

Casselton, ND (Newsworthy.ai) Tuesday Aug 8, 2023 @ 10:03 AM Pacific —

Rural broadband providers broke ground today on a series of multimillion dollar projects that will deliver leading-edge fiber broadband technology to rural communities across Eastern North Dakota. A groundbreaking ceremony near Casselton today was hosted by Halstad Telephone Company, MLGC, Polar Communications, Red River Communications, and BEK Communications Cooperative.

“The people living in this region have been waiting a long time for this to happen,” says Tom Steinolfson, CEO/GM of Red River Communications. “Speaking on behalf of my broadband colleagues across the state, we are thrilled to be able to fulfill the promise to the residents of these underserved and unserved communities who have been waiting a long time to enjoy the same connectivity as some of their neighbors in more populated areas.”

In total, these rural broadband providers are building more than \$119 million worth of fiber broadband, funded by four separate state and federal funding sources, including the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

### **Company Counties Dollars**

- BEK Communications Cooperative Barnes, Cass, Ransom \$1,017,520
- Halstad Telephone Company Cass Grand Forks, Traill \$12,275,934
- MLGC Cass Richland, Steele \$31,000,000
- Polar Communications Walsh, Grand Forks, Traill, Steele \$49,626,551
- Red River Communications Richland \$5,269,494

“Our focus is to ensure that every resident in North Dakota has access to high-speed broadband, leveling the playing field between urban and rural communities,” says Karl Blake, CEO of Polar Communications. “North Dakota has always been the most connected state in America. With these recent funds, we’ll be that much closer to 100% connectivity.”

The transformational technology upgrade will generate a surge of benefits including igniting economic opportunities for local businesses and agricultural operations, enabling rural students to realize their educational aspirations with better access to online learning platforms, strengthening healthcare services through improved telehealth capabilities, and bolstering public safety by improving communications infrastructure.

“This is a game changer for us,” says Clay Erdmann, Regional Sales Manager for Mustang Seeds, a seed supply company located just three miles south of Casselton. “We’ll be able to

run our business much more efficiently with a reliable, faster connection.”

“This is an unprecedented opportunity taking place in Eastern North Dakota,” says Steinolfson. “We want to take a moment to thank the Governor’s office, our state’s congressional delegation, local and state legislators, and county officials for helping to secure the funding needed to make these projects a reality. Also, we thank the residents and businesses of our rural communities for your resilience and patience throughout this process.”

Call your local broadband provider to learn about project details and to sign up for services.

## **About the Companies**

### **[Halstad Telephone Company](#)**

Halstad Telephone Company has been serving the Red River Valley since 1904. HTC serves Cass, Grand Forks, and Traill Counties in North Dakota as well as Norman and Polk Counties in Minnesota. A leader in communications, HTC has been a trailblazer in technology throughout its 119-year history. For more information, contact Mark Forseth, CEO, at [markforseth@rrv.net](mailto:markforseth@rrv.net), 218-456-2125.

### **[MLGC](#)**

MLGC is a 117-year-old, fourth-generation family-owned Rural Local Exchange Carrier (RLEC) that delivers ultra-high-speed broadband services to areas in Barnes, Cass, Griggs, Ransom, Richland, and Steele counties in Eastern North Dakota. What began with a single switchboard and a hand-cranked, wall-mounted telephone has evolved into a 100 percent fiber optic network powering some of the fastest speeds in the nation. MLGC has more than 1,400 miles of fiber in the ground, providing television, internet, and phone services to more than a dozen communities, along with advanced business services. MLGC’s existing service territory is covered by a seamless, 100 percent fiber-optic network, providing 10 gigabit service with the world’s most advanced solutions. For more information, contact Tyler Kilde, President, and CEO, at [mlgcnews@mlgc.email](mailto:mlgcnews@mlgc.email), 701-437-3300.

### **[Polar Communications](#)**

Polar Communications was founded in 1952 and currently provides telecommunications services to more than 8,000 subscribers in North Dakota and Minnesota. Polar proudly serves the counties of Cavalier, Pembina, Ramsey, Walsh, Nelson, Grand Forks, Griggs,

Steele, Traill, Cass, Richland, Kittson, Marshall, and Wilkin. Polar's fiber optic network allows the very best in voice and broadband Internet services and provides advanced business services such as phone systems, video surveillance, and advanced networking. Polar Communications prides themselves on superior customer service with state-of-the-art technologies. Any questions can be directed to Karl Blake, Chief Executive Officer at [kblake@polartel.com](mailto:kblake@polartel.com), 701-284-7221.

### **Red River Communications**

Headquartered in Abercrombie, North Dakota, Red River Rural Telephone Association, dba Red River Communications, is a leading-edge broadband and telecommunications cooperative. Red River Communications provides fiber broadband internet, phone, digital TV, wireless internet, and cellular services to over 4,500 customers across southeast North Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Red River Communications has deployed a fiber-optic network spanning nearly 3,000 miles and is expanding in several communities, including rural Wahpeton and Dwight. This year, the cooperative celebrates its 72nd anniversary. For more information, contact Tom Steinolfson, General Manager and CEO, at [toms@redrivercomm.com](mailto:toms@redrivercomm.com), 701-553-8309.

### **BEK Communications Cooperative**

BEK Communications Cooperative, founded in 1952, is a communications services company headquartered in Steele, North Dakota. In the last 71 years, the company has grown from a small telephone company to a full telecommunications business. BEK provides fiber-based voice, Gigabit broadband, and IP television services; cloud-based security, automation, surveillance, voice, and storage services, along with hospital and business communications solutions. For more information, contact Derrick Bulawa, CEO, at [derrick@bektel.coop](mailto:derrick@bektel.coop), 701-845-0355.

### **Learn More About the Individual Funding Programs**

ND American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Broadband Program awarded by the *state of North Dakota*, and administered by North Dakota Information Technology: [ndit.nd.gov/about-us/broadband/american-rescue-plan-act](http://ndit.nd.gov/about-us/broadband/american-rescue-plan-act)

USDA Reconnect Grant Program: [usda.gov/reconnect](http://usda.gov/reconnect)

Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) Grant Program: [fcc.gov/auction/904](http://fcc.gov/auction/904)



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