

BUSINESS connections



Teaming Up With Western Youth Network



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BUSINESS connections

“A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.”

This famous quote from professional baseball player Jackie Robinson is a fitting way to begin this January *Business Connections* issue and give you inspiration for 2025.

You'll read about an agency making a meaningful impact on many lives in the **Business Spotlight on Western Youth Network (WYN)** on pages 4 and 5. For 40 years, WYN has worked to nurture and empower youth in our area to help them live healthy, engaged and fulfilled lives despite the effects of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). SkyLine/SkyBest is honored to provide WYN's two offices with broadband internet and VoIP phone services, as well as donate financially to this life-changing nonprofit.

Another group of people who contribute positively to their communities are small business owners. On page 3, we explore why **Small Businesses Have Big Impact**. Then on page 6, find out how to **Optimize Your To-Do Lists** and make the most of each day—a routine that can boost the productivity of your business.

Finally, we share on page 7 that **Many Hands Helped With Hurricane Helene Recovery**. Our sister co-ops and others supported SkyLine/SkyBest employees during the grueling work to restore internet and phone services to devastated areas. The impact of these helping hands will be felt for years.

I wish you a happy, healthy and helpful new year. What kind of impact do you plan to make, and how can we help?



Sincerely,

Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

ON THE COVER:

Front L to R: Angela McMann, Caroline Davis, Jennifer Warren, Zara Blevins, Brittany Duncan, Haleigh Seamon, Amber Dixon

Back L to R: Linda Holtcamp, Rita Jordan, Tiffany Moon, Jessica Howard, Hollie Brown, Samuel Gates

Photo credit for local images: Todd Bush

Small Businesses Have Big Impact



Local economies and communities benefit greatly from this business sector

The Small Business Administration defines small businesses as those with fewer than 500 employees, and its 2023 statistics show there are 33.3 million small businesses in the U.S. Nearly half of this country's workforce is employed by small businesses.

By the Numbers

Here are some additional noteworthy statistics:

- Women made up 47.3 percent of workers and owned 43.1 percent of small businesses.
- Millennials and Gen Zers are 188 percent more likely to have the aim of creating a side business, compared to Baby Boomers.
- Small businesses create 1.5 million jobs annually and account for 64 percent of new jobs created in the U.S.
- 70 percent of small businesses are owned and operated by a single person.

Impact on Communities

The impact of small businesses cannot be overstated. They often sponsor youth sports teams, support area nonprofits and contribute to the growth and vitality of local economies. Small businesses also pay a share of taxes that would otherwise be shifted to homeowners. Many provide leadership in such areas as environmentalism and ethics. In addition, they offer a personal touch that is hard for larger companies to replicate.

Supporting Small Businesses

Sadly, within five years of starting, about 50 percent of small businesses fail. Reasons for this failure include lack of market need for the products or services, poor budgeting and reluctance to seek assistance when needed. Some business failures are outside the control of business owners, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although most of the responsibility for the success of a business is on the owner and employees, consumers can do a lot to support small businesses they believe in. American Express launched Small Business Saturday in 2010, which falls on the Saturday after Thanksgiving each year and encourages holiday shoppers to purchase from small and local businesses on this day. Participating in Small Business Saturday is one way to support small businesses; another is to support them throughout the year.

When you purchase products or services from small businesses, let others know when you're especially pleased with the experience. This is an easy way to help them attract new customers and can be done through word of mouth or by posting positive reviews on social media. By doing so, you're helping local small businesses as well as your community thrive.



Amber Dixon, Jennifer Warren and Haleigh Seamon.



Western Youth Network

Every child deserves the chance to reach their full potential

The mission of Western Youth Network (WYN) is to “transform our High Country community by nurturing and empowering our children so that they live healthy, engaged and fulfilled lives.” Every member of the WYN team is passionately committed to this work.

Helping Youth for 40 Years

WYN formed in 1985 as Watauga Youth Network and received the Governor’s One-on-One Grant to fund the first WYN program, called Friends, which mentored court-involved youth. Since then, WYN became Western Youth Network, increased the scope of its programs and expanded its service area.

Central to WYN’s programs is the goal of addressing the impact of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences), which are potentially traumatic events in childhood such as neglect and experiencing or witnessing violence. ACEs put people at greater risk for negative effects to health, life expectancy and mental/emotional wellbeing. WYN exists to help impacted youth through four core initiatives —Mentoring, Afterschool, Summer Camp and Community Health—described in page 5’s sidebar.

In 2025, WYN will celebrate 40 years. How will WYN recognize this milestone? Executive Director Jennifer Warren replied, “We have lots of 40th anniversary ideas in the works that will be announced soon. One thing people can count on is joining us for our annual Wish Upon a Star Gala in June. We are excited to

celebrate and honor everything WYN has accomplished over the past four decades as well as the people who helped us get this far. The gala will also be a time to pull together support for the growth planned for our future.”

Life-Changing Achievements

Warren became WYN’s Executive Director in 2006 and takes pride in many achievements. “I’m grateful to have successfully navigated the 2008/2009 recession when many agencies providing similar services across the state did not survive. I’m also incredibly proud that WYN has expanded our services beyond Watauga County —an effort that has seen particular momentum in the last four years,” Warren said.

