



Does trading locally really matter? For service, commitment it does!

By Lori Vergin

Does Local Matter?

Technology plays an increasingly significant role in the lives of Americans, especially those in rural areas like West Texas. Whether using it for communication, information, education, commerce, telemedicine, or entertainment – we rely on technology daily.

Technology enables us to reside in the area we call home while enjoying a quality of life that is enhanced by connectivity to business opportunity, educational resources, advanced medical care, and global access. At West Texas Rural Telephone and WT Services, we take our responsibility for your connectivity very seriously. WTRT is a cooperative, born from the needs of area residents. Local folks came together to make sure telecommunications services were available in areas where big companies didn't see enough business to invest or care. And, WT Services came about when folks in Hereford, Bovina and Friona found them-

selves underserved from their distant, corporate provider.

We call West Texas home, because we **ARE** West Texas. What difference does that make? It makes a huge difference in the level of service our customers receive, our commitment to the region and the economic impact of every dollar spent purchasing our products and services. Our company headquarters is based here, creating jobs and contributing to the local tax base. Our employees live here, their salaries are spent in the local economy. Their families support local communities, school districts, and businesses. And, so do WTRT and WT Services. From donations, sponsorships, scholarships, volunteer support to business technology consulting, distance learning and more – you can see our presence and commitment to the region indelibly marked upon it.

We've spent millions of dollars investing in our network to ensure that our

customers receive services that rival or exceed those available in urban areas, to ensure there is no "digital disadvantage" to those who choose to call our region home. You may know us best for Internet, TV and Phone service. But, we do much more than that. Our network powers economic development and serves as the connective force for school districts, telemedicine and cellular service. We understand the wants and needs of West Texas, because we call it home too.

We know you have choices when it comes to technology providers. Huge, conglomerate companies make a splash with tempting special deals, confusing advertising details and short-term bottom dollar rates. And, we understand it can be tempting to jump on their offers. But, we encourage you to look closely when the grass appears greener. It may just be because there is an overabundance of

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Rural connectivity taken very seriously as technology assumes increasingly significant role.
- Quality of life enhanced by connectivity to business opportunity, educational resources, advanced medical care and global access.
- Because this is our home we have a huge commitment to the region and contribute to the local tax base.
- Employees and their families support local communities, school districts and businesses.
- We understand the wants and needs of West Texas because we live here.



Amy Linzey touts WTS/WTRT in TTA interview

Texas Telephone Association Today newsletter featured WTRT and WT Services CEO and General Manager Amy Linzey recently. Here is that article:

With an eye on the future, West Texas Rural Telephone Cooperative has been rapidly deploying fiber networks to serve a diverse customer base in the Texas Panhandle.

WTRT – currently serves a vast 2,300-square-mile area spanning Deaf Smith, Parmer, and portions of Oldham, Castro and Bailey counties.

“We have less than

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manure applied to fertilize that grass. Those huge, conglomerate companies take your local dollars and send them off to their home offices in Dallas or Arkansas. There’s no question that your hard-earned dollars are best spent with the local company that provides world-class technology **AND** is committed to actively contributing to the quality of life in the region for the long term. **Local IS important.**

one person per square mile,” said Amy Linzey, chief executive officer of West Texas Rural Telephone Cooperative.

WTRT, with about 55 employees, provides high-speed Internet, TV, broadband, and voice communications services to consumers and business customers including state, federal and local government agencies, school districts, dairies, feedlots, meat packing plants, international corporate customers and large industrial users. WTRT’s subsidiary, WT Services, provides voice communications, broadband internet, two-way radio services, computer services and security services.

“We are a growing, thriving, evolving and energetic company,” Linzey said.

When Linzey assumed the helm of WTRT in 2012, the cooperative was facing financial and technological challenges as well as changes within the industry.

Under her watch, the cooperative has seen change and growth with widespread upgrades to the network – including voice, video and high-speed broadband – to

serve the growing demands of consumers and businesses.

“One really obvious thing to me was I had to upgrade nearly every piece of network,” Linzey said.

Since 2012, WTRT has invested some \$16 million in deploying fiber and technology upgrades. WTRT has installed more than 315 miles – or 1.6 million feet – of fiber throughout the cooperative service area. When the fiber project is completed, WTRT will have installed nearly 1,000 miles of fiber.

WTRT has a long history of providing a lifeline to rural consumers through voice communications services. WTRT was formed in 1950 after large commercial telephone companies declined to offer service to the area because of the massive capital investment required to serve such sparsely populated rural communities as well as farms and ranches.

WTRT traces its roots to the passage of the Rural Telephone Act in 1949 that provided low-interest loans from the Rural Electrification Administration (now the Rural Utilities Service under the U.S.

Department of Agriculture). Just as REA illuminated and powered rural America, low-interest loans led to growth for rural telecommunications with telephone service to improve the quality of life of rural Texans.

Each year, WTRT and WT Services award about \$10,000 in scholarships to local high school students as well as cash and in-kind charitable donations to local communities.

As WTRT deploys new networks and technologies, Linzey continues to listen closely to the demands of consumer and business customers.

“We’ve come a long way in six years,” Linzey said.

Linzey said rural telecommunications providers must plan for the future. Demand for high-speed Internet access is growing exponentially to support streaming video and other applications, Linzey said.

“The Telecommunications Act of 1996 was put in place before the big demand for bandwidth,” she said. “Our industry is facing a huge disruption from competition and rural companies need to prepare for it.”