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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Class In Session: Corning Cuts Ribbon for Fiber Training Center

In an era of broadband expansion, there's a need for boots on the ground to connect all corners of the U.S. **Corning** is addressing that need for laborers by unveiling a new Fiber Optic Training Center at Catawba Valley Community College's Corporate Development Center.

Nestled in Hickory, North Carolina, the center contains classroom space for Corning trainers to come in and give hands-on lessons on how to design, engineer, install and manage high-speed fiber broadband networks. The curriculum spans 40 hours of content and can be adjusted depending on the student's schedule, ultimately giving those who complete the course a badge certifying they've passed an introductory course into the world of optical fiber.

"There's a shortage of installers in our industry, and we, as one of the industry leaders, are working together with our customers and the installation community to bridge that gap," **Mike Bell**, Corning's SVP/GM, Optical Communications, told **CFX**. "Hopefully some of the [BEAD] RFQs will get approved and started, specifically in Louisiana first, here in the fourth quarter. Then as that starts to happen next year when the installation force is really needed, then we'll be able to ramp that up and make sure that that's not a bottleneck in the process."

The idea of a partnership between Corning and CVCC sparked around a year and a half ago. Both the school and Corning have previously worked with Skills USA, a national organization that

encourages high school students to potentially get involved in trades, which led to the idea of collaborating to create training opportunities at a more local level. The school also has its K-64 initiative that helps students of all ages prepare for long-lasting career paths, so it fits in CVCC's vision to help cultivate economic development in Catawba County.

Dr. Robin Ross, VP, K-64 and Talent Development for CVCC, said when looking at the growth of Corning and the needs of the fiber industry in the Catawba County area, she saw how beneficial creating a Fiber Optic Training Center could be. "The college historically has worked very closely with businesses and industries, in that we've helped design specific academies based on whatever sector of manufacturing or business the company is in," Ross said. "So that just prompted us to say, 'So what does this look like for Corning, and how can we partner together to make this happen in the area?'"

Bell echoed Ross' sentiments, adding that working with CVCC felt like a natural fit considering its location and the relationships the school has with local high school students. And with Corning having been building fiber cables in the area for more than 40 years, it added to that desire for local growth and development.

Another aspect of the training center and its help with future BEAD rollouts is that it was born from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Part of the workforce requirements within BEAD applications entailed strategies to ensure an available and skilled workforce is present to complete BEAD projects, including through partnerships and training programs. Final

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proposals required updates on the status of labor and workforce readiness plans, so for Corning's customers also involved with BEAD, the training center is a boost.

At this point, 55 eligible states and territories have had both of their BEAD volumes approved. Only Texas, which has completed nine of the 10 phases, is still waiting for Volume II approval by **NTIA**.

Currently, the big need in the fiber industry revolves around installation, so the course places a large focus on that in addition to giving students the initial skills needed for design and installation maintenance. However, both Bell and Ross discussed how the training center is set up to be flexible so that courses can be added or changed based on what the needs of the industry are.

"I think there's going to be more and more need for design, and so we'll probably have to adapt or even add courses that are more along those lines," Bell said. "We also have ideas about data centers. AI is huge right now—it's just exploding. I'm sure we'll expand what we're doing [at the] training center beyond broadband technician training to other fields that have specialized needs that you wouldn't get."

Addressing the labor shortage is just one piece of the puzzle. Approximately 23% of U.S. households are connected to fiber, according to the **Fiber Broadband Association's** consumer research report for 2023. But with companies charging into new markets and BEAD ready to accelerate growth, it's an important piece to the puzzle that'll see more communities go live with new, faster internet connections.

"It's not just that we're providing people well-paying jobs, but we're providing them a purpose even greater themselves," Bell said. "Yeah, you have a well-paying career, excellent growth, but you're making the world a better place and you're providing people and communities with high-speed connectivity that they can only get with fiber."

One company that could very well see the fruits of the Fiber Optic Training Center is **AT&T**. The company announced a multi-year purchase agreement valued at over \$1 billion that'll have Corning provide next-gen fiber, cable and connectivity solutions to support AT&T's fiber network and its expansion projects. AT&T will use products like Corning's Evolv portfolio, which is compliant with BEAD.

INDEPENDENT PROGRAMMERS WANT FCC ACTION

Monumental Sports' President of Media & New Enterprises **Zach Leonsis** and colleagues met last week with **FCC** Commissioner **Nathan Simington** to discuss some of the challenges the company has encountered as an independent sports

programmer. Specifically, they talked about the adverse effects that Most Favored Nation clauses and Alternative Distribution Method restrictions have on the RSN's ability to serve local audiences, including through emerging platforms or DTC offerings, according to an **FCC** filing describing the meeting. "These types of terms, which often fail to account for significant differences in the technology and economics of different distribution methods, ultimately restrict the options available to fans seeking to follow their local teams," Monumental said. "Issues raised by MFNs are particularly acute where MFNs are not conditioned on the MVPD's acceptance of associated terms and conditions. Further, their consequences are notably more significant for consumers who do not have access to premium subscription plans offered by MVPDs, as regional sports networks, like Monumental, often are not included as part of MVPDs' base plans." The FCC is considering a [proposal](#) to ban Most Favored Nations and Alternative Distribution Method clauses in an effort to allow independent programmers to compete more effectively. Reply comments in the proceeding were due back in July, with MVPDs, including **Comcast** and **Verizon**, speaking out against the proposal. They argue such clauses actually help distributors and independent programmers reach agreement. Other meetings at the FCC last week included a group of independent programming reps who inquired about potential timing an implementation of a possible rule. Earlier this month, reps from **NCTA**, **Cox**, **Charter** and **Comcast** met with Media Bureau staffers on the item. NCTA said prohibiting MFNs and ADMs only in agreements between MVPDs and independent programmers "would anticompetitively skew the marketplace—hamstringing MVPDs at a time when they are already losing subscribers to their online competitors, while leaving [online video distributors] free to negotiate as they please, including the freedom to insist on provisions limiting the programming that can be shown on MVPD platforms."

