings to meet your workplace needs today and tomorrow. To learn more, call 1-844-SKYBEST.

Symmetrical Networks Help Businesses Keep Traffic Moving

What's the difference between asymmetrical and symmetrical networks, and what benefits does each type offer to businesses? Here's a quick rundown:

Asymmetrical networks provide internet connections with different upload and download speeds. For example, it might be 100 Mbps down and 5 Mbps up. Asymmetrical networks have been predominant for years, with upload speeds being considerably lower than download speeds.

Symmetrical networks provide the same speed in both directions — upload and download. Continuing with the example above, a symmetrical network might offer 100 Mbps up and 100 Mbps down. A growing number of businesses are switching to symmetrical networks to meet increasing demands for higher upload speeds.

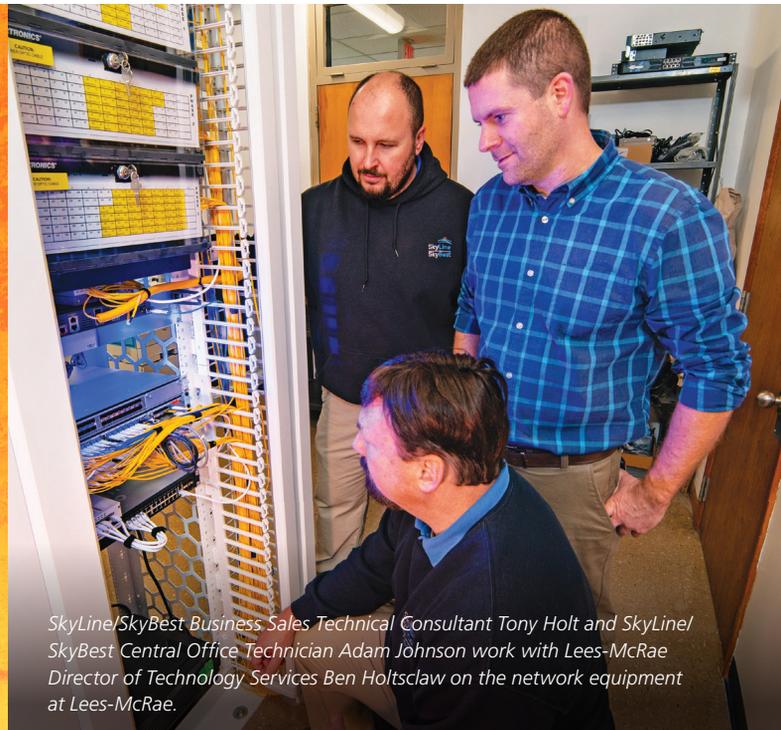
Brent Keith, SkyLine/SkyBest's Strategic Sales Supervisor, said, "As businesses started to move more services to the cloud and use hosted services, the need for upstream data became more important. Symmetrical networks are the best solution for businesses that need the connectivity to keep their internet-based services running smoothly."

We offer Business Class internet plans with symmetrical speeds up to 500 Mbps and download speeds up to 1 Gig. To learn more, call 1-844-SKYBEST to talk with a member of the SkyLine/SkyBest business team.



Lees-McRae College

A long partnership with SkyLine/SkyBest helps the college serve its students and community



SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Technical Consultant Tony Holt and SkyLine/SkyBest Central Office Technician Adam Johnson work with Lees-McRae Director of Technology Services Ben Holtsclaw on the network equipment at Lees-McRae.

Since 1900, Lees-McRae College has provided sound education through its motto, “In the Mountains, Of the Mountains, For the Mountains.” Its mission is to educate and inspire students to approach life and work from a creative, collaborative and critical perspective in preparation for diverse careers and environments.

Lees-McRae students can pursue their studies on the main campus in Banner Elk, North Carolina, or through several online programs. Nearly 1,000 students—from 34 states and 20 countries—are now part of the Lees-McRae family. The college offers 22 majors and 23 minors for baccalaureate degrees, as well as a Master of Arts in Teaching.

To keep its students, faculty and staff connected, Lees-McRae has relied on SkyLine/SkyBest communications services for decades. Today, these services include a 600 Mbps symmetrical Metro-E connection with broadband service, PRI circuits, and a Mitel IP-based PBX system.

A VoIP Solution for Efficiency and Functionality

This phone system, which is a VoIP solution, was installed at Lees-McRae in 2015 to replace outdated PBX equipment. Brent Keith, SkyLine/SkyBest’s Strategic Sales Supervisor, noted, “It was clear the college needed a solution that was not only suited to their needs for efficiency and functionality but could also provide the scalability a growing college demands. The Mitel

IP-based PBX system is ideal for customers like Lees-McRae by allowing seamless, scalable communications across their campus and making an already efficient organization even more so.”

