

From our CEOs: The Great Electrification becomes the Great Connect

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“Bert Carver was on a mission early this year. For days, he drove the roads surrounding his home on the outskirts of Walhalla, South Carolina, and knocked on doors seeking signatures from neighbors who, like him, were eager for the arrival of Upcountry Fiber.” This excerpt from page 12 of the Upcountry Connected reminded us about our roots and exactly why we’ve started this process. Like electric cooperatives were born out of need, today, we carry that same spirit of service and innovation of the Upstate, so we can ultimately connect all of our service territory and some areas beyond.

It’s an audacious challenge, especially when you look at our rocky, mountainous areas. Hitting rock while trenching is not unheard of; rather, it’s common. But that isn’t stopping us. This project will ultimately span 1,800 miles and include 6,000 miles of fiber optic cable. To put that in perspective, 6,000 miles is the equivalent of stringing the fiber from Washington state to Florida and back.

We often get asked about our process for building out our service territory. In short, it takes a lot of labor and a lot of money.

It’s important to note that rural electric cooperatives could only electrify rural America with the assistance of the Rural Electrification Act, which provided low-interest loans to make such a massive undertaking feasible.

We’re in the same position again today. It is a substantial investment to bring high-speed fiber internet to all areas of our service territory – and even beyond. Simply put, we cannot do this without the partnership and assistance of federal and state funding and grants. Fortunately, our government at all levels understands the predicament this country faces and is stepping up with multiple grant programs that will help bridge the digital divide.

We are actively seeking funding and have already received \$825,000 at this point for our project in addition to our direct investments. We can only build as fast as our financing and any additional money from grants allow.

Many areas within our project qualify for federal and state funding. As much as we do not want to wait, we simply can't afford not to wait for these funds. Waiting could mean that our investment is matched, and that will leave us millions of dollars to continue to build.

We understand it is disheartening to see some areas built out as others – even those across the street – are still waiting. Know this: We WILL get to you. As grant funds are dispersed, we will mobilize our build-out quickly.

If you go into any rural electric cooperative office, it's not uncommon to see this African proverb on a wall: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

And that's just what we're doing. We are partnering and going far through the mountains, the trees, the hills and the brush. We're going far, and we're coming to you. The end result will be one of the most connected areas in the country.

For those who are tired of waiting, we see you. We are committed to you. We won't leave you behind.

We pledge to keep you updated on the grant process, the status of our funding and other related progress. We plan to bring you along in our process. After all, we are in this together.