



RINGER

Fall 2019

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KEEPING NORTH DAKOTA CONNECTED FOR GENERATIONS

Letter from the Executive Director

BAND



By David Crothers
BAND Executive Director

The story of North Dakota broadband across the state is one of the most remarkable stories in our history. Today, North Dakota regularly ranks in the top handful of states when measuring internet speeds and the percentage of people that have access to broadband services. One national publication even posed the question, “How did North Dakota become the crown jewel of the internet in the Midwest?” The answer is fascinating in its simplicity; it’s because of locally-owned broadband providers.

In 1953, local owners joined together to form an association to represent local interests. Working with policymakers in both North Dakota and Washington, D.C., they created an understanding of the importance vibrant communications networks have within our state. When founded, its name was the North Dakota Association of Telephone Cooperatives. Since then, it has evolved as the members, services, technology, but, most importantly, the needs of customers, have changed.

Today, we are known as the Broadband Association of North Dakota or “BAND.” This change reflects how we are no longer simply telephone companies, but are now state-of-the-art technology companies. Early on, BAND realized that success would be determined by the ability to prepare for the future. And they did just that. Members began to transition, offering new products and researching new communication technology. Now, a “telephone company” has become a “broadband company,” providing access to entertainment, opportunities, and a connection to the world.

In fact, it’s almost inconceivable, but the “telephone” services offered

by BAND almost no longer exist. Today, customers’ wants and needs call for greater bandwidth in their homes to use streaming services, like Netflix and YouTube, which consume larger amounts of broadband. Phone services now make up a sliver of the traffic traveling through the broadband pipe to your home.

Unlike other states, in North Dakota, you likely receive broadband services from a local provider. BAND’s 18 members serve over 96 percent of the geographic territory across the state. Decisions regarding broadband networks that bring you services are being made in Park River, Hazen, Williston, and other local communities, not in a corporate board room in New York City.

For BAND and our member organizations, we see this local ownership as a unique strength. It’s how we are able to offer some of the fastest internet in the country. The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines high-speed broadband as the ability to “download 4 megabits and send 1 megabit per second.” The Federal Communications Commission defines it as “downloading 25 megabits and sending 3 megabits.” Gigabit service is 1,000 megabits each way. Rural North Dakotans have access to speeds 250 times faster than the federally defined minimum.

And yet, despite that, North Dakota still experiences a “digital divide.” The digital divide exists when a state’s urban areas receive high-speed broadband funding and the rural areas receive virtually none, leaving rural areas with a lack of infrastructure to support new technologies.

In North Dakota, BAND is actively working to close that gap. In addition to advocating with policymakers in Congress to advance proposals that eliminate the digital divide, we are in the midst of completing the most ambitious technological build-out to deliver next-generation services across the state. We are committed to bringing gigabit-speed to every home, business, school, library, and government office we serve.

This effort is not cheap, easy, or some 2wpromise made for the future. It is happening now. Already, nine BAND members are 100 percent “fiber to the home.” Meaning, it doesn’t matter if you live in town or 30 miles outside its limits, you can have Gig service. Two more members will finish build-out this fall, another next year, and the rest within two years from now. North Dakota will be one of the most connected states in the nation.

The Broadband Association of North Dakota has changed over 70 years, but the guiding principals and promise to their customers remain the same. BAND continues to evolve as the needs of customers do, using the best technology available to give North Dakotans opportunities equal to anyone else in the world.



2019 NCC Annual Meeting

The **2019 NCC Annual Meeting** of members was held at **NCC in Ray** on Tuesday, June 18, 2019.

A delicious picnic style meal was served by the NCC employees to approximately 540 people at the NCC warehouse. Prior to the business meeting, DMJ from Williston entertained the crowd with a variety of instrumentation and beautiful harmony. About 70 children enjoyed the kids' activities, including inflatables and a new Kids Technology Zone where kids were able to try out some Virtual Reality Goggles. Members were encouraged to try out the Virtual Reality Experience, the NCC Security and Video Surveillance Demo, the Advanced TV service demo and to sign up for SmartHub an online customer portal that allows them to manage their NCC account from any smart device or a computer.

