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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

New Frontier: GCI Maps Out Post-Spin Future

In a few short months when **GCI** spins into **GCI Liberty**, it'll be the second time *Ron Duncan* will have ridden "the Malone merry-go-round." **TCI**, under *John Malone's* tutelage, was GCI's original investor when the Alaskan operator was born in 1979. After subsequently becoming a wholly owned subsidiary, GCI spun out and went public for the first time in 1987.

"In the four decades since, we've grown from a competitive long-distance upstart—probably not many of you remember when you actually had to pay for long-distance service—to today, when we've become a fully converged telecom provider that serves all of Alaska," Duncan, who founded GCI along with *Bob Walp*, said on an investor conference call Tuesday.

GCI is being spun off from **Liberty Broadband** as **Charter** works to acquire Liberty Broadband in an all-stock transaction. Charter and Liberty Broadband expect the transaction to close on June 30, 2027, subject to the completion of the GCI spinoff and other customer closing conditions. As of now, GCI is still waiting on a final closeout with the **SEC**, with most of the work left to do relating to accounting. It also doesn't have approval from Alaska's regulators yet, but that should be coming soon, according to Duncan. The most likely timeframe for shares to be distributed is the first two weeks of July.

Duncan spent the opening salvo of the call reminiscing on his company's 46-year journey up until this point, before giving a synopsis of where it stands in the Alaskan telecommunica-

tions market and the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Although there aren't as many opportunities for GCI to grow areas like OIBDA as it once had in the past, the company will continue to pursue growth in the Last Frontier. That growth, however, will be more skewed to free cash flow. SVP/CFO *Peter Pounds* said that because of the step-up in basis that could generate as much as \$420 million of tax benefits on the spinoff, GCI sits in a favorable free cash flow position.

GCI doesn't anticipate strong top-line growth due to the Alaskan market being relatively flat for now, but it already holds a substantial share of all of the segments it operates in, sans wireless. While it only trails **AT&T** in that segment, Duncan pointed out GCI does have the widest statewide wireless footprint of any Alaskan provider.

GCI benefits from a lack of competition with pure-play FTTH and fixed wireless providers. Duncan noted that its nearest competitor primarily offers DSL. It does see contention with LEO services, mainly **Starlink**, and while the **SpaceX** company has taken some GCI subscribers in urban areas, the bulk of folks switching over are in rural locations where GCI isn't yet able to offer its full suite of high-speed services or in areas that have experienced prolonged fiber outages.

"Fiber connectivity to those markets [sometimes] goes down for six or eight months because the fiber breaks under the ice and you can't get in to repair it until the ice goes away," Duncan said. "Starlink has managed to take a substantial number of customers in those communities and those conditions, and

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we've discovered that it takes a while to win them back, once we're back in there with the higher-speed services."

Elaborating on competition, Duncan said GCI sees limited fiber overbuilding in urban areas, though there are a few places where fiber overbuilds by local telcos have been more successful than others. The principal issue with that, of course, is that the costs to build are substantially higher in Alaska than they are in the continental U.S.

Joining Duncan and Pounds on the call was Malone, who was bullish on GCI—or soon to be GCI Liberty—and the elbow room it holds pertaining to financial flexibility. It's safe to say the imminent Chairman of the Board will make his mark on the new entity. When Malone was asked about what his expected involvement looks like, he leaned on the areas he's grown fond of over the course of his decorated career.

"I enjoy strategy, I enjoy strategizing with [Duncan], I love M&A, I love deals and I love structure," Malone said, mentioning his excitement for the GCI and Liberty Media teams to collaborate. "I think we have a little bit of a supercharger when it comes to capabilities that you wouldn't normally find in a business of the size of GCI, because of the involvement with Liberty, Liberty Media, me and the Rolodexes that both [Duncan] and I have been able to develop over this long period. I think we're going to find some very interesting opportunities which will have exceptional financial rewards associated with them."

