

F&B Communications Broadband Operations Experience

F&B Communications, Inc. (F&B) has more than 100 years of experience as a local telecommunications provider. For the past 21 years, F&B has offered high-speed broadband Internet services to subscribers in eastern Clinton County and western Cedar County in Iowa. The network consists of more than 540 miles of fiber with connections to multiple Direct Internet Access (DIA) to provide service redundancy. F&B operates a multi-gigabit Active Ethernet (AE) fiber-to-the-premise network with dedicated home-run fibers for each subscriber to provide optimum performance and service quality.

Approximately 1,800 residential and small businesses subscribers currently rely on F&B's operations and state-of-the-art communications network. The company supports the area's emergency responders, wireless carriers, health care, banking, agriculture, manufacturing, government and education providers. Additionally, it provides connections across Iowa, the United States, and the world through its ownership in and connection to Aureon.

The Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program (Notice of Funding Availability #007) will allow F&B to expand to serve underserved subscribers in the rural Durant and Stockton, Iowa, areas with gigabit fiber optic broadband service.

CURRENT SERVICE OFFERINGS

Internet – F&B provides high-speed Internet using fiber optic and DSL technologies to all subscribers in the Bennett, Calamus, Delmar, Lowden and Wheatland exchange areas.

Video – Digital television services are available to residents of Bennett, Calamus, Delmar, Lowden, Toronto and Wheatland as well as those in the surrounding rural areas through a partnership with Skitter TV. Skitter TV offers customers more than 300 channels of programming with features such as high-definition channels, RestartTV, Remote Storage DVR, on-screen caller ID and an interactive program guide.

Phone – More than 100 years ago the company was formed by farmers and businesses to serve the Calamus and Wheatland areas. Today, F&B continues this tradition of service by providing local telephone, long distance and advanced calling features to the Bennett, Calamus, Delmar, Lowden and Wheatland exchange areas.

Security – F&B offers home and small business security service. In a service that is not limited by geographic boundaries, F&B provides security system installation and monitoring for customers in eastern Iowa. Personal Emergency Alerts Systems for senior citizens are a popular offering in this product line. F&B technicians are certified and licensed in the state of Iowa.

Technology Solutions – Created out of a need to support the IT needs of Internet customers in 2006, Technology Solutions is F&B's retail sales and networking support division. Technology Solutions operates a store front in Wheatland at 108 Jefferson St. E. and provides a location for computer, television and other electronic sales and service. The organization also specializes in home and business data networking, phone systems and security integration for clients throughout eastern Iowa. Technicians are CompTIA A+ Certified and have achieved other networking and security certificates.

F&B Communications is committed to providing advanced telecommunications services by building a network that can support our customer's increasing bandwidth needs. We strive to offer quality products and services with hometown customer service, education and support.

HISTORY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Newspaper reports say that as early as the late 1800s a telephone company was serving the communities of Calamus, Toronto and Wheatland. Formally incorporated in the state of Iowa in 1907, Farmers' and Business Men's Mutual Telephone Company served customers in western Clinton County. Throughout the years the "mutual" was eventually dropped and in 2007 the name was officially changed to F&B Communications, Inc.

The two towns first operated with a magneto-type crank system until a modernization program was started in the 1950s. In 1959, Stromberg-Carlson switching equipment was installed. Most of the subscribers were connected on party lines, up to ten on a line. In 1968, buried cables were installed in the rural areas to replace the overhead runs, making F&B the first company in the nation to have an all-pressurized underground system. At that time all subscribers had one-party service and 1+ direct dialing for long distance calls.

In 1983, the company buried telephone cables and TV coax cables to all homes in the city limits of Calamus and Wheatland. Subscribers now had the option of receiving local network TV stations and an increasing number of cable networks.

Fiber optic cable was buried between Calamus and Wheatland in 1989 opening a window of opportunity. In the 1990s the company installed a major fiber route to carry telephone toll traffic from Wheatland to Tipton and interconnect other independent telephone companies in north-central Iowa and the Iowa Communications Network. In 1991, F&B acquired cable TV systems in the communities of Delmar and Bennett. F&B began providing sales and service for DirecTV in 1994 to customers in rural Clinton County. (This service offering was discontinued in 2004.) Also in 1994, a cable TV system was built in the community of Lowden. In the mid 90s, F&B began offering dial-up Internet services. The business office in Wheatland underwent major renovations in 1995. In 1999, F&B, as a Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) began providing telephone service in the communities of Bennett, Lowden and Delmar.

The company launched high-speed DSL Internet access in 2001. In 2002, F&B began providing Internet services under the name FBCom.net through the installation of a redundant server system. F&B upgraded to an Internet Protocol TV (IPTV) system in 2004 to provides customers an enhanced channel lineup and numerous interactive on-screen features. In 2006, a new business venture, Technology Solutions, began to provide computer sales and service to customers. For a time, F&B was also a partner in Wapsi Wireless, which was formed to bring i wireless PCS services to customers in Clinton and Jackson counties.

In the late 2000s, F&B connected its first fiber-to-the-premise customer and has been working to overbuild its existing copper facilities with fiber for that past 10 years. In 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture entrusted F&B as the successful recipient of a Broadband Initiative Program and Broadband Technology Opportunities Program grant/loan allowing the company to expand its operations to serve the rural portions of its CLEC exchange areas. F&B is currently in the middle of finishing its final fiber-to-the-home builds within its current service footprint with an estimated completion in 2022. After that time, 100-percent of F&B's subscribers will be served by fiber. F&B's efforts as a fiber-to-the-home provider have allowed it to earn NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association's designation as a Certified Gig-Capable Provider for delivering gigabit broadband speeds and enabling technological innovation.

COMPANY LEADERSHIP

A seven-member board of directors oversees the operations of the company. Daily operations are guided by General Manager Kenneth Laursen. He has held this role since 1999 and previously served in other supervisory and technical roles within the company since 1992. Aaron Horman is the Assistant General Manager. He was hired by the company in 2001 as Marketing Manager and currently oversees many aspects of the company's operations. Office Manager Ariell Connelly and Plant Supervisor Derek Hendrickson have 16 and 7 years, respectively, of service in their leadership roles. F&B takes its responsibility as the areas locally-based telecom provider seriously and has always taken a progressive approach to utilize the latest technologies to keep customers connected in an evolving world.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In addition to providing high quality and reliable telecommunications services, F&B is proud to be an active community partner. Through its charitable giving, F&B supports several community organizations including emergency services, libraries, schools and other community events and causes. A local scholarship program created by the company over 20 years ago has provided funds for graduating high school seniors. Board members and nearly all of F&B's employees live in the very communities they serve. Subscribers benefit from this presence as it yields an unmatched dedication to providing high quality services and customer support.

PARTNERSHIP

F&B intends to partner with WTC Communications (WTC) to successfully serve the subscriber locations outlined in this application. WTC is an independent telecom provider serving subscribers in the Wilton, Iowa, area. This partnership of two local community-based providers has the potential to leverage the expertise and resources of both organizations to effectively meet the broadband needs of the residents in the rural Durant area.

About WTC Communications

WTC has been in business since 1901. Current ownership purchased the company in 1952. Since 1952, WTC has been a pioneer in providing buried private line services in the Wilton, Iowa, area. They also led the way moving from electro-mechanical to digital then to soft switching.

They have completed some fiber build to an industrial area that helped companies take advantage of higher end broadband and connecting them to their national or state-wide infrastructure to better manage their businesses.