

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Fiber Capital: Corning, CommScope Lead Fiber Charge

With fiber construction slated to move into hyperdrive next year, two vendors took the spotlight to show how they will meet the need for fiber-optic cable. **Corning** and **CommScope** both held splashy events in North Carolina on Wednesday, with U.S. Secretary of Commerce *Gina Raimondo* appearing at both to spread the administration's message of broadband for all.

"Today, only about 19% of US homes are connected to fiber-based internet, and when we look at rural areas, that number is even less," Corning Chairman/CEO *Wendell Weeks* said at a ribbon-cutting event for the company's new optical cable manufacturing campus in Newton, N.C. "That's why we're glad to see public and private investments in broadband becoming a top priority... Now, North Carolina is home to two of the world's largest optical fiber and cable facilities, making North Carolina the fiber optic capital of America."

Just down the road in the town of Hickory, CommScope announced plans to expand fiber-optic cable production, increasing output as well as adding at least 250 jobs over the next five years. It's doing so with the rollout of a new HeliARC fiber cable line—which was designed specifically for rural deployments—and the investment of \$47 million CapEx in the U.S. toward growing fiber optic cable production.

"Not only will it result in more Made in America products, but these products have also been designed with sustainability and environmentally friendly practices in mind," CommScope

President/CEO *Chuck Treadway* said. "The decrease in size and weight of HeliARC cable permits more products to move in one shipment, making it more sustainable and environmentally friendly."

Corning's Trivium campus in Newton will add 400 high-skilled manufacturing jobs to the company's existing workforce of over 5,000 in the Tarheel State alone. It's the continuation of a series of investments made by the company since 2020, but it's also another way North Carolina has stationed itself at the forefront of the Internet For All initiative.

Raimondo, who joined President *Biden* for a semiconductor announcement in Durham on Tuesday, said she got a renewed sense of urgency for connectivity when she was at a public library in the city of Lincolnton this week. She said she spoke with multiple people who expressed different pain points with their lack of internet access, but what stuck out was a young woman recalling how an ISP told her "You should probably move" when she requested affordable broadband.

"This is the United States of America. It is past time that every American ought to be connected with Affordable Internet no matter where they are," Raimondo said. "My team and I are committed to doing our part. We have \$50 billion we're going to invest it in partnership with governors who will create plans for their states specified to their state—no one-size-fits-all."

Corning's commitment to connecting all has been a cornerstone since its inception, but its current relationship with the federal government came at the beginning stages of Biden's administra-



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tion. In early 2021, Raimondo requested a meeting with Weeks, NTIA Head *Alan Davidson* and Senior Advisor to the Secretary *Kevin Gallagher*. Her goal was to find a partnership that would create enough fiber in the U.S. to accelerate buildouts across the country, and with the help of Gov. *Roy Cooper* (D-NC), the Tar Heel state became a focal point for a national movement.

Stephen Milner, CEO of **Planters Broadband Cooperative**, was on hand for the festivities on behalf of **NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association**. He noted how companies like his serve nearly 1/3 of the U.S.' landmass with an average density of about seven subscribers per square mile. However, those areas were left behind by companies that once provided service. That's when vendors like Corning come into play, having provided over 46 million feet of fiber optic cable to NTCA members.

"We think it's great that we can provide American jobs to make all the products to connect all Americans. We believe with those connections that it'll provide more economic vitality for everyone, so that'll generate more jobs," Corning SVP/GM *Michael Bell* said. "If you provide fiber-to-the-home, you will never have to do anything else for the next 100 or more years."

COURT ACCELERATES SG-TEGNA CASE, FCC FILES TO DISMISS

The **FCC** filed a motion Wednesday to dismiss **Standard General's** appeal of the Media Bureau's hearing designation order for its proposed **TEGNA** acquisition, claiming a lack of jurisdiction. "In this case, there is no Commission decision or order, and the order from which appellants seek to appeal is not final in any event. Appellants seek review of an order issued on delegated authority by the FCC's Media Bureau," the agency told the court. "And even if the Bureau's Hearing Designation Order could fairly be attributed to the Commission, it is not a final order subject to judicial review because it neither 'mark[s] the 'consummation' of the agency's decision-making process' nor determines any of appellants' 'legal rights or obligations.'" It also filed opposition to SG's emergency motion to expedite and consolidate the case, as did **The NewsGuild-CWA** and the **National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians-CWA**, which oppose the Standard General-TEGNA deal, along with **Common Cause** and the **United Church of Christ Media Justice Ministry**. While Standard General and TEGNA are trying to consummate the deal before a May 22 deadline, the groups argue that it's a "so-called emergency" of their own making. "Their privately negotiated deadlines do not justify circumventing the FCC's process for determining whether grant of their multiple applications would serve the public interest," CWA, et al said. The D.C. Court of Appeals issued an order Tuesday requiring the FCC and any supporters of the Media Bureau's