Ben Holtsclaw, Director of Technology Services at Lees-McRae, said, “The VoIP solution installed by SkyLine/SkyBest has allowed the college to make use of its robust fiber IP network and improve campus-wide telecommunications. Prior to its installation, we had to rely on old and often faulty copper lines. Additionally, management of the Mitel IP-based PBX system is much simpler than that of our old PBX.”

Close Connections with SkyLine/SkyBest

Holtsclaw is also appreciative of the customer service and technical support provided by SkyLine/SkyBest. He said, “When working with SkyLine/SkyBest’s technical support team, I don’t feel like we’re identified by just a circuit number. Having someone local to call is invaluable when issues arise that affect our internet and voice communications.”

Jon Kokos, Vice President for Finance and Business Affairs, had this to say on the topic of service and support: “I appreciate that Brent Keith and Edward Hinson understand Lees-McRae College and what it means to Avery County and to the High Country. I see SkyLine/SkyBest as a partner that cares about our college and our community. It makes doing business with them more meaningful.”

Summer Theatre Sponsorship

In addition to being the communications provider for Lees-McRae, SkyLine/SkyBest partners with the college through long-time sponsorship of the Lees-McRae Summer Theatre. This annual giving has increased over the years and is currently at the Benefactor level.

Karen Powell, Public Relations Administrator at SkyLine/SkyBest, said, “We began a corporate sponsorship of the Lees-McRae Summer Theatre in 2009 after previously advertising in playbill programs. SkyLine/SkyBest is proud to support education and the arts, and Summer Theatre represents both by presenting outstanding productions using professional, student and community performers. We promote the Summer Theatre in our customer newsletters to increase awareness of this stellar theatre arts series, and we sometimes host our key accounts at the performances.”

“The VoIP solution installed by SkyLine/SkyBest has allowed the college to make use of its robust fiber IP network and improve campus-wide telecommunications.”

— BEN HOLTSCLAW, DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY SERVICES, LEES-MCRAE COLLEGE

Powell added, “Lees-McRae is the only four-year college within the SkyLine’s five-county cooperative footprint. The college is central to Banner Elk and plays a key economic role in the town, county and region. Our two organizations have a long history of serving this community and look forward to continuing this work in the years ahead.”

Celebrating 120 Years in 2020

Blaine J. Hansen, Vice President for Planning and External Relations at Lees-McRae, shared this about what’s ahead for the college: “In 2020, Lees-McRae will be adopting a new strategic plan and a new facilities master plan that embrace opportunity and our place in the mountains. The plans will help us strengthen our commitments to experiential learning in distinct academic offerings, such as wildlife rehabilitation, outdoor recreation management and our new graduate program in teaching. We will also be celebrating our 120th anniversary with special programming throughout the year!”

Clearly, Lees-McRae is poised to reach new heights “In the Mountains, Of the Mountains, For the Mountains” in 2020.

Lees-McRae Classroom Now Located at Beech Mountain Resort

What better place could there be to study for a degree in Outdoor Recreation Management than a ski resort?

Dr. Katie Wall is Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator of Outdoor Recreation Management at Lees-McRae College. She noticed that a large percentage of her students were working at area ski resorts, which led to the classroom collaboration between Lees-McRae and Beech Mountain Resort.

“We are always seeking ways that we can cultivate future leaders in the industry and more importantly in the High Country. This classroom will provide Outdoor Recreation Management students with experiential learning and hands-on experience in the industry. Because these students are on the resort’s property, they will be able to attend class in the morning and work in the afternoon,” said Dr. Wall.

This Lees-McRae classroom at Beech Mountain Resort will be used for these classes: *PSIA-AASI Ski-Snowboard Level 1 Instructor & Adaptive Level 1 and National Ski Patrol Outdoor Emergency Care Certifications*. The satellite classroom has been sponsored by the family of Dr. Thomas Brigham, the father of southern skiing who helped create Beech, Sugar, and Snowshoe ski mountains. Other classes for this program will still be held on campus.



Current Status of SkyLine/SkyBest's Fiber Expansion

Here's the latest on SkyLine/SkyBest's fiber expansion in the communities of Blowing Rock, Boone, Lenoir and Mountain City, TN:

Blowing Rock: We're currently constructing fiber to serve the downtown businesses of Blowing Rock and also plan to provide fiber connectivity to residents in the downtown area.

Boone: SkyBest constructed fiber for Boone's downtown business district several years ago. More recently, we've provided fiber connections to several multi-dwelling units (MDUs) for student housing near the Appalachian State University campus and to residents within our Boone fiber footprint. We also extended fiber connections from our cooperative boundary on Highway 105 into Boone and along the Highway 321 business corridor including the medical services district.

Lenoir and Mountain City, TN: SkyBest's fiber overbuild projects for the business communities in Lenoir and Mountain City, TN are complete. In Lenoir, we serve downtown area businesses as well as residents along the Highway 321/18 corridor. In Mountain City, we serve the downtown business district as well as businesses and residents along the South 421 business corridor.

SkyLine/SkyBest is proud to bring fiber to our business communities. If you have questions about fiber availability for your business, call 1-844-SKYBEST.



