



**OPASTCO**

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## **OPASTCO 47th ANNUAL WINTER CONVENTION MAPS OUT THE POTENTIAL FOR A ROBUST RURAL BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE**

*OPASTCO Leadership Announced; Broadband and Economic Opportunities Abound*

SAN DIEGO – The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) yesterday held the Second General Session of its 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Winter Convention at the Hotel del Coronado in Coronado, Calif. On the agenda for the convention's final day was a discussion on the activities of the Broadband Forum and how its activities affect and benefit OPASTCO members; a panel on broadband stimulus and the new opportunities for carriers; an uplifting discussion on the state of the country's economy; an announcement of the new OPASTCO leadership for 2010, and the Leadership Address. The General Session was followed by a luncheon featuring special guest speaker Harry Patz, Microsoft's vice president for communications.

Monte R. Lee's Lynn Merrill and Guest Speaker Robin Mersh, COO of the Broadband Forum, shared how OPASTCO's involvement in the technical organization has made significant contributions to how the Broadband Forum looks at its compliance specifications, broadband deployment, and the positions it takes when filing comments with the FCC. "For the Broadband Forum, OPASTCO is the voice of small carriers and rural areas," said Lynn Merrill, who is OPASTCO's representative at the Broadband Forum. Mersh urged OPASTCO members to take advantage of the many resources available through the Broadband Forum, including white papers on topics such as the "IP/MPLS Value Proposition," technical releases, and tutorials such as "MPLS in Mobile Backhaul." Mersh's appearance was sponsored by the Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED).

JSI's Steve Meltzer moderated a panel on broadband stimulus. Panelists included RUS Chief of Staff Lisa Zaina, LICT Corp's Evelyn Jerden and JSI's John Kuykendall. Reiterating RUS Administrator Jonathan Adelstein's message to OPASTCO members on Monday, Zaina explained "The first NOFA was a real learning experience for us. This second NOFA is a whole new broadband application plan. The changes we made reflect concerns you made in the first round." Jerden, whose company was awarded funds in the first round, has looked at the requirements for the second round and urged OPASTCO members to reapply for round two. "There is a huge, huge difference in eligibility. I urge everyone that doesn't have fiber to the home to take a look at their farthest customers and start working with their consultants. Kuykendall, who noted the new separation between RUS and NTIA for the second round, pointed out "NTIA's focus is on the middle mile and

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critical communities. NTIA is not suited for rural telephone companies. RUS is now, with its 75 percent grant plus 25 percent loan awards, and is even better focused on telcos.”

Economist Dr. Marci Rossell, sponsored by CoBank, gave a humorous, enlightening and entertaining look at America’s economy compared to the world and provided examples of how our country already is out of the recession. “The U.S. entered the recovery phase three to four months ago.” Stating that it might not feel like it yet because we commonly think of job growth as what cures a recession, Rossell reframed the idea. “Jobs do not create recovery. Recovery creates jobs and it takes time.” November 2009’s revised job figures show that 4,000 jobs were created and that the process has begun.

The Second General Session ended with the announcement of OPASTCO’s new officers and the new chairman’s leadership address. The 2010 Executive Committee is Rhonda Armstrong of Sebastian Corporation as the non-officer board representative, Horizon Telcom’s Pete Holland as treasurer, Ace Communications’ Mike Osborne as second vice chairman, OmniTel Communications’ Ronald Laudner Jr. as first vice chairman, and Pioneer Communications’ Catherine Moyer as the 2010 chairman.

During her leadership address, Moyer told the audience “My company belongs to a large number of associations, and these associations too are more alike than different. While there are different means to an end, we fight much more effectively together than apart. I will look for every opportunity to form alliances, even with entities that up to now we have had nothing in common. As technology continues to evolve, as we approach this world in which the size of the broadband pipe into a home is the most important thing, and the applications that run over the pipe, voice included, is secondary, our alliances will come in new, and perhaps as of now, unforeseen places. Building alliances will make our voice stronger and louder, especially in the place in which we need it most, Washington, D.C.”

Luncheon Special Keynote Speaker Harry Patz, vice president of Communications Sector North America for Microsoft, addressed how today’s communications and media companies are targeting a new generation of customers and how Microsoft’s “three screens and a cloud” vision fits in. Three screens and a cloud connect user experiences and deliver them seamlessly across multiple environments, interfaces, and devices through cloud-based services. “Microsoft is delighted to have had the opportunity to share our vision with the OPASTCO membership,” said Patz. “Despite the recent economic challenges, we continue to see unprecedented innovation in the high tech and communications industries, and consumers today are being offered exciting new products and services that enable them to stay connected to people and information anytime, anywhere, across a wide range of devices.”

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**Note to Editors:** The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) represents more than 525 small, independently owned, local telecommunications companies serving primarily rural areas of the United States and Canada. OPASTCO membership includes both

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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 Web site at [www.opastco.org](http://www.opastco.org).