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VIRGINIA FIBER PROVIDER WANTS TO TAKE ON RDOF ASSIGNMENTS

With **FiberLight** informing the FCC over the summer that it has become uneconomical for it to provide broadband in certain census block groups it was awarded in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction, another provider wants to take over assignment of the funding. **Firefly Fiber Broadband**, a wholly-owned subsidiary of **Central Virginia Electric Cooperative**, is seeking the assignment of RDOF funding and associated public interest obligations for 463 locations in 56 census blocks located in Madison County, Virginia, but it's complaining that FiberLight has gone silent. "Firefly Broad-

band stands ready to assume FiberLight's RDOF obligations and to expedite the deployment of gigabit speed broadband services to consumers and communities in Madison County. Unfortunately, FiberLight has recently been unresponsive to Firefly Broadband's efforts to work with FiberLight in preparing and submitting to the Commission a request for approval of the transaction," Firefly told the **FCC** in a letter dated Friday. **CFX** reached out to FiberLight Monday and a spokesperson said the company has been actively engaged in multiple discussions with Firefly regarding the potential transfer of RDOF funding for the Virginia project, including its intention to explore a transfer process. "We're currently conducting a legal review and remain committed to working in good faith with Firefly to support the successful completion of this project," the rep said. Firefly told the FCC it has reached out to FiberLight on multiple occasions over the past two to three months, but it has recently been unresponsive and has shown no inclination to move forward with the assignment to Firefly Broadband. Firefly said it is hoping the FCC may step in and help facilitate the transfer of RDOF assignments—adding that if FiberLight is unwilling to assign its obligations to Firefly, the Commission should take note of this fact when it considers the appropriate forfeiture penalties to impose upon FiberLight for electing to default upon its RDOF obligations. Firefly celebrated its sixth anniversary in August and has surpassed 30,000 internet connections. FiberLight operates in over 430 cities in the U.S. with approximately 19,000 route miles of fiber networks.

FRONTIER UNCERTAINTY CONTINUES

Frontier shares closed down half a percent Monday as questions continue to swirl over **Verizon's** planned \$20 billion acquisition of the company. **New Street Research** issued a note over the weekend, declaring that Frontier doesn't have the votes. "We have spoken to roughly 20 large investors in Frontier. Nineteen of the 20 have told us they believe the price is too low. Investors that we have spoken to that are unhappy with the price hold 49.6% of the shares outstanding," the firm said. "If they vote based on their view of value, it will be blocked (we assume there are investors below the top 30 or so that we have approached that would be similarly opposed to the deal). We haven't spoken to a single investor that has told us they have committed to voting in favor of the deal. We believe the one investor that was happy with the price could still vote against the deal, if they thought it would lead to a higher price." Frontier is scheduled to hold its shareholder meeting and vote on Nov. 13. **Raymond James** downgraded Frontier on Monday to "Market Perform" from "Strong Buy," citing limited potential to negotiate an increase in valuation from Verizon.

NEXSTAR'S CLEVELAND DUOPOLY

Nexstar is acquiring WBNX-TV/TV55 in Cleveland from **Winston Broadcasting**, which will give it a duopoly in the nation's 19th largest DMA. It already owns and operates Fox affiliate WJW in Cleveland. WBNX is currently an independent, but will become a CW Network station on Sept. 1, 2025, under Nexstar's ownership.

CTAM HONORS

Chris Albert, longtime **National Geographic** EVP, Marketing & Communications, will receive **CTAM's** 2024 Beacon Award for Communications Excellence, an honor reserved for distinguished communications leaders who epitomize success in discipline, demonstrate innovation and creativity, and inspire excellence in others. Albert left his role in September after 20 years at the company that included the launch of Emmy-nominated "Genius," Nat Geo's New York Fashion Week debut and a bevy of memorable press events. *Julian Brodsky*, Director Emeritus and Co-Founder of **Comcast**, has been named the 2024 Grand TAM recipient in recognition of his commitment to ensuring the industry's future through exceptional leadership, particularly his commitment for the CTAM Executive Management Program at Harvard Business School. *Lauren Richardson*, Comcast Business Senior Director, Solutions Strategy & Analyst Relations, will receive the CTAM TAMI Award, which honors individuals for their exceptional contributions to initiatives critical to driving the continued success of the industry. Her volunteer efforts to the CTAM MSO-wide Business Services initiative resulted in developing the first-ever sales data reporting for CTAM's Business Services Connect, the industry's SMB lead generation portal. Award winners will be honored for their vision and leadership at CTAM Think, Nov. 7.

CARRIAGE

Chicago Sports Network inked another distribution deal not named **Comcast**. CHSN signed a multi-year agreement with **Fubo** to roll out on the vMVPD's base channel plan. Fubo subscribers in the Chicago DMA will have access to Blackhawks, Bulls and White Sox games as well as other studio shows and programming found on the network.

DOING GOOD

As **UP Entertainment** gets ready to celebrate its 20th anniversary on Wednesday, the company is declaring Oct. 30 as National Uplift Someone Day, encouraging everyone to spread joy. UP Entertainment's portfolio of channels will air messaging about the new holiday. The networks will also raise awareness about food scarcity as UP Entertainment is teaming up with Feeding America to be the national charity partner for the inaugural Uplift Someone Day. Other partners include 1-800-Flowers.com, the Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta and the Atlanta Community Food Bank.