

BUSINESS connections

The SkyLine Team Works Together for a Strong Future

Pictured L-R: Angie Miller, HR Manager; Brantley Davis, Plant Manager; Cindy Rothstein, Executive Director of Finance; Kim Shepherd, CEO; Eric Church, OSP Engineer; and Nancy Lewis, Accounting Specialist





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Business progress comes in many forms. From foundational technology to changes in leadership to expanded services, this issue of *Business Connections* highlights some of the ways progress occurs.

Technology Helps Small Businesses Grow Anywhere, and we're pleased to enable local companies to keep up with big city competitors. Turn to page 3 to learn more. There you'll also read about our construction progress as **SkyLine/SkyBest Expands Fiber to Jefferson Business District.**

On pages 4 and 5, read about my new leadership challenge in the article, **Kim Shepherd Takes Over as SkyLine CEO.** As an Ashe County native with 20 years' experience at SkyLine/SkyBest, I look forward to ensuring you continue to have the best possible customer experience.

Next, on page 6, learn how our services provide **More Speed, More Reliability, More Options.** Our internet services have always been top rate, and now we're offering even faster speeds.

Finally, on page 7, discover why you should **Be Vocal About Buying Local.** Take your commitment to supporting the local economy a step further by telling its benefits to others.

No matter what kind of progress your company wants to make, we'd like to help. Please contact us any time to tell us how.



Sincerely,

Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

Technology Helps Small Businesses Grow Anywhere

A big city isn't required to access big solutions

Just because a small business is located in a rural area, it doesn't mean it can't reach customers and resources from all over the world. Today's technology—from high-speed internet over fiber to cloud-based solutions—offers the opportunity for rural business owners to enjoy the best of both worlds. They can live and work in the small communities of their choice and still have access to the “big city” communications services required to work efficiently and remain competitive.

SCORE, a source of free and confidential small business advice for entrepreneurs and small businesses, suggests employing these strategies:

- **Use technology to connect with new markets, collaborators and customers.** Cloud-based communication tools such as VoIP, Hosted PBX, online portals and social networks help small businesses build stronger relationships and more satisfied customers. They also support the rise of the virtual workforce, allowing employees to work from home (or anywhere with an internet connection).
- **Capitalize on technology's scalability and flexibility.** A small business that experiences a surge of orders, for example, can use pay-as-you-go cloud services to quickly scale to handle the traffic and prevent the website from crashing. Cloud services can also be easily downscaled when IT requirements change. The use of on-premise software and hardware is becoming less popular due to the availability of cloud-based solutions such as Microsoft Office 365. These solutions offer greater scalability, security, efficiency and flexibility than their on-premise counterparts.
- **Store data in the cloud.** The cloud is a safer, more secure place to store business data than on-premise servers. It also keeps small business owners and their computer networks from getting bogged down with files.

The massive growth of mobile is another important technology factor for small businesses to consider. StatCounter reports mobile usage was 42 percent in June 2017, up from 31 percent in June 2016. By contrast, desktop usage fell from 61 percent to 48 percent during the same period.¹ With more people accessing the web via mobile devices, small businesses should have a mobile-friendly version of their website and explore the use of mobile apps and mobile payments.

SkyLine/SkyBest is well equipped to provide the broadband technology that small businesses in our rural service areas require. To discuss the specific needs of your small business, call us at 1-844-SKYBEST.

¹<http://gs.statcounter.com/platform-market-share/desktop-mobile-tablet/united-states-of-america>



SkyLine/SkyBest Expands Fiber to Jefferson Business District

In the near future, businesses in the Jefferson business district will gain access to fiber internet services. Advantages of this service include symmetrical (same upload and download) speeds and up to 1 Gig of bandwidth for a wide range of key business tasks. The new fiber-to-the-premise (FTTP) infrastructure enables SkyLine/SkyBest to introduce digital TV services in this area for the first time, and the highly stable and reliable technology ensures “future-proof” service.

Construction is currently underway to install the fiber lines along Main Street in Jefferson. We anticipate installations will begin in early 2019 for businesses seeking speeds of 100 Mbps or more. If you need higher speeds in the Jefferson area, please let us know by calling our Business Sales Group at 1-844-SKYBEST. We appreciate your patience between now and then.

Kim Shepherd Takes Over as SkyLine CEO

Customers and employees will benefit from her broad leadership experience



Ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new SkyLine/SkyBest customer center at 217 Wilson Drive in Boone.

