

BUSINESS connections



NC Rural Center Advocates for Broadband Solutions and More

Patrick Woodie, NC Rural Center President, and Kim Shepherd, SkyLine/SkyBest CEO



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Management
Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

Business Sales Department Contact Information
1-844-SKYBEST
businesssolutions@skyline.org

Robin Miller
Inside Sales Coordinator
Mtn City, TN; Ashe,
Alleghany & Avery Counties
robin.miller@skyline.org

Hollie Brown
Inside Sales Coordinator
Lenoir, NC & Watauga County
hollie.brown@skyline.org

Corporate Office
1200 NC Hwy 194 N,
West Jefferson, NC 28694.

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Postmaster Send Changes To
Kala Johnson
Marketing Specialist Supervisor
SkyLine/SkyBest
PO Box 759
West Jefferson, NC 28694



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Inspired by the quilt graphic in the NC Rural Center's logo, we've pieced together a variety of content for this issue. Quilts are not only a tradition rooted in North Carolina's rural communities, but also a reminder that big goals are achieved after many small steps.



The NC Rural Center is the subject of our Business Spotlight on pages 4 and 5, and you'll learn what this organization is doing to help the 80 rural counties in our state. SkyLine/SkyBest is honored to partner with the NC Rural Center, especially in our joint mission to expand rural broadband and increase economic development.

Also in this issue are educational articles about technology, marketing and human resources. On page 3, we explain the differences between **DSL vs. Cable vs. Fiber**. On page 6, you're encouraged to **Make the Most of the "About Us" Page**. And on page 7, there's a reminder that **Strong Teams Make Strong Businesses**.

It's amazing what hundreds of pieces of fabric can form or what a business can do when combining many resources together. Please let us know what communications challenges you're facing and SkyLine/SkyBest will sew up the solutions.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Shepherd".

Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

Cover photo by Todd Bush

DSL vs. Cable vs. Fiber

Here's why fiber provides the fastest and most reliable internet connection

Most internet connections come to the subscriber via some sort of cable. The prevalent options across the U.S. are landline telephone lines (DSL), cable TV lines (cable) and fiber-optic lines (fiber).

What exactly are the differences between these three types of internet connections? What impact do they have on speed, reliability and cost? Here's a quick overview based on content from BroadbandNow.com:

DSL Internet

DSL stands for Digital Subscriber Line, a family of technologies used to transmit digital data over copper phone lines. This type of internet service is provided by phone companies and is often bundled with landline phone service. About 90 percent of the nation has access to DSL coverage.

Download speeds are generally in the 5–35 Mbps range with upload speeds in the 1–10 Mbps range. Speeds will vary depending on the distance from the subscriber to the provider's local office. DSL has lower bandwidth and isn't as fast as cable or fiber internet.

Cable Internet

Cable internet is delivered via copper coaxial television cable by companies that also sell cable TV services. Like DSL, about 90 percent of the nation has access to cable coverage.

Download speeds average in the 10–500 Mbps range, with upload speeds in the 5–50 Mbps range. Bandwidth is generally shared with neighbors also connected to cable internet, so speeds for residential and business subscribers can drop by 20-40 percent during peak usage time in the evenings when people get home and turn on Netflix or other high-bandwidth applications.

Fiber Internet

Fiber is a relative newcomer to the internet market, with only about 25 percent coverage nationwide. This is due to the considerable expense of running fiber-optic lines all the way to customer addresses, referred to as Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) or Fiber-to-the-Premise (FTTP). SkyLine/SkyBest completed an ambitious FTTP overbuild of its cooperative service footprint with over 98 percent fiber availability in 2017. This initiative also garnered national recognitions for SkyLine/SkyBest as a Gig-capable and Smart Rural Community Award winner by NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association. Fiber is considered to be the gold standard for these reasons:

- **Greater Reliability** – Fiber is unaffected by electromagnetic interference like copper, making it much more resilient to outside factors including proximity to other infrastructure and weather.
- **Much Faster Speeds** – Fiber providers can offer speeds up to 1 Gig (1,000 Mbps) over much longer distances than traditional copper-based technologies like DSL and cable. These speeds can also be symmetrical, meaning the download and upload speeds are the same.
- **Future-Proof Technology** – Even if typical broadband speeds become 1,000 times faster in 20 years, a single existing fiber-optic connection can still support it.

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.