CABLE ONE CEO LAULIS TO RETIRE

After 26 years at **Cable One** and more than four decades in the cable and broadband industry, *Julie Laulis* announced her plan to retire before the end of this year. She'll step away from her roles as President/CEO and Chairman, but will stay on as a senior advisor through Jan. 3, 2027, to ensure a smooth leadership transition. "For 26 years, I've been fueled by the privilege of serving alongside remarkable associates, constantly learning and finding purpose in making a difference in the communities we serve. I consider myself fortunate beyond measure," Laulis said. "I'm incredibly proud of what we've built together and step into this next chapter with full confidence in our leadership team and the bright future ahead for Cable One." Laulis joined Cable One in 1999 and was named CEO in 2017. She oversaw the company's customer-facing rebrand into **Sparklight** while helping grow its national footprint, whether through acquisitions or broadband expansion products. More recently, she's led Cable One in investing north of \$1 billion to build a reliable network with the capacity to support a digital-centric future. Cable One's board will now work with a global executive search firm to identify its next CEO, but did mention it's considering both internal and external candidates.

COMCAST BIDS ADIEU TO NECN

Comcast is gearing up to drop 24-hour regional network **New England Cable News** at the end of the month. What's unusual here is that NECN is owned by Comcast subsidiary **NBCUniversal**. "We regularly evaluate our channel lineups to ensure we're offering customers a wide variety of content at the best value. Based on several factors—such as much of NECN's programming being available on other channels and viewership—NECN will no longer be available with Xfinity TV service effective July 1," Comcast told **CFX**. NECN remains available on other providers, including **Verizon FiOS**, **Hulu Live TV**, **Fubo** and **Astound Broadband**. Much of NECN's coverage is available on NBC10 Boston, an NBCU owned-and-operated station. In February, NECN's websites and apps were shut down, with its digital coverage available exclusively on NBC10 Boston's website and apps. That may be a sign NBCU is gearing up to shut down NECN, but there's no official word at this point. The regional network has a rich history, launching in 1992 as a joint partnership between **Hearst Corp.** and **Continental Cablevision** (now part of Comcast). Hearst sold its stake to Comcast in 2009. NECN alumni include *Aneesh Raman*, former **CNN** war correspondent and speechwriter to President *Barack Obama*, and WABC NY anchor *Liz Cho*.

FIBER CONNECT NOTEBOOK

Fiber Connect is winding down as Nashville gets ready to welcome CMA Fest later this week. Like most industries, AI is on the minds of the fiber crowd, and their thought is that they have the technology to best usher in the AI Age. "You have these massive language models starting in hyperscale data centers. In this world, you're getting data centers interconnected... Fiber gives us that capacity," *James Feger*, **Lumen's** SVP of Product Segments, said during the general session. Another word top of mind is tariffs. "Tariffs keep me up at night," said *David Eckard*, **Nokia** VP, North American Market Development. "[Customers] have to plan. They have to figure out what their budget is going to be... Whether it's active equipment, passive, backhoes, whatever equipment you have to buy, it's subject to tariffs." – **UTOPIA Fiber** used the conference to announce that it has completed a citywide open access fiber network with Bountiful City, UT, nearly a year ahead of schedule. More than 16,500 addresses are passed by the city-owned network, with residents and businesses able to choose from 14 private, Utah-based internet providers competing on service and price. "Finishing this project almost a year early is no small feat. It speaks to the commitment of the Bountiful community, the efficiency of our construction contractor and the strength of the partnership between UTOPIA and the city," said *Roger Timmerman*, Executive Director of UTOPIA Fiber.

MIDCO BUYS SCI BROADBAND

Midco will acquire **SCI Broadband**. The deal will expand the operator's footprint in central, eastern and northeastern Minnesota, where SCI has 12,000 customers. Oct. 1 is the closing date of the acquisition, subject to customary closing conditions and regulatory approvals. The M&A comes as Midco is also developing its own mobile product, which the operator said will launch by the end of the year.

T-MOBILE FIBER HOME INTERNET

T-Mobile announced its Fiber Home Internet product will officially launch Thursday after limited trials. The multi-gig speed broadband service will be available to over 500,000 households across the U.S. Customers will be able to choose from three service tiers, ranging from 500 Mbps to 2,000 Mbps speeds, as well as a limited-time "Founders Club" plan, which gives users the option to lock in 2,000 Mbps at \$70/month for 10 years. All other plans come with a 5-year price guarantee. T-Mobile is following the lead of other operators, such as **Verizon**, **Comcast** and **Charter**, [who launched similar price-lock deals](#) to address customer churn and dissatisfaction with rising prices and a lack of transparency in their monthly bills. T-Mobile also offers the 5-year price guarantee to its 5G Home Internet FWA customers. Citing its recent acquisitions of **Lumos** and **Metronet**, the operator expects T-Mobile Fiber to reach 12 to 15 million households or more by the end of 2030.