Kim Shepherd has been named the new CEO of SkyLine following the June 30 retirement of CEO Jimmy Blevins. Shepherd previously served as Chief Management Officer (CMO) since November 2016 and has been with SkyLine for 20 years.

A Clear Vision

"I'm blessed, honored and excited all at the same time," remarks Shepherd. "I know there will be challenging times and difficult decisions that have to be made, but there will also be many rewards. The SkyLine staff and Board of Directors are top notch, and the opportunity to work with such fantastic people is thrilling to me."

In her role as CMO, Shepherd assumed the day-to-day management operations of the company and joined the CEO for monthly board meetings and regional and national industry meetings with the Board of Directors. In her 20 years with SkyLine, Shepherd has held various leadership positions, including Repair Services Supervisor, Customer Service Manager and Executive Director of Customer Operations.

During her career, Shepherd has provided leadership to some of the company's largest initiatives, beginning with managing the customer operations aspect of the Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) expansion into West Jefferson and Jefferson.

More recently, she led the establishment of call center operations and the launch of new customer service locations in Banner Elk, Boone and the Smart Home in West Jefferson.

Her leadership experience has given Shepherd a clear idea of what success looks like as she enters this new role. "Success, to me, means maintaining the core values that our company has been built on," she states. "Growth and expansion will help us thrive, but we can't let them cause us to lose sight of who we are. SkyLine is a local company that employs individuals who genuinely care about what they do. The customer service we've provided to our customers for the past 65 years has defined us. Success means maintaining it."

Shepherd is also clear about her vision for the company. "SkyLine's mission is to provide state-of-the-art communications and technology solutions enabled by a culture of excellence in customer service," she says, "My vision is for us to uphold that mission. We will have to stay ahead with technological advancements, and we have to continue to look at growth opportunities."

“The SkyLine staff and Board of Directors are top notch, and the opportunity to work with such fantastic people is thrilling to me.”

— KIM SHEPHERD, CEO, SKYLINE

Expertise and Knowledge

“We’re very pleased that Kim will lead SkyLine and its subsidiary operations into the next dynamic era of telecommunications,” says SkyLine President R.C. Mitchell. “She brings a broad level of expertise and knowledge, having led multiple areas of SkyLine’s operations that focus on connecting our customers to the latest technology and delivering a high level of customer service.”

As SkyLine CEO, Shepherd leads the executive management group, which consists of the leaders of Engineering Operations, Finance, Competitive Operations and Customer Operations. She also serves as President of SkyBest Communications, Inc. and CEO of Chesnee Communications and Loretto Telecom, both SkyBest Companies. Additionally, she will be a member of the following boards: Carolina West Wireless, Carolina-Virginias Telephone Membership Association, Tennessee Telecommunications Association and South Carolina Telecommunication & Broadband Association. She also serves on the Telecom Insurance Group Board as an NTCA appointed board member.

Ashe County Native

A native of Ashe County, Shepherd is a graduate of Northwest Ashe High School. She holds a bachelor’s degree in mathematics from Appalachian State University and a master’s degree in business administration (MBA) with a concentration in human resources from Gardner-Webb University.

Shepherd and her husband Derek reside in Warrensville with their two children. They stay busy with traveling to volleyball and basketball games with their daughter, and this year, they will travel to youth league football games to watch their son as he coaches for the first time. In addition, the family loves the outdoors, including camping, fishing and kayaking, and are active members of their church.



Outgoing CEO Jimmy Blevins Leaves a Lasting Legacy

After 32 years of service and 10 years as our CEO, Jimmy Blevins has retired. In June a special ceremony was held to name the Engineering Building as “The Jimmy C. Blevins Engineering & Technology Building.” At the ceremony SkyLine Board President R.C. Mitchell remarked, “While Jimmy has held several titles in his 32-plus years at SkyLine, his first career passion was engineering.” He added that part of SkyLine’s greatness resulted from Blevins’ efforts to keep the company at the forefront of technology.

Earlier this year, Blevins received the “Manager Life Achievement Award” from NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association for his leadership in establishing a company culture that is forward-looking and customer-centric. In his time as CEO, Blevins implemented several visionary initiatives and, under his leadership, SkyLine and SkyBest have introduced new and diversified service offerings.