NC Rural Center

Helping the “middle of nowhere” become the center of the universe



(L to R) Patrick Woodie, NC Rural Center President; Edward Hinson, SkyLine/SkyBest Executive Director of Competitive Operations; and Brent Keith, SkyLine/SkyBest Strategic Sales Supervisor

The NC Rural Center opened its doors in 1987, with a mission to develop, promote and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life for rural North Carolinians. It serves the state’s 80 rural counties with a special focus on individuals with low-to-moderate incomes and communities with limited resources. Priorities include workforce development, infrastructure, rural health, manufacturing, Rural Day, faith community, small towns, disaster recovery, small business development, microenterprise lending, food and agriculture, and leadership development.

Partnering with SkyLine/SkyBest

Guided by this mission, the NC Rural Center developed a strong partnership with SkyLine/SkyBest. Patrick Woodie, President of the NC Rural Center, says, “The 80 counties in which we work encompass the entire North Carolina footprint of SkyLine/SkyBest. As a member-owned cooperative, SkyLine/SkyBest has a mission that’s very complementary to ours, to make life better for the people and communities they serve in northwest North Carolina.”

Woodie adds, “Rural broadband is one of the top advocacy priorities of the NC Rural Center. They provide the kind of broadband infrastructure in their service area that we’d like to see in all of rural North Carolina. SkyLine/SkyBest deserves

credit for being aggressive and making the long-term investments needed to deliver such a robust network. As a native of northwest NC, a customer of SkyLine/SkyBest and a former Alleghany County Commissioner, I understand better than most how deep their commitment is to their service area. High Country towns are in a better development position because of rural broadband from SkyLine/SkyBest.”

Across the state, the NC Rural Center is advocating for affordable, accessible and sustainable broadband solutions for rural counties. “We tend to avoid the one-size-fits-all response to broadband expansion, knowing that every community is different and a successful solution in one place cannot always be replicated in another,” he notes.

Highlights of 2018

The NC Rural Center wrapped up its ambitious Rural Road Trip in 2018, after visiting all 80 of the state's rural counties and speaking with more than 1,600 rural community leaders. One of the top priority issues cited by folks on the ground was the need for broadband access, affordability and adoption.

Woodies says, "Rural broadband expansion continues to drive our policy agenda and our work across the state. Without broadband, rural communities are at a disadvantage in education, health care and economic development."

In 2018, the state of North Carolina launched the GREAT program (Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology). The NC Rural Center has been advocating for this broadband infrastructure funding model since the launch of its Rural Counts policy agenda in 2016 and applauds the state's leadership in passing funding for the GREAT program.

Another highlight of the past year was the continued expansion of the NC Rural Center's leadership development programs, which work with rural leaders to help them get the training, resources and support they need. "Our flagship leadership development program, the Rural Economic Development Institute (REDI), helps rural leaders examine their community and region through a comprehensive, community economic development lens, by developing the tools and skills needed to create a collective vision and build the capacity to implement that vision. To date, REDI has trained nearly 1,200 rural leaders throughout the state," Woodie notes.

Plans for the Year Ahead

Four key areas of the NC Rural Center's work in 2019 will be:

- **Rural Advocacy** – The next Rural Day event will be held on March 26. This annual gathering of rural advocates from across the state helps people learn about the critical issues facing rural communities and hear directly from our state's elected leaders about their vision for rural North Carolina.
- **Leadership** – The NC Rural Center will work to enhance its flagship leadership development program (REDI) and better deploy its regional leadership training (Homegrown Leaders).
- **Thread Capital** – Its new Resilient Recovery Loan is designed to meet the extended challenges faced during a business's recovery from a natural disaster, including mitigating for future disasters, repairing physical damage and recouping significant economic losses.
- **Faith In Rural Communities** – This program will continue to work with rural churches, often one of the most trusted anchor institutions in their communities, to be better prepared and equipped to address the pressing economic issues facing their local communities.

Visit ncruralcenter.org for additional information.



Thread Capital Weaves Business Dreams Together

The NC Rural Center started Thread Capital in 2018 to better serve North Carolina's small business owners. Analysis of small business lending data showed a lack of available funding for entrepreneurs to start businesses and for established owners to grow. This was due to the decline in small business lending following the Great Recession and the continued closing of brick-and-mortar bank branches in rural communities. The NC Rural Center decided it must build the partnerships and products to support an equitable system of entrepreneurship in the state.

As a subsidiary of the NC Rural Center, Thread Capital offers small business loans from \$500 to \$50,000—the range identified as the biggest gap in the current lending marketplace and where small business owners have the most difficulty finding affordable options. Thread Capital also has access to loans up to \$5 million through a network of statewide lending partners.

Less than six months after its official launch, Thread Capital acted quickly in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence to provide services to support small business owners as they recover and rebuild. As of December 21, 2018, Thread Capital's Rapid Recovery Loan program has made 66 loans totaling more than \$2 million.

In addition to funding, Thread Capital also offers coaching and connections to help make small business dreams come true. To learn more, visit threadcap.org.

Make the Most of the “About Us” Page



It's prime real estate on your website and a valuable tool in building customer relationships

The “About Us” page is one of the most visited pages on a company's website. It's easy to understand why. After visitors see your home page, their first question is often, “Who are you, anyway?” That's when they look for the “About Us” page.

Despite this, web marketing experts have found that many companies neglect the “About Us” page. This can be the result of putting too much effort on a website's design at the expense of its content. It's best to get input for the “About Us” page from as many people in your company as possible. Then find a person in the company who can put the information in a concise form.

The Basics

The “About Us” page needs to at least answer the customer's question, “Who are you?” To do so, your “About Us” page should contain:

- Contact information. (This may be repeated on the “Contact Us” page if you have one.)
- A listing of products and/or services.
- Information about what types of customers you serve.
- How long you have been in business.

Ideally, the page should go beyond these basics to cover content such as the following:

Tell Your History

Tell your company's history in an interesting way. You want to consider items like the inspiration for your company, its accomplishments and how you plan to grow it. Putting this information into a story is more likely to be of interest to a visitor than a dry list.

Provide Testimonials

Don't be afraid to tell your own success stories. Better yet, use testimonials from customers, which carry more weight than what you say about yourself. Link to favorable reviews and other positive media coverage of your company. If your company issues press releases, link to them too.

Get Personal

Personal information about your employees may also be appropriate, but should be linked in some way to your business. For example, the fact that your company's CEO once rode a motorcycle across the country would be relevant for a company that sells cars or motorcycles, but less so for one that provides financial services.

Get Philosophical

Incorporate some of your mission statement or business philosophy into the page. You don't need to reproduce the statement as is. Instead, adapt it so that it speaks directly to what you can do for the customer.

Get Social

Invite visitors to link to your social media pages from your “About Us” page. A potential customer will be reminded of your presence every time you post an update. Make sure you have an employee who can cultivate the relationships that are created via social media.

Check out the SkyLine/SkyBest menu of “About Us” pages on our home page at skybest.com. We also encourage you to visit the NC Rural Center's “About Us” pages beginning at ncruralcenter.org/about-us for an excellent example of this type of content.

Strong Teams Make Strong Businesses

Five tips for building a high-performance team



(L to R) Brett Yates, Business Sales Executive; Charity Shatley, Business Sales Executive; Brent Keith, Strategic Sales Supervisor; Robin Miller, Inside Sales Coordinator; Graham Brown, Business Sales Executive; and Hollie Brown, Inside Sales Coordinator

Successful businesses recognize the importance of strong teamwork. When members of various departments work together cohesively to achieve common goals, both the company and its staff members thrive. You can look forward to benefits including improved morale, an enhanced sense of shared purpose and greater accountability.

The hard part, of course, is building that team mentality. Techniques for teambuilding have included everything from completing obstacle courses together to paintball competitions. Yet there remains some debate over whether these tactics translate into positive teamwork back at the office. So what really works? Here are five keys to building a better team:

1. Define the team. You may have several internal teams, each made up of representatives from different departments. Or if your business is relatively small, your entire group may be working together on a special project. Either way, do your best to ensure that each team can provide a well-rounded viewpoint of the challenge at hand.

2. Set clear goals. It's important to make sure each team member understands why the group was formed and what the expectations are for the group as a whole. Be sure to encourage collaboration, while giving ownership of specific tasks to individuals based on skill and interest. A collective vision that gives team members an opportunity to make a real difference in the workplace—from improved processes to expanding product and service lines—will help them stay motivated. Plus, it helps them know when they've succeeded.

3. Build trust. When team members can trust each other and their managers, they are better able to commit to meaningful change and support colleagues in their efforts. Great teams allow each member to voice their opinions and ideas without fear of retribution.

4. Model the behavior you seek. Everything starts at the top. When leaders act professionally and with positive work habits, it's easier for staff to follow suit. It's critical that senior managers demonstrate qualities of good teamwork, including:

- Helping others when they need support to complete a task
- Listening to input without judgment or criticism
- Commitment to meeting challenges and finding effective solutions

5. Reward great teamwork. Bonuses, gifts and public acknowledgement should be given as much for positive teamwork as for individual performance. Showing appreciation encourages continued team efforts and makes employees feel valued.

By creating a work environment with a positive team approach, you'll have happier employees—and very likely, a healthier bottom line.

Business Class Internet



Contact a SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Representative to find the best internet speed to fit your needs. Choose from speeds up to 1 Gig!*

1-844-SKYBEST **BusinessSolutions@skyline.org**

*Some restrictions may apply. Higher internet speeds available in fiber-served areas.