

**BUSINESS**

# connections

## SkyLine/SkyBest Brings Telecom Services to Mountain City



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# BUSINESS connections

**We measure our success through community impact.** Our decisions about how to move into the future are based largely on how those efforts might impact the community we serve. In this issue of *Business Connections*, we explore some recent changes and how they will help the businesses and individuals in our local area.

SkyLine/SkyBest is making a difference as a **Gig-Capable Certified Provider**. This designation reflects our commitment to providing the best (and fastest) possible internet service to our customers.

On pages 4 and 5, read about our spotlight customer, **Johnson County Government**. Because the County shares our dedication to improving the lives of locals, its management decided it was time to partner with SkyLine/SkyBest for a serious technology upgrade.

**SkyLine/SkyBest Brings Telecom Services to Mountain City** as you'll learn on page 6. We're excited to serve new customers in this community.

Finally, as we note on page 7, it's not just large companies and governments that have community influence. **Small Businesses Have Big Impact**, so no matter the size of your operation, know that you're a positive contributor too!

On a personal note, it has been my honor to serve you along with my colleagues at SkyLine Membership Corp. for the past 33 years, specifically as CEO since 2008. This issue marks my final Business Connections Magazine. As I look forward to retirement on July 1, I also look back with pride at our progress from the growth of fiber-to-the-premise services to expansion into the business communities of West Jefferson, Jefferson, Boone, Lenoir and Mountain City. I anticipate great things in the next chapter for SkyLine/SkyBest under the leadership of incoming CEO Kim Shepherd. As always, contact us anytime. We truly appreciate your business.

Sincerely,

Jimmy C. Blevins  
Chief Executive Officer



Cover photo by Todd Bush

# SkyLine/SkyBest is a Gig-Capable Certified Provider

*We join other providers  
in leading innovation  
in rural America*



SkyLine/SkyBest has been recognized as a Gig-Capable Certified Provider by NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association. NTCA Chief Executive Officer Shirley Bloomfield stated, “I am proud to recognize a growing number of companies as Certified Gig-Capable Providers. Their accomplishments in building gigabit networks are a great testament to their ongoing ingenuity and commitment to leading their communities to a better future.”

To achieve certification, telecommunications providers must demonstrate that they can provide gigabit technology to 95% of at least one exchange within its service territory without new trenching or stringing new aerial facilities. This ability must be confirmed in writing by an engineering firm or other third party involved in the planning, deployment or operation of the company.

As a Certified Gig-Capable Provider, SkyLine/SkyBest is proud to join other companies across the country that have built communications networks capable of delivering internet speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second, which is 100 times faster than those currently available in many U.S. households. SkyLine/SkyBest also received tools to promote itself as a Gig-Capable Provider and will be recognized in NTCA media, on the NTCA website and during association conferences and events.

“We are beyond thrilled to have achieved this designation,” states CEO Jimmy C. Blevins, “but even more so to be able to provide these services to our customers. We know how critical it is for rural business and residents to have access to high-speed internet. This access enables our population to pursue the same opportunities as those living in urban areas, and allows our community to attract more business into our area.”

**More information about the NTCA Gig-Capable Provider certification program is available at [www.ntca.org/gigcertified](http://www.ntca.org/gigcertified).**

## Benefits of Hosted VoIP Phone Service

Hosted VoIP phone service can be a smart replacement for a traditional on-premise phone system for a small “mom and pop” business all the way up to a large enterprise. The benefits include:

**Reduced Capital Investment.** Unlike on-premise phone systems, there’s no upfront investment in hardware.

**Low, Predictable Costs.** We maintain and enhance the service, so there are no surprise maintenance, upgrade or replacement costs.

**Flexibility to Meet Your Growing Needs.** The infrastructure can grow as your business grows; there are no limits to adding users, sites or features.

**A Secure and Reliable Solution.** Our network automatically handles calls and messages during power outages. In case of disaster, employees can forward calls to home or mobile phones.

**Mobility Options for Remote or Home Workers.** Employees can seamlessly connect over their home broadband connection and enjoy the same features they use at the office.

*To learn more about hosted VoIP phone service from SkyLine/SkyBest, call our Business Sales Team at 1-844-SKYBEST.*



# Johnson County Government

*New technology leads to a future full of possibilities*



*Tim Watson, SkyLine/SkyBest Field Services Supervisor; Brent Keith, SkyLine/SkyBest Strategic Sales Supervisor; Robin Miller, SkyLine/SkyBest Inside Sales Coordinator; Dustin Shearin, Johnson Co Gov't Purchasing Agent; Charity Shatley, SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive; Graham Brown, SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive*

As an entity that continuously seeks to provide the best services possible for its residents, Tennessee's Johnson County has in recent years seen the need to upgrade its technology. Last year the County updated its internet speeds, which helped reduce wait times for citizens and paved the way to offer new services.

