

## **F&B Communications, Inc. Eligibility and Demonstrated Experience**

F&B Communications, Inc. (F&B) has more than 115 years of experience as a local telecommunications provider. For the past 23 years, F&B has offered high-speed broadband Internet services to subscribers in western Clinton County and eastern Cedar County in Iowa. The network consists of more than 540 miles of buried fiber with connections to multiple Direct Internet Access (DIA) providers to establish service redundancy. F&B operates a multi-gigabit fiber-to-the-premise network with a robust design that provides optimum performance and service quality for each subscriber.

Approximately 1,900 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, Capital Projects Fund Funds (Notice of Funding Availability #008) will allow F&B to expand to serve underserved subscribers in the application area with gigabit fiber optic broadband service.

### **CURRENT SERVICE OFFERINGS**

*Internet* – F&B provides high-speed Internet using fiber optic technology 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. Through the Absolute Cable TV brand, 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 115 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 103 N. Main St. and provides a location for computer, television and other electronic sales and service. The organization also specializes in home and business data networking, business phone systems and security integration for clients throughout eastern Iowa.

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 service 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. Phone, Internet and TV services have continued to evolve with new partnerships and service options.

In the late 2000s, F&B connected its first fiber-to-the-premise customer under a plan to overbuild its existing copper facilities and provide fiber broadband to the entire customer base. 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. As of 2022, F&B serves all customers with a 100% fiber end-to-end network. 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.

In 2022, the Iowa Office of the Chief Information Officer awarded F&B grant funding through the Notice of Funding Availability #007 program to expand its fiber footprint in north central Clinton County and southeastern Cedar County. Both projects are currently under construction. To support the continued expansion of broadband to unserved and underserved locations in both counties, F&B was actively involved in the recent 2023 Office of the Chief Information Officer Invitation to Quality #001 Broadband

Intervention Zones selection process through engagement with both county Boards of Supervisors and the region's Councils of Governments.

## **COMPANY LEADERSHIP**

A seven-member board of directors oversees the operations of the company. Daily operations are guided by General Manager Aaron Horman. He has held this role since 2022 and previously served in other supervisory, operational, technical, and marketing roles within the company since 2001. Office Manager Ariell Connelly and Plant Manager Derek Hendrickson have 17 and 9 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 many 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.