HT'S LAHAINA FIRE RESPONSE

There's a lot broadband providers can learn from one another when it comes to disaster response. Having faced the deadliest U.S. wildfire in the last century, **Hawaiian Telcom** has plenty to share. The Lahaina wildfires of August 2023 claimed the lives of 102 people and destroyed much of the historic town, leveling 2,200 structures. In a riveting talk during **Fiber Connect** on Tuesday, **altafiber** Chief Network Officer *Ron Beerman* walked the crowd through the terrifying ordeal (altafiber acquired HT in 2018). Most incredible, he had video from HT Customer Zone Technician *Carmel Lay*, who began filming from HT's office in Lahaina as the wind began to pick up. Her video shows smoke off in the distance and then as it gets closer, she evacuates. She parks somewhere safer and records video of a now raging fire, with explosions. Eerily, while she's recording the car radio is playing music with no emergency alerts. Lack of warning was blamed for some of the loss of life. While all of HT's employees were safe, Beerman said two of the company's retirees died from the fires, which displaced 12,000 residents. By Aug. 10, Hawaiian Telcom had 10,000 customers back up. "During this time, we began getting calls from our vendors and partners offering to help. I can't tell you how grateful we are. It says a lot about how we are as an industry at the times it matters most," Beerman said. Something to keep in mind when fire destroys poles—there are all sorts of nails inside them that will cover the ground. Cleanup isn't easy and even walking down the road can be dangerous.

HT takes great pride in that there were no major safety issues as the response took place. Crews working to restore service had to wear respirators, which require skin-to-skin contact. "So, you have to shave. In Hawaii, beards, mustaches and goatees are part of their identity," but employees quickly stepped up to volunteer, said Beerman. He shared a before/after photo of a man who'd been growing a beard braid for eight years, who was one of the first to step up and get fitted for a respirator.

FIBER FRENZY

Mediacom launched multi-gig, symmetrical speed broadband in Webster and Elko New Market, Minnesota, bringing its Xstream Internet offerings to nearly 1,800 households in these rural areas. Customers can choose from three tiers of service ranging from 300 Mbps to 2,000 Mbps down and 100 Mbps to 1,000 Mbps up. Qualifying households can also access a low-cost plan, Xstream Connect, with download speeds of 100 Mbps and upload of 20 Mbps, which costs \$14.99/month.

CARRIAGE

Fubo and **DAZN** have inked a multi-year deal to distribute their owned-and-operated linear channels on each other's U.S. platforms. Fubo will offer a new channel, **DAZN1**, which will air live boxing and MMA fights as well as VOD. Customers can purchase DAZN1 as a standalone subscription or as an add-on to Fubo's MVPD platform. Fubo can now also offer DAZN's live PPV events. Meanwhile, DAZN will get a new FAST channel called **Fubo Sports**, featuring 400 live sporting events per year, including **UEFA** soccer matches and the **Bare Knuckle Fighting Championship**.

RATINGS

TNT's ratings momentum from the **NBA** and **NHL** Playoffs stretched into another week as it topped the primetime cable chart for May 26-June 1, recording an average of 2.99 million viewers P2+. That edged out **ESPN's** 2.36 million and **Fox News'** 2.29 million. It was all Fox News in total day as the news net led with 1.48 million. That was more than double what second-place ESPN checked in with (659,000).

PEOPLE

Donna Speciale is stepping down as President of U.S. Advertising Sales and Marketing of **TelevisaUnivision**. She will stay on through a transition period. *Tim Natividad*, who most recently served as U.S. Head of Enterprise Sales of **TikTok** and has also held senior marketing and advertising roles at **Roku**, **Amazon** and **Google**, will succeed Speciale effective June 9. — *John Matts*, who joined **Hallmark Media** in 2022, will shift from COO to President. Matts will oversee ad sales, distribution, finance, research, culture and strategic insights. Following *Sabrina Wiewel's* shift to EVP of Crayola Studios at Hallmark Media, 16-year-veteran *Jessica Tasler Noble* has been appointed the company's new Chief Culture Officer.