The business meeting was called to order by **President AJ Cvancara** at 6:30PM. Jennifer Gjovig, Legal Counsel reported on By-laws changes. Two directors were elected to a three year term to the Board of Directors. Lorena Lambrecht, District #6 representing Tioga was re-elected and Leslie Grubb was elected to District #5 for Powers Lake and Columbus to replace retiring Director, Elda Titus. Titus was recognized for 36 years of service to NCC. Chris Skidmoor, Auditor

from Moss Adams reported on the coop's financial state, which included a 30% increase in net margin and he also shared that in a recent study they conducted, NCC outperformed operating margins of other like-size telcos by 5% in 2018. General Manager/CEO, Jeremy Becker stated that upon completion of this year's construction schedule, NCC will have completed the placement of fiber to every location within the NCC boundaries. He also reported on the growth in Internet demand from customers, introduction of an Internet only service offering this past October, the conversion of all TV subscribers to the IP based Advanced TV service which will carry into 2020 and he recognized NTCA and The Broadband Association of North Dakota (formerly NDATC) for their efforts in supporting our industry in North Dakota and on Capital Hill. Becker ended his report by thanking all NCC employees and the Board of Directors for the commitments that make NCC's success possible.

Many prizes were given away throughout the meeting. The grand prize of \$500 cash was won Bruce & Corrine Kjelvik from Tioga. Kids grand prize of a PS4 and two games was Kayla Olson from Tioga.

For more information contact: Angela Schepp: angelas@nccray.com or **568-3331**

Adult Prize Winnners

\$25 Cash- Ronald & Carol Olson - Ray
\$25 Cash - Bruce & Sharon Rosten - Wildrose
\$25 Cash - Emil & Valerie Bleken - Alamo
\$25 Cash - Tom & Denise Weyrauch - Ray
\$25 Cash - Stuart & Michelle Dolan - Ray
\$25 Cash - Jerry & Barb King - Crosby
\$25 Cash - Alan & Judy Knox - Ray
\$25 Cash - Leona Haukedahl - Wildrose
Magnetic Flashlight (donated by NISC) - Shirley Hoffman - Tioga
Backpack (donated by NISC) - Dennis & Karen Jacobson - Wildrose
\$50 Scheels Gift Card (donated by Border States) - Merlyn & Elaine Esterby - Alamo
\$50 Scheels Gift Card (donated by Border States) - Melvin & Dorothy Christiansen - Flaxton
\$50 Gift Card (donated by CNE) -Cheryl Seyfert - Crosby
\$50 Gift Card (donated by CNE)-Leona Haukedahl - Wildrose
\$50 Gift Card (donated by CNE)-James Krise - Wildrose
\$50 Gift Card (donated by CNE)-Harlis Sem - Powers Lake
\$50 Gift Card (donated by CNE)-Ryan Tappenden - Ray
\$50 Gift Card (donated by CNE)-Cameron & Amanda Magnuson - Ray
\$50 Gift Card (donated by KLJ)-Angel Kilber - Ray
\$50 Gift Card (donated by KLJ)-Vincent & Burnetta Grant - Powers Lake
\$50 Cash (donated by JSI) - Gary Reinholdt - Epping
\$50 Cash (donated by JSI) - Bruce & Corrine Kjelvik - Tioga
\$50 Cash (donated by JSI) - Donald Zacharias - Tioga
\$50 Cash (donated by JSI) - Kenneth & Mary Schmidt - Ray
BEK Gift Basket - Mark & Lynn Oster - Ray
Quilt (made by retiring director Elda Titus) - Roger Johnson - Noonan.