She continued, “Honestly, the thing that makes me most proud is that I’ve been able to cultivate a healthy and safe environment for our children and staff alike. In terms of a workplace culture, some team members have referred to WYN as a unicorn. WYN invites both flexibility for life as well as hard work to benefit our children and families. We have quite a few employees who have been with us for a long time, and that longevity and organizational

history mean so much. I love that people love working at WYN! Additionally, I'm profoundly grateful that WYN is an equally safe and caring space for children. When a child or adolescent comes to WYN, we help them feel a sense of belonging. They experience healthy peer and adult interactions in a safe environment, and they learn relationship and resilience skills. To know I played a part in creating this for hundreds of children over the years is the biggest gift."

Strong Community Connections

WYN has two offices, located at 134 Doctors Drive in Boone and 2951 Tynecastle Hwy in Banner Elk. Both count on SkyLine/SkyBest broadband internet and VoIP phone services.

"We are grateful to have had virtually no service interruptions with our SkyLine/SkyBest's services, even in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Not having to deal with outages and tech issues allows our team to do our jobs and not waste time troubleshooting," said Warren.

When it comes to customer service and tech support, Warren had this to say: "Our experience with SkyLine/SkyBest has been top-notch! It means so much to have a familiar person to call if we have questions or need help. SkyLine/SkyBest is incredibly quick to respond when we reach out. Haleigh Seamon came to our office and spent a lot of time training our sometimes tech-challenged team on how to use our new phones. I also appreciate that SkyLine/SkyBest supports WYN and other nonprofits financially. It's easy to give them our business."

We are grateful to have had virtually no service interruptions with our SkyLine/SkyBest's services, even in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene."

— JENNIFER WARREN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WYN



Jessica Howard.

WYN's Core Initiatives Help Change Lives

To make the brightest futures possible for youth, WYN is addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their consequences through trauma-informed interventions and advocacy. WYN accomplishes this through the following initiatives:



Mentoring – The mentoring program helps youth between the ages of 6 and 17 in Avery and Watauga Counties who need a little extra support and guidance. WYN does this by connecting them with positive role models.



Afterschool – WYN provides afterschool programming in Watauga, Ashe and Alleghany counties.

The aim is to support youth during the afterschool hours by providing quality programming that focuses on building strong resilience and relationship skills.



Summer Camp – Every young person deserves fun summer memories. WYN's six-week summer camp gives youth of all socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity to have a safe, healthy and enriching summer experience.



Community Health – WYN works to support an equitably safe and healthful High Country for youth and families through public health projects and policy advocacy. It serves a five-county region and partners with local agencies and community members to identify and address needs.

Learn more at westernyouthnetwork.org.

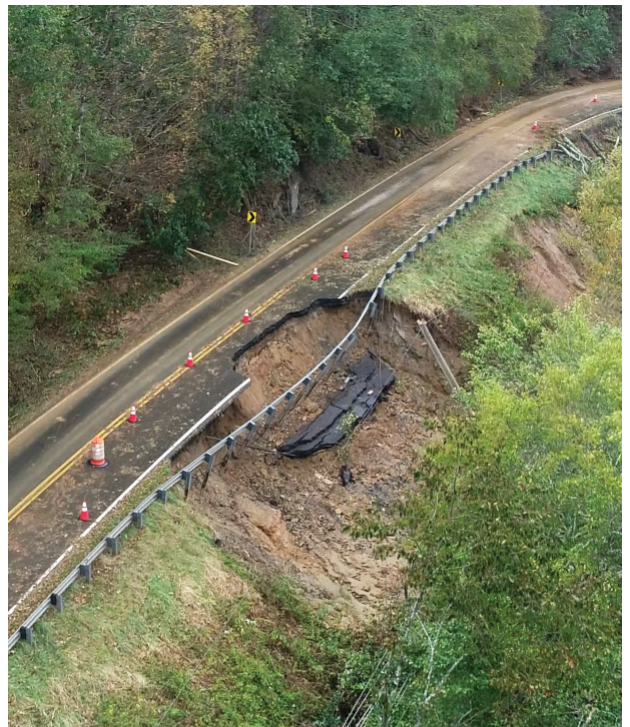
Many Hands Helped With Fiber Deployment

The damage and devastation caused by Hurricane Helene was unprecedented. Like all of you, the SkyLine/SkyBest team remains heartbroken by the lives lost.

To restore communications services, we immediately started making network repairs. Through it all, we were struck by the resiliency and willingness to lend a helping hand throughout the High Country. Our hardworking SkyLine/SkyBest employees were supported by sister co-ops and other telcos who provided extra manpower and equipment, and we're grateful to each and every one of them. While Hurricane Helene was strong, our community is even stronger.

Though complete recovery will take time as we continue to navigate the lasting effects of the storm, we are proud of the progress made, and business is operating normally once again. Our team remains dedicated to serving each of our members and customers.

Lastly, we thank all of our customers for your patience and cooperation following Hurricane Helene. To see a SkyLine/SkyBest video about the recovery efforts, scan this QR code.



NEIGHBORS

Helping

NEIGHBORS

We are grateful for sister co-ops
who answered our call for help with the
road to recovery after Hurricane Helene.

Ben Lomand Connect

BTC Fiber

DTC Communications

FTC

FOCUS Broadband

NCTC

Randolph Communications

SCRTC

Star Communications

Surry Communications

Twin Lakes

WK&T Telecommunications

Zirrus

A heartfelt

thank you!

SkyLine  SkyBest