

Local Phone Company Embraces Technology; Offers Latest in Broadband to Businesses/Consumers

When D&E Communications won the ‘Technology Company of the Year’ award from the Technology Council of Central Pennsylvania in 2002, it served as a reminder that top notch technology companies are found right here in Pennsylvania. Founded in 1911 to provide local telephone service, the company is now an integrated communications provider and has a history of being a leader in embracing new technology. Company spokesman W. Garth Sprecher noted that D&E’s leap forward started well before the 1996 federal law deregulating the telecommunications industry.

“Since our beginning, D&E has been at the forefront of changes in the industry,” Sprecher said. “But things really started to pick up for us in the early 1980s. We knew then that the industry was going to see a paradigm shift.”

In 2006, this aggressive approach to technology has translated into a company that is nearly 100 percent broadband deployed in its service region; northeastern Lancaster County, part of Berks County, all of Union County, and parts of Lebanon County. Moreover, the company changed structurally to meet the demands of expanding markets. It still serves as a rural local exchange carrier, or RLEC, but it also now serves as a competitive carrier, or CLEC. Both offer high-speed Internet, voice, and in some cases, video services.

High-speed broadband, voice and other services offered by D&E reflect the company’s goal of service, and the reality of tough competition in its service areas. Sprecher said that they have two competitors in two of their service areas, and one in another. Its Systems Integration division identifies and implements client focused technology solutions. Each of their solutions applies proven best practices in connectivity, reliability, accountability and security.

“We have become very aggressive at bundling services to stay ahead of the competition,” Sprecher said. “And of course our pricing is competitive as well.”

He added that one of their key goals in broadband deployment is to get the connection as close to the customer as possible. “It’s all about getting the fastest speed possible at the best price.”

D&E has three broadband speed choices it offers residential customers:

5m/512k - \$41.95

1.5m/256k - \$38.95/mo

256k/256k - \$24.95/mo

During promotional periods, it offers these broadband speeds at monthly discounted rates with a year commitment from the customer: for example, 5m/512k as low as \$29.95

D&E also recently launched voice dial tone bundles that include:

- Up to 5M broadband service;

- Voice Dial Tone;

- All the most popular calling features - Caller ID, Voice Mail, Call Waiting, Return Call, CF, 3-Way etc.;

- And optional Unlimited Long Distance.

In the Lewisburg region, the company offers Video Service, as an additional bundle offering that includes:

- Broadband, Digital TV, Voice Dial Tone, and On-Screen Caller ID and Voice Mail. These bundles start at \$99.99 And have up to 4M broadband service.

D&E is a member of the Pennsylvania Telephone Association (PTA), whose president, Dave Freet, lauded the company's efforts: "D&E is a very progressive company that is doing all the right things to bring its customers world class telecommunications services. As with many of the PTA member companies, D&E is well ahead of the statutory broadband obligations of Act 183," said Freet.

"D&E and the other companies have also worked diligently with the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) on a broadband inventory that will electronically display where the advanced telecommunications network is being built throughout Pennsylvania. Using both the deployment reports under Act 183 and the DCED website, regulators and all Pennsylvania residents will have a complete picture of where cutting edge services are being deployed in the state," Freet added.

D&E supplies telephone and data access services to over 170,000 lines in its coverage area, and employs approximately 600 people. The Central Penn Business Journal has listed it among the region's 30 fastest-growing companies for three consecutive years

Cable competition benefits ignored

In an opinion column on cable television competition, Joel Kelsey and Beth McConnell ignore the significant benefits that such competition can bring to Pennsylvania's cable customers ("Telecom build-out requirement only fair," Nov. 7).

In demanding build-out requirements, Kelsey and McConnell advocate needless roadblocks to competition that discourage new cable competitors from entering Pennsylvania's cable market. Small entrepreneurs whose business plans may hinge on serving specific communities often do not have the financial resources to comply with government-mandated build-out requirements.

Verizon continues to support efforts to bring cable competition to as many of our customers as possible, and we are building our fiber-optic network in many diverse communities throughout Pennsylvania. But build-out requirements that made sense in an era of cable monopolies make absolutely no sense in today's world of new technologies and competitive options.

From the outset, Verizon's goal has been to bring consumers cable TV choice as quickly as possible. That is why we strongly supported the cable choice and competition bills introduced earlier this year in the state Senate and House. These bills offered a tremendous opportunity to update the state's cable franchise laws that have done little, if anything, to create meaningful cable competition in the commonwealth. Unfortunately for Pennsylvania consumers, there was not enough time in this year's legislative session to pass any legislation.

Because the current rules were written decades ago and don't reflect today's world, consumers are stuck with ever-increasing cable rates and limited choices. They deserve cable choice, not central planning that deters competition, protects the incumbents and drives away investment.

-- WILLIAM B. CARNAHAN, Vice President - External Affairs Verizon Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh