

## High-speed Internet enhances chances for jobs, life quality in rural America

Deploying fiber optic cable is high priority for West Texas Rural Telephone Cooperative, its WT Services subsidiary, and rural communications providers across the country.

High speed internet service via fiber optic cable can improve quality of life and promote economic development and associated employment opportunities in rural communities.

Companies considering rural locations look for assets like fiber technology. A recent magazine article explores the good things that can happen in rural locales when they find it.

Rachel Brown writes in Rural Telecom magazine that fiber optic technology has brought life changing opportunity to two counties in rural Kentucky served by Peoples Rural Telephone Cooperative of McKee, Kentucky.

Brown reports that during the past two years 350 people in PRTC's service area have landed jobs as customer service rep-



resentatives for major companies, most being paid above minimum wage, starting at about \$10 an hour. Their employment has come thanks to fiber technology, and has had a \$12 million economic impact going back into the community and uplifting the local economy of these two counties.

Huge demand for customer service agents in the U.S. means an opportunity has opened for hundreds of teleworkers in impoverished areas of rural Kentucky. The trend has profound potential for rural America--if it is served by fiber technology.

Teleworks USA placed customer service hubs in Owsley and Pike County that are a source of work for local residents largely

due to PRTC having a robust broadband system available to home and office. Work has opened up for retirees, former coal miners, the elderly and the young--even people who haven't held a job before.

A plus is that workers primarily are dealing with inbound service calls, taking reservations, and offering technical support, not pressuring people with telemarketing. Many simple customer service issues are resolved with emails or web chats.

Karen Beamon, senior director of talent acquisition for Sutherland Global Services, told Brown in her magazine article that "solid internet connections are key for telework to be successful."

That's just the capability that WTRT and WTS are working diligently toward putting in place throughout the local service area.

Brown reports rural residents may actually have a leg up on getting hired (See **RURAL JOBS**, Page 2)



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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Deploying fiber optic cable is high priority for rural communications providers across the country.

- High speed internet service via fiber optic cable can improve quality of life and promote economic development and associated employment.

- Companies considering rural locations look for assets like fiber technology.

- Huge demand for customer service agents is opportunity for rural workers.



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for the call center industry.

Betty Hays, operations manager for Teleworks USA notes that rural Americans represent a highly-motivated work force that is not afraid of hard work.

"Rural people have a higher level of technological sophistication than is generally realized--they're tech savvy. They have commitment to the job, good productivity, ability to multitask, and are willing to work longer shifts. It's common knowledge in the business world that rural Americans have an outstanding work ethic," Adam Prager, president of consulting firm Prager Co. told Brown.

Prager says when companies consider moving into a rural area, assets like fiber and high speed internet are vital, and outweigh the location of rural communities in considerations.

"Telecommunication shouldn't be an afterthought. It should be there at the outset, and telecom companies should demonstrate that they can meet a company's needs," said Prager.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows jobs for customer service agents in the U.S. are growing at a rate of 10 percent a year, faster than the national average for other jobs.

The growth is due at least in part to rising wages in India and other offshore countries that have long harbored call centers, reversing trends and now making it price competitive to hire Americans.

Non-profits, community organizations and municipalities have even taken to spearheading efforts

to bring telework jobs to rural areas in the U.S.

According to Dunn and Bradstreet, revenues for the U.S. call industry are now at \$21 billion.

Another favorable factor for rural residents in areas served with fiber is that call centers are shifting away from offices to work-at-home, and hours

are flexible. The fact that call center work can be done at home also saves rural residents the cost of commuting to jobs in town, and an outlay on clothing for office environs.

Brown reports if work happens at home in rural America, the worker retention rate remains high.

## FCC proposing new rules to block avalanche of 2.4 billion robocalls

The FCC is proposing new rules to block or at least reduce an avalanche of unwanted robocalls that has now snowballed to 2.4 billion of these calls being made monthly nationwide. These calls are springing up on land lines and cell phones alike and seem to circumvent "Do Not Call" designations put in place by frustrated phone customers.

The dangers of robocalls include instances of scams such as one being attempted locally where callers already having some personal information about a targeted consumer or business trick them into saying "yes" to a seemingly harmless question. The question may be as seemingly innocent as "Can you hear me all right," or "Is this (your name). Con art-

ists use such questions to obtain false authorization to amass charges to their victims.

Another involves a scam where victims receive calls purported to be from the IRS.

Claims are made that the victim owes "back taxes." Threatened with arrest or deportation, victims are harassed into paying money they do not owe--to the tune of \$54 million nationally in the past year.

The FCC is considering rules that would give telephone companies the authority to block spoofed robocalls--where callers fake their Caller ID information to hide their identity when a subscriber requests that calls originating from a number be blocked.

Proposed rules would allow providers to block spoofed robocalls when the spoofed Caller ID information cannot possibly be valid, including numbers that have not been assigned to anyone.

These latest steps by the FCC mark continued efforts by industry, regulatory and consumer groups to end robocall practices annoying millions of Americans who are the recipients of the pesky robocalls.

**SAY NO**



**TO  
ROBO-CALLS!**