Fiber is Fast Becoming an Asset for More SkyLine/SkyBest Communities



SkyLine/SkyBest has the most advanced fiber network in the High Country, and we're excited to bring this same technology to more communities that need access to appreciably faster internet speeds. (Check out the sidebar for an update on our most recent fiber projects.)

By delivering that 'last mile' fiber connection—between the mainstream internet "backbone" and the customer's location—SkyLine/SkyBest provides access to the fastest internet speeds available in our service area. These symmetrical speeds include 45 Mbps/45 Mbps, 100 Mbps/100 Mbps and 500 Mbps/500 Mbps. Having your upload speed as fast as your download speed is especially beneficial if your business regularly uploads large data files to the cloud. We also offer download speeds up to one Gig, which is equivalent to an unbelievably fast 1,000 Mbps.

As a fiber provider, we're able to offer these internet speeds over much longer distances than traditional copper-based technologies like DSL and cable. In addition, your connection is not shared with other customers, resulting in maximum reliability and no peak-hour slowdowns.

Back in 2015, SkyLine/SkyBest became one of the first rural-based telecommunications providers in the nation to become Gig-Certified by NTCA—the Rural Broadband Association. Gigabit broadband is possible only via a fiber network and creates a next-generation broadband experience that has no rival.

What's more, you can count on excellent reliability with our fiber network due to its design. It features a core network offering five divergent paths to Tier 1 internet back-haul locations that ride on a fiber-optic ring that's intelligent, self-healing and fully monitored. This configuration delivers a service reliability of five 9s—that is, 99.999 percent uptime so your business can keep working efficiently and productively.

Brent Keith, Strategic Sales Supervisor, said, "Fiber gives us unlimited capacity and positions SkyLine/SkyBest to grow our network and be 'future ready' as the needs and demands of our customers increase."



Celebrating Our SRC Showcase Award and Smart Rural Communities

Years ago, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association started an initiative known as Smart Rural Community (SRC) to promote rural broadband networks and related applications. The nationwide program encourages rural areas to use broadband to foster economic development, commerce, education, healthcare, government services, public safety and security, and efficient energy use.

Rural broadband providers are taking the lead to bring high-speed internet to small-town America, and SkyLine is proud to be part of this program. SkyLine received the SRC Showcase Award, and more than 35 communities across SkyLine's service area can use the "Smart Rural Community" designation.

SRC Showcase Award to SkyLine

SkyLine was one of 12 companies to receive the SRC Showcase Award during the NTCA Fall Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana in 2016. This award is presented to NTCA members to recognize their extraordinary achievements in promoting rural broadband networks and applications in rural communities. Prior to earning the SRC Showcase Award, SkyLine spent more than a decade to bring last-mile fiber connections to members throughout the cooperative's five-county service area. This investment in fiber technology is an investment in the quality of life and economic health of our communities.

Smart Rural Communities in Our Service Area

The Town of Sparta and Alleghany County represent multiple municipalities and more than 35 communities across SkyLine's service area that have been given the "Smart Rural Community" designation by NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association. SkyLine's fiber network and the high-speed internet it provides has helped them implement vital healthcare, education and business expansion projects.

The local impact of this designation as a Smart Rural Community also gives greater leverage to these municipalities and communities to market their areas, with the goal of fostering entrepreneurship, job creation and job expansion opportunities.

To learn more about Smart Rural Communities and watch a short video about the program, visit www.ntca.org/member-services/smart-rural-communities.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Evan Owen

Business Sales Executive

Evan Owen attended North Carolina State University and Appalachian State University, where he majored in marketing and supply chain management. Prior to joining SkyLine/SkyBest, Evan completed an internship with Miller Insurance Agency.

As Business Sales Executive, Owen serves as the primary onsite interface for customers and handles outside sales and business solutions consultations.

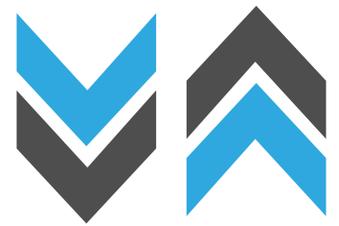
What's a typical work week like for him? Owen replied, "I'm constantly on the move between counties in the SkyLine/SkyBest service area. I visit many businesses to assess their telecommunications needs and develop customized solutions for them."

He added, "I thoroughly enjoy my job, since it allows me to connect with members of the community while providing them with top-of-the-line telecommunications services. The biggest draw for me is the networking involved with being a Business Sales Executive."

When not working, Owen loves all the leisure activities offered by his mountain area including fishing and hiking. He's also an avid sports fan with football being a personal favorite.



Enjoy the Benefits of *Symmetrical Internet*



SkyLine
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A symmetrical internet connection allows you to upload data to the internet while downloading large files, without the loss of bandwidth. Get more done with symmetrical internet speeds from SkyLine/SkyBest.

Contact us today and ask about our special offers.

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