## Immediate Improvements

Prior to the upgrade, the phone and internet systems at the County were "subpar," according to Purchasing Agent Dustin Shearin. "We weren't able to help residents in a timely and efficient manner," he says. "Employees had to wait for things, and items would take up to 30 minutes to upload." In addition, no wireless service was available for court and office visitors. Shearin worked with other government officials to find a solution. The process eventually led to choosing SkyLine/SkyBest to upgrade the County's service.

The process to find a provider involved meetings with various companies, and the County selected SkyLine/SkyBest because of its ability to deliver what the County needed at a price they could afford.

The County now has 120/120 Mbps broadband internet service in nearly all of its offices, as well as a VoIP phone solution and wireless internet. Shearin states, "The phone/internet upgrade has helped to improve drastically the quality and speed of our

internet and phone service. We immediately noticed a major reduction in work orders for phone and internet issues." Another benefit is simple billing through a monthly invoice that's easy to read and understand.

## Responsive Service

One County service that can now be offered is passport application processing, says Shearin. In addition, the County has been able to accept credit card payments for various fees, both onsite and online. Also, the Senior Center can now offer computer classes to its members. "Based on these technological advancements, we are beginning to provide improved services to current and future generations of Johnson County citizens, who will continue to rely more on these types of solutions," he said.

In addition to the services themselves, Shearin appreciates the responsiveness of the SkyLine/SkyBest team. He says, "You call them and they're on it. Usually we get the person who can help within a minute or two. It's clear that SkyLine/SkyBest wants to make sure we're taken care of. They don't want to leave us

with any kind of mess. Plus, the people who work there are friendly. They're our neighbors." SkyLine Strategic Sales Supervisor Brent Keith concurs, "Since we began working closely with the County, we have developed several relationships within the community and truly appreciate the value of this partnership."

## The people who work there are friendly. They're our neighbors.

— **DUSTIN SHEARIN**, PURCHASING AGENT, JOHNSON COUNTY

While new solutions will continue to be needed in the coming years, Shearin stresses the importance of frugality within the County. "We always want to be aware of what's needed to efficiently operate the government versus the amount of available tax dollars," he states. "We anticipate continued economic growth, but will also continue to seek outside funding, such as state dollars and federal grants, to provide even further advancements for our people."

### A Great Place to Live

Johnson County provides numerous resources for its residents including the Senior Center, Public Library, Doe Mountain Recreation Area and the Trade and Forge Creek Community Centers. It also offers joint ventures such as the Mountain City/Johnson County Community Center, as well as various programs jointly funded by Johnson County and the Three Start grant.



*Tim Watson, SkyLine/SkyBest Field Services Supervisor*

These programs contribute to residents' preference for living in the County rather than surrounding areas. Shearin says other factors include the peaceful small town lifestyle and the beautiful landscape, which includes Watauga Lake. The lake is surrounded by a forested mountain and sits at 1,959 feet above sea level; it is accessible only by winding mountain roads. In addition, 30 miles of the Appalachian Trail are located in Johnson County.

The County currently has 116 employees, not including the school system. Employees know that their efforts are making the County a great place to live for residents now and for future generations. "Being able to feel good about our accomplishments when we overcome major hurdles is a reason I personally like working for the County," remarks Shearin.



## Dustin Shearin Wins 2017 Innovation Award

For his efforts in upgrading the technology of Johnson County, Dustin Shearin was awarded the inaugural 2017 East Tennessee Purchasing Association (ETPA) Innovation Award.

In a letter to members announcing the award, the ETPA writes, "Because of the remote location and nature of their entity, [Johnson County was] unable to take advantage of what many others had realized in years past with reliable, high-speed internet connectivity for their region... Think of your entity today, where would you be without the ability to send/receive fast, secured emails? How would you survive today, if you didn't have the automated actions you enjoy through the use of your entity's website, your online catalogs and having the world at your fingertips? Now imagine that you helped bring this new technology to your entire organization... This is the magnitude of change and the spirit in which we now give this award."

**Congratulations, Dustin!**

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# SkyLine/SkyBest Brings Telecom Services to **Mountain City**

**W**ith SkyLine/SkyBest's Fiber-to-the-Premise (FTTP) initiative complete across its five-county service area, the company has begun expansion efforts to additional communities through its wholly-owned subsidiary and Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) SkyBest Communications, Inc.

SkyLine/SkyBest is now serving additional areas of Watauga County including numerous multi-dwelling units for university student and family housing in Boone as well as along the 321 business corridor with its medical sector.

Most recently, SkyLine/SkyBest has constructed fiber facilities to serve the downtown business community of Mountain City and along Hwy. 421, with plans to extend residential services to homes near the downtown area.

SkyBest has a new telephone exchange with the prefix of 501 (similar to 739 in Shady Valley) to serve the Mountain City area. Existing or new businesses have the option of using the new 501 prefix when they establish service through SkyLine/SkyBest. Existing businesses that already have a local telephone number through their incumbent provider such as CenturyLink or Charter may continue to use their same telephone number by porting it to SkyLine/SkyBest for a small monthly fee.