Kids Prize Winnners

Wigglin' Waterpillar - Bristol Hill - Tioga
Cra-Z-Loom - Emma Melberg - Tioga
Frisbee Mini Golf Set - Ayden Whitfield - Ray
20pc. Colossal Pail Sand Play Set -Emily Jones - Ray
Skip-Bo & Farkle Games -Mackenzi Moe - Ray
Jumbo Bowling Game -Ryan Skardal - Ray
RC TumbleBee - Tucker Alberts - Tioga (Powers Lake Exchange)
Airhogs Super Nova - Brandon Rasmussen - Williston (Marmon Exchange)

BUILDING UP BROADBAND:

How BAND makes life
easier in rural America

BAND
broadband association of north dakota

In the winter, it's quiet out at Feil Farms. The 3,500-acre farm is 20 miles northwest of Langdon, far from the hustle and bustle of town. Sean Feil grew up here watching his grandfather and father work the land, growing barley and wheat. Later, they would start planting canola, and years later, soybeans. Each day was spent outdoors, and each day was different. Sean couldn't imagine any other life.

"I enjoy being outside," he says. His voice is low, thoughtful. "Being your own boss. Watching the crops grow each year."

It's a familiar lifestyle to many families in rural North Dakota, where agriculture is the leading revenue-producing industry and accounts for about one-fourth of the state's economic base. From Williston to Wahpeton, this is the heart of "America's Breadbasket," where we value the art of working the land. In fact, 39.1 million acres — nearly 90% of North Dakota's land area — is in farms and ranches.

And yet, what does living in rural America look like in a world that is growing increasingly connected? What does it look like in a post-dot-com society where the internet is no longer a nice-to-have, but a need-to-have?

Questions like these are why in 1953, a group of North Dakota telephone cooperatives had the forethought to band together to keep North Dakota connected. They met at the Patterson Hotel in Bismarck, with a mission to guard against unfavorable legislation and ensure the highest quality communication systems would remain available across North Dakota.

They had no idea how much would change.

This committed organization has ebbed and flowed through a revolutionary era of communication. At the time of the association's creation, a majority of rural North Dakota residents had party-line service, wires were strung from pole to pole and "long distance" calls were prohibitively expensive. Today, rural areas of the state have access to some of the fastest and most affordable broadband technology found anywhere in the United States.

Today, 65 years later, this organization now serves North Dakota as BAND — the Broadband Association of North Dakota. And while so much has changed, their mission has not; to ensure the highest quality communication systems are accessible to all North Dakotans. Their hard work over the decades laying over 45,000 miles of fiber across the state has changed the lives of folks across North Dakota. Folks like Sean, and his family, on their farm in Langdon.

As Sean reflects on the broadband services he uses to sustain his farm, he shakes his head with a smile.

"My dad could have never imagined this," he says.

Living in a rural area, Sean was used to not

“

**I FaceTime my
kids to say goodnight
and tell them
I love them.**

having a good connection from the farm to the 'outside world'. The phone reception was choppy, and if he needed to look up equipment on the internet, he had to wait until he went back into Langdon. Every day, he said goodbye to his wife and kids and made the 20-mile drive to check on the farm. At night, he often lay awake worrying if the crop and equipment were safe — but he had no way of knowing.

That is until he brought up his challenge to his uncle, who works at United Communications, a member organization of BAND. He suggested Sean try out installing a wireless access point and a security camera system, to allow him to check on the farm remotely.

Sean was sold. With the help of United Communications, he installed four cameras throughout his farm. Now, Sean gets a text any time motion is detected by the sensors or the cameras, and can even see who it is. Everything is also recorded on his DVR, so he can rewind and review video footage if needed.

"I have a lot more peace of mind," Sean said. "I don't worry so much when I'm gone."

In addition, his broadband provider dug fiber out to Sean's farm and set him up with a wireless access point so that he now has a point-to-point internet connection throughout the yard. Now, he can keep up to date on markets, weather, and look up equipment parts right from the field.

Far more important for Sean, however, is that he can spend more time with his wife Brittany, his 4-year-old daughter, his 3-year-old son, and their new 15-month-old little girl. Before, his frequent trips took time away from home. During busy season, when work requires him to stay overnight at the farm, he was forced to say goodbye and had little to no connection with his family. Now, with the broadband services from his local broadband provider, Sean is able to stay connected.



"During the busy times, I can still stay in touch with my wife and ask how things are going back home," he said. "And every night before bed, I FaceTime my kids to say goodnight and tell them I love them."

For the 18 local broadband providers across North Dakota that make up BAND — this is why we do what we do. It's stories like Sean's that illustrate what it looks like to live in rural America today; how North Dakotans can enjoy the beauty of rural living while maintaining quality broadband and connection across the state. Serving the people of North Dakota is how it all started 65 years ago — and no matter where the adventure of communication services takes us, BAND's mission will remain true for the next 65 years and beyond.

**Learn more about BAND and how you
can connect with your local BAND
organization, at broadbandnd.com.**

Start Taking Those Pictures Today!

2019 Photo Contest – Deadline October 1st!

We are in search of special photographs that depict the beauty of our area for the 2020 NCC Calendar.

Entering our free photo contest is easy. Simply mail entries to:

NCC
ATTN: Angela Schepp
PO Box 38
Ray, ND 58849

Or email at ncc@nccray.com
Subject line: Photo Contest 2019

All photos submitted are being showcased on our facebook page:
www.facebook.com/northwestcommunications. Like our page today!

New Telephone Directories

You should have received your free copy of the new **Northwest ND Telephone Directory** in the mail. Additional copies will be available at area financial institution in the NCC service area. Please check your listing and contact **Sheri** at NCC at 568-3331 with any changes, so that they can be made for the 2020-2021 print directory.

You can also visit NCC's Online Telephone Directory. You can find the link on our website www.nccray.com. The online directory is updated regularly for new listings which might not be in the printed directory, since it's updated once per year.

New Telephone Listings

Crosby
Ness Kaisa: 965-5256

Epping
Reinholdt Gary & Audrey: 859-2828

Marmon
Sveet Dale: 826-3999

Powers Lake
The Historic Hygge Hotel: 464-7666

Tioga
Brekke Brian: 664-5436
Holmes Lori: 664-4783
Smithberg Jacob & Naomi: 664-7911



NCC Employee News

Congratulations to **Blane Zeleny**, Communications Specialist, for completing the TT&S Apprenticeship Program. The program is designed to help telecommunications technicians become proficient in their positions. The program requires 8000 hours of on-the-job-training and 576 classroom hours outside of the regular work day. Enrolled technicians are required to complete

the curriculum within two years. NCC is proud to announce Blane earned his Apprenticeship designation in just over one year!

Thanks Blane for your commitment to your education, to NCC and our membership.

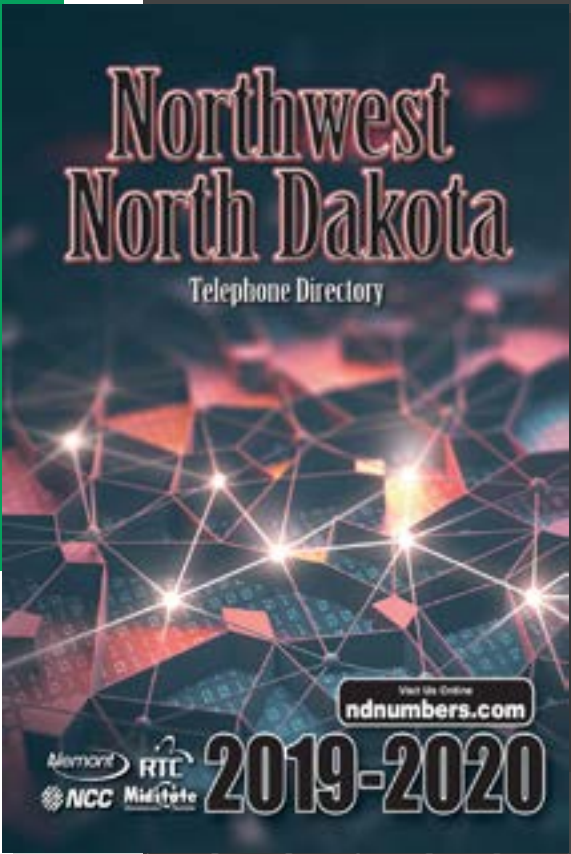
Do you have a community project that needs funding?

