



OPASTCO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**OPASTCO'S 46th ANNUAL WINTER CONVENTION RECOGNIZES
GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY, ASSOCIATE MEMBER ACHIEVEMENT**

PTCI's Strecker, CoBank's West Honored at Annual Awards Breakfast

KOLOA, HAWAII – The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) today honored grassroots advocacy and associate member contributions at its annual awards breakfast at the 46th Annual OPASTCO Winter Convention at the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa. OPASTCO's outgoing board members also were recognized at the breakfast for their service, as were the recipients of grants and other distinctions from the Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED) and honorees of this year's Innovations Showcase.

This year's recipient of the OPASTCO Grassroots Advocacy Excellence Award is Ron Strecker of Panhandle Telephone Cooperative, Inc. (PTCI), in Guymon, Okla. As PTCI's chief executive officer, Strecker has devoted considerable time and resources toward advancing PTCI and the greater rural telecommunications industry's profile before state and federal regulators and legislators. He also has emerged as a leader within the OPASTCO membership in devising strategies for organizing grassroots advocacy efforts and campaigns.

As this year's recipient of the OPASTCO Associate Member Distinguished Service Award, Rob West, senior vice president and manager of CoBank's communications division and communications and energy banking group, has long established a strong commitment to rural America's telecom companies and the communities that they connect. West has served as president of FRED and as a participant and chairman of several OPASTCO committees, including the Associate Member and Education committees.

This year's outgoing members of the OPASTCO Board of Directors include Gene South of Lakedale Telephone Company; Robert DeBroux of TDS Telecom; John Granger of Mapcom Systems; James Kail of Laurel Highland Telephone Company; Ben Foster of Twin Valley Telephone; Michael Urdahl of Signal Telecom Partners; and Godfrey Enjady of Mescalero Apache Telecom, Inc.. OPASTCO wishes to extend its sincerest thanks for their service and leadership on behalf of the board and the membership as a whole.

FRED's awards presentation spotlighted the most recent recipients of Ethyl and Technology Grants, which help fund educational and community development projects in FRED-member service areas, as well as programs such as the 2009 Leadership Through Learning Program, which again will bring outstanding rural

OPASTCO Convention Recognizes Grassroots, Associate Member Achievement / 2-2-2

high school students to Washington, D.C., this March for a week of unparalleled educational and cultural experiences and opportunities. The foundation also thanked its president, Doug Dougherty of the Illinois Telecommunications Association, for his dedication and service during the past year. FRED's president for 2009 is Ellen Classen of the Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative (RTFC).

This year's Innovations Showcase again recognized the latest and greatest in product and service innovations achieved by OPASTCO members companies. First place was awarded to Mapcom Systems; second place to Ixia; and third place to Martin Group.

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Note to Editors: The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) represents more than 600 small, independently owned, local telecommunications companies serving primarily rural areas of the United States and Canada. 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 3.5 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. The association has an affiliate 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED). Visit the OPASTCO Website at www.opastco.org.