

## **From our CEOs: Connecting you to the world**

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A digital divide exists. Many rural communities like the Blue Ridge area and part of the Upstate lack the fast internet service essential to accessing resources that can provide better medical care, education, communication, entertainment and much more. Help, however, is here.

This story begins when Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative recognized this critical need. High-speed internet for many of our neighbors was either nonexistent or challenging to receive. Solving this problem is, obviously, daunting. Expanding a modern communications network throughout a rural and largely mountainous area creates unique challenges. Fiber optic cable must extend to every home and business that will receive service. We must complete a complex link to the global network of computers that is the internet, and we also have to maintain it. Similarly, we'll have to refine the services the system will offer and train customer service representatives to better assist you.

Fortunately, we've found a partner in WCFIBER. Capable of making this network a reality, they have a long and successful history of creating such systems. They brought gigabit-speed service to the city of Newberry and Greenwood County, providing internet performance rivaling that in many metropolitan areas. WCFIBER's fiber network is capable of serving everyone from businesses to homes with multiple devices connected simultaneously.

The power of our two performance-driven and community focused organizations created Upcountry Fiber. Over the coming months, we'll be creating a network competitive with any in our nation. In fact, the work has already begun. Construction began on the Upcountry Fiber pilot project in 2021, and more than 500 miles of fiber optic cable — thin glass wires capable of moving data as light — now extend through parts of the BREC service area.

This is a long-term commitment consistent with our service to the Blue Ridge area. In order to share the stories of those communities and our role within them, we've developed this magazine.

Our goal is to help educate you about new industry trends, inform you of community activities and bring you news about Upcountry Fiber's development. We will publish magazines like this six times a year, and our mission is to provide you with as much information as possible.

Through these pages, we'll update you on network upgrades, share information about our services and shine a spotlight on how local citizens and organizations are using technology to create something special. You'll also find helpful tips, industry news and interesting feature stories.

We have so much good news to share, and we can't wait to show how your neighbors are using this new service.

Upcountry Fiber is committed to these investments. We know building our infrastructure and making upgrades to our services are good investments because our communities are counting on us to pave the way for the future. We're working diligently to ensure our customers have access to the necessity of high-speed reliable internet — and we're doing so as quickly as our resources allow.