The **Foundation for Rural Service (FRS)** awards grants that range from \$250 to \$5,000 and support organizations and projects that fit into the following categories: business and economic development, community development, education and telecommunications. A letter of support from NCC must accompany the application and postmarked by September 13th. You can visit www.frs.org/programs/grant-program/community-grant for more information. Please email ncc@nccray.com or call our office 568-3331 if interested.

Reminder!

NCC is again partnering this year with **CoBank** to provide a grant of up to \$15,000. Entities who can apply must be a 501 (c)(3) charity, school or government organization such as counties or municipalities and their agencies or departments.

CoBank Sharing Grant applications are due September 16, 2019. Visit www.nccray.com or call **568-3331** for more information.



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Pay bills online, get paperless bills, and save!

Managing your account has never been so easy! Use your computer or mobile device to pay bills, automate payments, notify us of service issues, receive important notifications, and more. **Get started at nccray.smarthub.coop**



Sign up for all three services—SmartHub, paperless billing, and autodraft and you'll be entered to win a \$150 gift certificate to a local business of your choice!

BROADBAND AND BASEBALL

How Giants Snacks became the snack of choice for every American baseball league

It was an otherwise ordinary afternoon at Giants Snacks in Wahpeton, ND, when the phone rang with an unknown number. Jason Schuler, a sales manager at the time, answered.

“Hello?”
“Hello, I’m a manager for the New York Yankees. We’d like to get some of your sunflower seeds for our dugout.” Jason smirked and hung up. He knew it had to be some of his buddies pulling a prank. The number called again. “Look —” Jason began. “Sir, this really is the New York Yankees,” the manager said. Jason froze. Then he laughed and apologized. A few weeks later, New York Yankees like A-Rod, Derek Jeter, and Kevin Brown were chewing Giants original sunflower seeds on the field. And they weren’t the only ones.

All hail, the North Dakota Giants

It was a time of exponential growth for Giants Snacks. They had recently been declared the official seed of the Minnesota Twins, thanks to a concerted effort from Jason, now the Vice President of Sales. From there, they quickly gained a reputation as the best sunflower seeds around — in large part (no pun intended) due to their bigger-than-average variety of sunflower seeds (hence the name “Giants”).

“Other teams would come to the Twins’ stadium, try the Giants seeds, and then request them for their own dugout,” said Tom Spiekermeier, Operations Manager at Giants. “Today, we’re at the dugout of every league in the country. And that’s all through the player’s choice.”

Giants remains the official seed of the Minnesota Twins to this day, and over the years they have also been the official seed of the Colorado Rockies and the St. Louis Cardinals, among others. Today, every year, the company ships out 2-3 pallets, or

“
Sir, this really is the
New York
Yankees.”

around 6,732 bags of sunflower seeds, to every major league baseball home stadium in America. (The only exception is the Toronto Blue Jays, and that’s only due to the restrictions and costs of shipping into Canada.)

“So if you’re watching baseball and see the players chewing seeds — that’s Giants Snacks!” Tom said.

Sunflower Socks

The origin of Giants Snacks is far more humble. The Schuler family traces it to generations ago, when a young man who was leaving Russia for America smuggled sunflower seeds in his socks — all the way to the Red River Valley. That man would eventually have a grandson named Jay Schuler, who sold sunflower seeds to snacking companies across the U.S. Meanwhile, fields of yellow sunflowers continued to grow and bloom across North Dakota.

During Jay’s time working for the snack company, he found some of the sunflower seeds were larger and plumper than the others. These, he was instructed to ship overseas. Jay had a vision that these larger seeds could be popular in America — but none of the companies wanted to jump on board.

“We were concerned about the consumer. They were concerned about their bottom line,” Jay Schuler said, in a Grand Forks Herald article about their story.

So, finally, in 1995, he put some in a bag and began selling them himself, calling them “Giants.” Over the years, these “Giants” grew in popularity. When Jay’s sons Jason and Robert joined, which lead to the Twins declaring Giants the official seed of the team, Giants snacks became a sought after snack.

Today, Giants Snacks continues to grow from their home based in Wahpeton, ND. There, they can remain in close proximity to the farmers producing the seeds and maintain quality control over their products. And, Tom adds, there are just good people out there.