## The Porting Process

If businesses choose to retain their existing business telephone numbers, porting begins with SkyLine/SkyBest filing a porting request with the customer's incumbent provider such as CenturyLink or Charter. This includes registration of the port with a third-party agency to prevent telephone service providers from arbitrarily porting customers without their consent. Once the port is verified and all of the information is determined to be accurate, a port date is set for SkyLine/SkyBest to take possession of the customer's existing telephone number(s). This is typically a smooth process with all providers working together seamlessly. However, when new areas of service such as Mountain City are defined, this process can be delayed and/or disrupted by the incumbent provider. The customer's provider must recognize the new provider and is obligated to set up the proper databases for both local and long distance calls to be completed successfully. The port type must also be properly defined to ensure a smooth transition between the providers' networks on the scheduled port date.

Our goal is to provide you the best telecommunications experience and personalized and responsive sales and customer service. We appreciate your business and look forward to serving your telecommunications needs.



## Current Mountain City Business Customers

Appalachian Land Survey Company  
Johnson County Government  
S & J Auto Sales  
Jason's Auto Repair  
Mountain City Funeral Home  
Kim Pope Insurance Agency  
Mountain Craft Woodworks  
True Value Hardware  
Pablano's Mexican Grill  
Transportation Technology Services, Inc.  
Sherry & JP's Chicken House  
Danny's Tire & Quick Lube  
Blown Away Hair And Nails  
Quality Furniture & Appliance  
High Country Imaging  
Mr. Sanders General Store  
Miller's Flower Shop  
Mountain City Pawn & Exchange  
Sugar And Spice & Everything Nice  
H & R Block  
Stop and Shine Car Wash  
Sassy Kats  
Johnson County Rescue Squad  
Redden Realty  
Big John's Closeouts  
Johnson County Bank

# Small Businesses Have Big Impact



*Local economies and communities benefit greatly from this business sector*

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, the 28 million small businesses in this country account for 54 percent of all U.S. sales and provide 55 percent of all jobs.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the small business sector is growing rapidly. While corporate America has been downsizing, the rate of small business start-ups has grown.

## Contributions and Challenges

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 special personal touch that is hard for larger companies to replicate.

However, it's well known that within five years of starting, about 50 percent of businesses fail. There are many reasons for this failure including poor budgeting, bad relations with customers or suppliers and reluctance to seek assistance when needed. But some business failures are outside the control of business owners, and many of those who "fail" use the experience to learn and go on to succeed in other ventures.

## How to Support Small Businesses

Though much of the responsibility for the success of a business is obviously on the owner and employees, consumers can do

a lot to support the small businesses they believe in. In 2010, American Express launched an initiative to help individuals and companies support small businesses. Named Small Business Saturday, the initiative 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 remember to support them throughout the year.

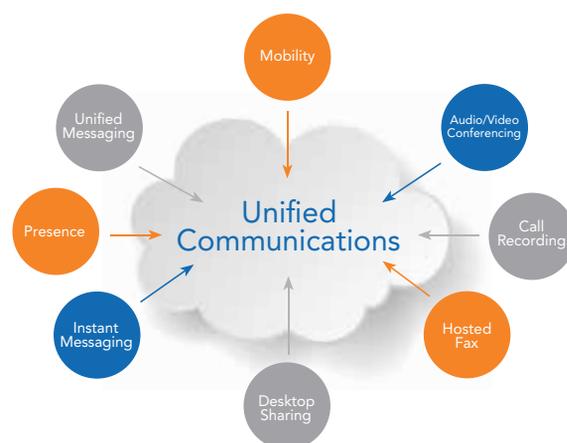
If your company purchases products or services from small businesses, let others know when they do a great job. This can be done through word of mouth, by posting positive reviews on the company's website, or via Facebook, LinkedIn or Yelp. You can also make it a point to work with local and small businesses, even if it costs a little bit more. In doing so, you're helping your local economy and community to thrive.

<sup>1</sup>[www.sba.gov/managing-business/running-business/energy-efficiency/sustainable-business-practices/small-business-trends](http://www.sba.gov/managing-business/running-business/energy-efficiency/sustainable-business-practices/small-business-trends)

# SkyBest Hosted VoIP

## More Features, More Innovation, More Productivity

SkyBest Hosted VoIP is more than a phone system; it's a complete communications solution that gives businesses the ability to be accessible anytime, anywhere, on any device. Easy to personalize and easy to use, SkyBest Hosted VoIP will link everyone in your company, allowing you to communicate more efficiently and effectively. And, since it's from SkyBest Communications, you can count on expert installation, thorough training and local personal service.



Front L to R: Hollie Brown, Robin Miller, Charity Shatley  
Back L to R: Graham Brown, Brent Keith, Brett Yates



Contact a SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Representative to find the best options for your business needs and build a customized solution that fits your budget.

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