Pictured L to R: The SkyLine/SkyBest 2017 Relay for Life Team of Karen Powell, Laura Calhoun, Kim Shepherd, Craig Poe, Robin Miller, Crystal Spencer and Sue Davis



More Speed, More Reliability, More Options

SkyLine/SkyBest is working to meet the changing needs of our customers

Think about how you used the internet five years ago and compare that to how you use it today. No doubt you use more devices, and it's likely your reliance on cloud services has increased. Those changes mean you probably need more bandwidth, and that's why SkyLine/SkyBest continues to expand our broadband offerings. We're excited to announce 100 Mbps and 500 Mbps symmetrical speeds are now available, in addition to our existing 5 Mbps, 45 Mbps and 1 Gig offerings.

Reliable, High Performance Wi-Fi

With greater bandwidth demand comes the need for high performance Wi-Fi services. SkyLine/SkyBest offers businesses carrier-grade, scalable Wi-Fi that can grow with you. It's designed to provide not only a wireless data network with good coverage, but a high performance connection speed using the latest 802.11 wireless local area network (WLAN) protocols.

We're committed to delivering reliable, proven solutions. We recognize that each company is unique, and we spend the time and resources to ensure your wireless network properly serves your needs, no matter the size or configuration of your business.

The Flexibility of Metro Ethernet

SkyLine/SkyBest's Metro-Ethernet (Metro-E) is a top-tier, point-to-point Ethernet service designed to keep up with the demands of even the largest multi-location organizations. With typical bandwidths ranging from 5 Mbps to 1 Gig, Metro-E can provide the robust, "always on" connections required by organizations that maintain multiple locations throughout the county, state or

region. All Metro-E services are covered by our industry-leading Service Level Agreement, which outlines performance standards for each component of this guaranteed service.

Like our Wi-Fi services, Metro-E can be customized. Metro-E can be designed to accommodate the level of transport of data as your business requires. The SkyLine/SkyBest team will design the appropriate Metro-E solution to deliver the bandwidth and speed you need.

Continuing Network Investments

The foundation of Metro-E and many of our other services is the SkyLine/SkyBest premium network. Strategic Sales Supervisor Brent Keith states, "We invest a significant amount of resources annually to enhance, upgrade and solidify our network, particularly the broadband portion. We also install and support top tier business communications solutions that allow our business customers to leverage our high performance network services."

Contact a Business Sales Representative at 1-844-SKYBEST to learn more about this and other business services. Visit www.skybest.com and follow on Facebook and Instagram to stay updated on developments with our communications services and network.



Be Vocal About Buying Local

*Speak up to support our
community's small businesses*



SkyLine/SkyBest is a big believer in small businesses. If we work together as community members, we can help small businesses succeed despite the increasing competition from national chains and online mega-retailers.

Given the prevailing emphasis on simply finding the cheapest price when making purchase decisions, it's important to remind our friends and neighbors of the substantial community benefits of buying local. They include:

Improving Our Local Economy – Each dollar we spend at small local businesses returns three times more money to our local economy than one spent at a chain and almost 50 times more than buying from an online mega-retailer.¹ Part of that money gets passed on in taxes that pay for municipal improvements like parks and roads.

Creating Local Jobs and Opportunities – Not only do small local businesses employ more people directly per dollar of revenue, they also employ an array of supporting services by buying local themselves. They hire local architects, contractors, accountants, insurance brokers, computer consultants and attorneys. They also tend to carry a higher percentage of locally produced goods than chains, meaning more jobs for local suppliers. In contrast, a chain store is typically a clone of other units, which eliminates the need for local planning and uses a minimum of local goods and services.

Keeping Our Community Unique – Small local businesses give a community its distinct character and personality. Conversely, a preponderance of chain restaurants and stores create communities that all start to look alike. By supporting the one-of-a-kind businesses in our community, we help maintain the uniqueness that makes living here enjoyable and attracts visitors.

Giving More Support to Local Causes – In general, small local businesses donate more per sales dollar to local nonprofits, events and sports teams compared to big businesses. Their owners and employees are also more likely to “do good” through volunteering at community events and serving on local advisory boards.

Whenever possible, SkyLine/SkyBest encourages you to buy local (and dine local, play local and give local) and spread this message to others. It's up to all of us to keep our community thriving. To see highlights of our company's community donations and volunteer activities, visit www.skybest.com/local .

¹<https://www.amiba.net/resources/localhero/>



We are proud to
support local sports.

SkyLine  **SkyBest**

Contact a SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Representative to find the best options for your business needs and build a customized solution that fits your budget.

1-844-SKYBEST BusinessSolutions@skyline.org