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**RURAL TELCOS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES RAISE \$58,987
TO SHOW THAT RURAL AMERICA CARES**

Shanksville Pa. Volunteer Fire Department To Receive 9-11 Disaster Relief Funds

WASHINGTON -- With a desire to show that rural America cares, small telephone companies across the country rolled up their sleeves and raised a total of \$58,987 for a 9-11 disaster relief fund to help those who were affected by the terrorist attacks. The Shanksville Volunteer Fire Department, the closest fire department to the crash scene of United Flight 93, has been chosen as the recipient of the fund, which closed January 31.

The fundraising initiative was administered by OPASTCO's 501(c)(3) nonprofit affiliate, the Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED). "When the attacks first happened, we wanted to do something to show the world that rural America stood together in support of the relief efforts," said FRED President Hank Buchanan. He went on to say, "Once the membership learned about our campaign, they immediately began fundraising drives in their communities. Their efforts included employee contributions, community donations, and matching company contributions." In total, the telephone companies, their employees, and their customers contributed \$43,987, with an additional \$15,000 donated by FRED.

"The Shanksville Volunteer Fire Department is overwhelmed by the generosity," Shanksville Fire Chief Terry Shaffer said. "We are looking forward to meeting some of the fundraisers and using the money to help our community fire department." The funds will help the volunteer fire department pay for a new tanker truck, which will be dedicated in memory of those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. Once the tanker truck is delivered in late spring, individuals representing the OPASTCO membership will visit Shanksville to present the donation to Shaffer.

"With the OPASTCO membership comprised mainly of independent telecommunications companies located in rural areas throughout the U.S. and Canada, the decision to support this rural town was not a difficult one," Buchanan said. "In the face of tragedy, Shanksville came together as a community, and we are proud to salute their efforts."

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September 11 Fund Donation to Shanksville, Pa./2-2-2

Note to Editors: The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) represents more than 500, small, independently owned, local telecommunications companies serving primarily rural areas of the United States and Canada. The association has an affiliate 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED). Visit the FRED Web site at www.fred.org.

OPASTCO membership includes both commercial companies and cooperatives, which range in size from fewer than 100 to 100,000 access lines and collectively serve more than 2.6 million customers. OPASTCO represents rural telecommunications interests before federal regulatory bodies and Congress, provides publications, and holds two conventions annually in January and July of each year, addressing the needs of the small telecommunications industry. Visit the OPASTCO Web site at www.opastco.org.