The WHO and the WHY

CFX's spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



STEPHANIE

Babin

SVP, BILLING STRATEGY AND DESIGN
CHARTER

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Stephanie was upped from GVP, Billing Strategy and Design to her new position. She'll assist in the creation of a converged customer ordering platform for Charter's Spectrum products, while also helping redesign the customer billing experience. Stephanie will continue reporting to EVP, Customer Operations *Cliff Hagan*.
- This isn't Stephanie's first time as a member of the Charter family. Her first stint with the company came in June 2005, when she worked in customer operations and business intelligence roles until 2012. Stephanie then moved to Comcast and guided information systems design and strategy for its residential, mobile and business units. Beyond that, she was also charged with managing multiple billing platforms and heading up business intelligence in Comcast's Central Division. She returned to Charter in July 2021.
- Stephanie graduated from Frostburg State (MD) with a Bachelor of Science degree.

designation of the deal for a hearing before an ALJ to file a brief in the court by 5pm today, with parties directed to hand-deliver the paper copies of their submissions to the court (so we haven't seen them in the docket yet). Standard General must file its reply brief by noon on Thursday. In a note to clients, **New Street Research** said it continues to believe the chances of Standard General making it out of this a successful merger are low. "While its brief paints an interesting picture of the various ways in which the FCC process to date upended various norms, the relief they seek—including effectively eliminating the FCC's ability to send a license transfer review to an ALJ—also upends traditional practice," the firm said. There is a chance that some judges in the Court of Appeals could see this as a chance to limit administrative agency power, *New Street* noted, but time will ultimately tell on that front.

YES NETWORK THE LATEST RSN TO DEVELOP STREAMING OFFERING

YES Network is the latest RSN to go direct-to-consumer launching a subscription product Wednesday that will allow fans within its regional coverage territory to purchase a direct subscription to

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the channel. Customers can buy the subscription for \$24.99/month or \$239.99/year through the YES app, which will now be the exclusive streaming home of the Yankees, Nets and Liberty in the RSN's territory. An introductory offer will be available through April 30 with discounted prices being \$19.99/month or \$199.99/year, and subscribers who sign up for the monthly plan will see the introductory pricing conclude at the end of the year. Fans who receive YES through their traditional pay TV providers will still be able to stream the network on the YES App at no additional cost. The app is available on devices including **Amazon** Fire TVs, **Roku** products, **Apple TV**, **Google TV** and **Samsung** connected TVs.

COMCAST BOOSTS ENERGY EFFICIENCY BY 36%

Comcast's efforts to be more energy efficient are working. The operator has reduced the electricity it takes to deliver each byte of data on its network by 36% since 2019. That's largely from a reduction in total energy use across network facilities in operations as investments in software, AI and other virtual and physical infrastructure that require less energy. Comcast has set a goal to be carbon neutral by 2035 for the direct and indirect emissions it owns and controls across its global operations. It has also committed to doubling its network energy efficiency by 2030 to cut the electricity per consumed byte of data in half.

NFL CREATES JV TO OFFER SUNDAY TICKET TO BUSINESSES

The **NFL** has teamed up with **RedBird Capital** to form **EverPass Media**, a JV that will hold the exclusive rights to distribute NFL Sunday Ticket to commercial venues. The service will be available on a non-exclusive basis through all participating cable and satellite providers. Everpass will be led by two **DirecTV** alumni. *Derek Chang* will serve as Executive Chairman while *Alex Kaplan* will hold the CEO seat. Beyond the '23 season, Everpass hopes to expand its portfolio to offer businesses around the globe a wider content selection.

ESPN, NEC EXTEND MEDIA DEAL

ESPN and the Northeast Conference extended their multi-year, multi-platform media rights agreement through the 2025-26 season. Men's and women's basketball games will continue to air on ESPN's digital platforms during the regular season, but now the network will televise the NEC men's and women's basketball championship games on the flagship channel, **ESPN2** or **ESPNU** each year. Two regular-season basketball contests will be broadcast on ESPNU each year, and select NEC football games will also appear on ESPN platforms.

AT THE COMMISSION

FCC Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* released a proposal that she

and the other commissioners establish high-level principles to be used to guide the agency's work promoting the efficient and effective use of advanced wireless technologies. Suggestions of what to include in those principles include statements on how the FCC will examine claims of harmful interference, the potential for further regulatory actions and the responsibilities of transmitters and receivers when it comes to mitigating interference. The proposal will be voted on at the Commission's April open meeting.

EVOLUTION DIGITAL, OPENSYNCH COLLAB ON ANDROID BOX

Plume's OpenSync has been integrated into **Evolution Digital's** EVO FORCE 1 set-top box, the pair revealed. EVO FORCE 1 is the first Android set-top box to have make the intelligent network capabilities included. Operators will be able to use OpenSync to get real-time insights into wireless access networks and how the box and the applications on it perform from a streaming perspective. The hope is that the remote support tools will result in less spent on truck rolls and customer care center calls.

FIBER FRENZY

Comcast is expanding its network to serve nearly 800 residents and businesses in Brooke County and Preston County, West Virginia. The operator's full suite of services is available now in Beech Bottom and Windsor Heights and services have begun rolling out to residents in Terra Alta. The expansions will be fully completed later this year.

PROGRAMMING

STARZ and **Channel 4** ordered six-part thriller "The Couple Next Door." Filming now in Leeds and Belgium, the show will be available on Channel 4 in the UK, on STARS in the U.S. and Canada and on **Lionsgate+** in Latin America. – **HGTV's** new season of "Fix My Flip" will premiere May 4 at 9pm and be available on **discovery+** the same day.

PEOPLE

NBC Sports veteran *Christine Dorfler* is ready to score a touchdown, joining the NFL as the league's CFO. The move is effective May 1, and Dorfler will oversee all media partnerships and contracts with other sports bodies like the **International Olympic Committee** and **Nascar**. *Joe Siclare*, who served as NFL CFO from 2011-2022, will aid Dorfler in her transition. – **NBCU** added *Jennifer Barendrecht* to its Advertising & Partnerships division as SVP, National Sales. She'll lead NBCU's One Platform sales efforts across its national offices with a specific focus on the western region. Barendrecht has more than two decades of experience in the industry, previously leading sales across **Turner's** entire sports portfolio.

Think about that for a minute...

It's Basic

Commentary by Steve Effros

It was originally called “basic cable” because that’s what it was: the “basic” channels any cable system had to provide to customers. Remember, back then “cable” was “CATV” which stood for “community antenna television.” And the “community antenna” was just that; an antenna constructed on top of the mountain that obstructed the desired “local” television signal from getting to the folks in the shielded valley.

“Basic,” was local television signals that the “locals” couldn’t get very well themselves. So someone had the bright idea (originally the folks trying to sell the new-fangled televisions in the community) of setting up a “community antenna” and running wires to everyone’s house who bought a set. It worked. A new industry was born.

But “basic” television started to morph very quickly when it was realized that you could not only get the “local” television signal, but if you put up a really good antenna, or started using microwave transmitters to pick up more “distant” signals and bring them to the community you had a business that not only aided your local television sales, but was a unique and sought-after service in and of itself. After all, if you wanted to follow the games from New York or Philadelphia teams and you were in the hills of Pennsylvania with a “local” station that didn’t carry them, why not sell the “distant” signal delivery as an added benefit?

Broadcast signal carriage was always considered part of the “basic” tier of service. Additional “tiers” started to be added when new video services began to appear. The most attractive of those new services, like ESPN, CNN and the Weather Channel were added to the “basic” tier to make it more attractive, and allow the “cable guy” to increase the price of basic service. After all, those new channels were not “free” to the operator. Even though they had advertising, they also demanded fees from the local cable operator to allow carriage. It was the only way to make enough money to pay for new programming: a “dual revenue stream.”

Thus the entire process of adding channels and paying for them began and quickly spiraled out of control as more and more video

offerings appeared and the “must have” channels, such as ESPN gained such leverage that they forced cable operators to add other of their owned video offerings to the “basic” tier which could claim 100 percent of the cable subscribers to the advertisers. “Tiers” of service could not attract the advertisers as well because they had fewer folks signing up and paying for them. The cable guys lost control of the negotiations. Then Congress added required payments for the “free television” broadcasters as well, called “retransmission consent” fees, and the cable subscription price, as well as the size of the “bundle” got out of control. Hence the demand for “a la carte.”

But, following up on last week’s column, “a la carte” would inevitably be more expensive for the consumer because without the aggregated power of the combination of fees and advertising, particularly on a “basic” tier, the stand-alone price of channels would have to go up. Streaming, as I pointed out, has proved that true. The original “cable bundle” is swiftly declining. “A la carte” streaming channels proliferated, but they for the most part have lost money. They need the combination of both fees and advertising provided by the “bundle.”

As I’ve noted, that’s where things are going to have to move... back to the bundle. And since then confidential emails to me responding to that column as well as public comments made by senior management, such as at Disney, have confirmed that’s where they’re going: back to the bundle. The YouTubeTV and “Hulu+Live

TV” model of combining unique video with broadcast signal carriage will be the new model. It’s basic.



Steve

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(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

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