“There’s a small-town mentality that people have,” he said. “That’s what I really appreciate about this area.”

Baseball & the Broadband Association of North Dakota

Of course, owning and operating a business that caters to customers across the country — and even a few around the world — demands certain resources in order to be successful. One of the most important pieces, Tom said, is having reliable internet.

Thanks to their local broadband provider, Red River Communications, part of the Broadband Association of North Dakota (BAND), Giants doesn’t have to worry about their rural location affecting their internet connection. BAND’s initiative, from the beginning, has focused on providing North Dakotans with quality broadband no matter where they are located, urban or rural.

Through decades of concerted effort laying fiber and fighting for the right legislation, North Dakota is now one of the most connected states in the nation. In fact, many rural areas often have higher internet speeds than in major cities.

“Having quality broadband makes my job so much easier — it makes all of our jobs so much easier,” Tom said. “I don’t know how I would get by without it.”

Quality broadband allows Tom to use a technology platform that tracks every productivity line, runs quality checks, and gathers data, all on his iPad. They also use a security service that allows them to remotely monitor and control their entrances. More recently, Giants is also beginning to utilize automated machines to optimize their productivity. None of these tools would be possible without a reliable internet connection, Tom said.

“We always try to ask ourselves, what can we do to be better? What can we do to be more efficient?” Tom said. “With these tools and data, I’m able to see which problems to focus on. It truly does help us to make a better product, and run a better business.”

Innovate or Die

Giants Snacks also uses their internet to connect with consumers. With the rise of e-commerce, they’ve launched a brand new website (you can check it out here!) which has increased their online sales. They also interact with their groups of taste-testers via

online groups, where they can fill out online surveys and provide market research on new products. Once new products are released, Tom and the Giants Snacks team are able to track feedback through customer reviews on the website.

“Sometimes we have to nix a flavor and years later people are still asking for it,” Tom said, mentioning their top request right now is spicy garlic. “Sometimes they don’t get enough traction, and you have to know when to bite the bullet and move on to the next thing. Our online surveys and feedback help us know when to do that.”

Recently, the “next thing” for Giants was the release of two completely new product lines: pistachios and cashews. Both products are quickly gaining success, Tom said — although their most famous continues to be their famous Giants Original Flavor Sunflower Seeds.

“My personal favorite is bacon ranch sunflower seeds,” Tom shared. “We also just released a sour cream and onion pistachio, and they’re so good.”

With flavors, packaging, technology and every other aspect of their business, Giants Snacks is committed to staying innovative. Giants Snacks founder Jay Schuler often quotes a famed line from Gary Vaynerchuk: “If you don’t innovate, you die.” From the very early days of pitching larger sunflower seeds to consumers (and even further back, one might argue, the innovative method of using a sock to transport seeds cross-country) — innovation runs in Giants Snacks roots. Equipped with quality broadband and technology, a quality home base in North Dakota, and a quality team of folks who understand agriculture and the beauty of a tasty sunflower seed, Giants Snacks is looking forward to continued success.

Epilogue

Last year, Lucy Spiekermeier, Giants Snacks Inc. General Manager, received a call from an unknown number. Like Jason years before, she was skeptical. She answered anyway.

“Hello, this is Giants Snacks Inc.?”
“Hello, this is the White House. We’d like to invite

you to participate in Made in America Day,” the caller said.

Lucy hung up. Spam, she thought, shaking her head.
The phone rang again.
“Ma’am, this really is the White House,” they said.

Sure enough, a few months later, Lucy and another Giants Snacks representative found themselves heading to the White House with a custom designed American Flag bag of sunflower seeds to show off the snack-of-choice for the players of America’s favorite pastime.

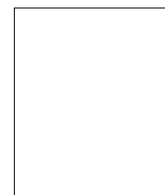
“
Ma’am
this really is
the White House



BAND
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111 W Railroad Ave,
Ray, ND 58849



EVERY TOUCHDOWN
FROM EVERY GAME
SUNDAY AFTERNOONS



REDZONE
From **NFL NETWORK**

