

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Easily Accessible: Connecting Communities During COVID-19

With FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* thanking broadband and phone providers that have gone even further to enhance connectivity than his Keep Americans Connected Pledge, the stories from the frontlines keep rolling in. **Starry**, a broadband provider primarily serving multiple-dwelling units in Boston, NYC, DC, Denver and L.A., took the FCC promise not to cut customers' service off over the next 60, but went further by retroactively restoring service to its customers that had canceled service over the past three weeks. "We said let's make sure we're not canceling anyone during this crisis" said *Virginia Lam Abrams*, Starry's svp, communications and government relations. "We've just cast a wider net in terms of how we view why people may or may not have been able to pay over the last few weeks, understanding this has probably been percolating a lot longer." Starry is also a little different in how its low-income broadband program, Starry Connect, works. Eligibility is tied to apartment buildings, not individuals, with underserved communities able to receive 30Mbps service for \$15/month. Through the end of May, Starry Connect will be free. "We're trying to pull all the levers that we can to protect the communities that are most vulnerable during the COVID-19 response," said Lam Abrams. "That's at least one thing we can tell people that you don't have to worry about." Starry is an official HUD stakeholder, and has partnerships with the Denver Housing Authority, the Boston Housing Authority and several others. Starry has also moved to expand Starry Connect to nearly 600 units of affordable housing in NYC. **Atlantic Broadband** just introduced a low-cost option for residents in its service area that do not currently receive its internet service. Called Atlantic Broadband Internet Assist, the 15/1Mbps service will be offered free for 60 days. Customers will also receive free installation and a free modem. Others who aren't officially part of the FCC Keep Americans Connected Pledge are also pitching in. Free broadcast streaming app **Locast** launched an emergency program for those who want to watch uninterrupted, but can't afford the voluntary \$5 per month donation due to difficulties resulting from coronavirus. Usually consumers who do not contribute have their programming interrupted periodically with video requests for donations. Now, if consumers request it, the function can be turned off for the next 30 days. "Your local broadcast TV stations can provide exactly the kind of local emergency news and public health information you need to help slow the spread of coronavirus and keep yourself, your friends, and family safe," said founder and chmn *David Goodfriend*. On Wednesday, Pai issued a statement offering props to 21 companies for tak-

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ing additional steps during the coronavirus crisis, though he added that the companies making such extra efforts weren't limited to these. Among those getting shout-outs were **C Spire**, which is offering free wireless data to K-12 students for educational purposes and **BEK Communications**, which is doubling Internet speeds for all customers at no additional charge, offering broadband service for free for four months to new customers with telehealth, education, and work-from-home needs. **ALLO Communications, Altice USA, AT&T, Cable ONE, Century Link, Charter, Comcast, Cox, Geo-Links, Hotwire, Mediacom, Nelson Cable, Ninestar Connect, Socket Telecom, Starry, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon** and **Washington Broadband** were among those getting an FCC pat on the back. And companies continue to sign on to the pledge. The FCC pledge applies to residential customers as well as small business. An FCC staffer said small business is defined as a company with less than 50 employees.

Keeping That (Adaptive) Spirit: Adaptive Spirit's sold-out annual event in Vail April 2-April 5 was canceled, but all's not lost. Organizers said the 2020 event's sponsors that they've spoken with have committed to giving funding, and a [silent auction](#) is proceeding online. That's huge since Adaptive Spirit's annual event helps fund the US Paralympics Ski and Snowboard teams. The auction is open through 5pm ET on April 3 and features a slew cool items, including trips to the ESPYs, a suite for a Lakers or Dodgers game and tons of ski gear (natch). "We were really disappointed to have to cancel, but obviously it's the right decision with everything going on," said co-founder/co-chair *Steve Raymond*, who was inducted into the Colorado Snowsports Hall of Fame last fall for his contributions to Paralympic sport in the state. "It's important that we're going to continue to get their sponsorship commitments because we're almost 50% of the teams' funding. They rely solely on private donations." This was going to be the event's 25th anniversary, with more than 20K telecom execs and guests having participated over the years. Adaptive Spirit has raised more than \$11m over 25 years for the US Paralympic Alpine, Nordic, Snowboard and Biathlon teams. "We sold out sponsorships for this year's event faster than we ever have, which to us is a huge indication of how loyal the sponsors are," said co-chair *Rich DiGeronimo*. All of that bodes well for 2021, when Adaptive Spirit will get another chance to turn 25 as it brings back the annual gathering of networking, industry discussions and skiing.

Monitoring US Networks: FCC commish *Jessica Rosenworcel* is calling on the agency to issue daily reports on the state of communications networks. "It does these reports in other crises, like hurricanes and power outages. It needs to do this here. Now. Because these are the networks we are all counting on for some semblance of modern life," she tweeted Friday. In Europe, **YouTube** and **Amazon** are the latest to lower streaming quality to handle the strain placed on networks during the coronavirus pandemic. The US hasn't instituted similar measures.

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AT&T Puts Hold on Share Repurchases: AT&T is suspending its previously-announced \$4bln accelerated share repurchase plan due to the spread of COVID-19, the company said in an SEC filing. AT&T had previously entered into an accelerated share repurchase agreement with **Morgan Stanley** to repurchase \$4bln of the company's common stock during 2Q20. CFO *John Stephens* said that the company is canceling all repurchases to maintain flexibility and focus on investing in its customers, taking care of employees and enhancing its network during the pandemic.

Cancellations & Postponements: **NAB** said it won't be able to reschedule NAB Show for this year, and will unveil a new digital offering called NAB Show Express as well as enhancing the fall's NAB Show NY. -- The **XFL** officially pulled the plug on its inaugural 2020 season. Five weeks of the 10-week season were played before play was suspended. Commissioner *Oliver Luck* emphasized in a letter to fans that the league will return in 2021. XFL games were broadcast on **ESPN** and **Fox Sports**. -- **Disney** is pushing back the launch of **Disney+** in India. It did not share a new launch date, only saying the rollout has been briefly paused.

Programming: **Showtime** will offer a 30-day trial to customers who sign up before May 3. -- **Disney** is bringing "Onward" to digital and **Disney+** early. The film is available to buy digitally Friday, and will be on **Disney+** April 3.

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Quotable

"If I look at the network first that we're managing, if we make a comparison week over week, we can see that we have a moderate growth in the network when it comes to data usage, but where it's spent and on what type of applications has changed dramatically. We're up 75% week over week on gaming, we're up 30% on VPN... 20% up on streaming... When it comes to our own employees, we have in less than one week moved 100K people to be working from home... we still have people keeping the networks up. We have field operations doing the most critical things in the field and stores open."

– **Verizon CEO Hans Vestburg** in an interview on **CNBC's Mad Money**

Research

- > 36% of consumers added at least one new home service (internet, TV and/or phone) purchase in 2019. When streaming services are factored in, the figure balloons to 73%.
- > Pricing was the main motivation for consumers changing services in all categories. Still, as many as 1/3 of consumers were shopping for better quality products.

(Source: **Broadband Now**)

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