



**OPASTCO**

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**OPASTCO 49th ANNUAL WINTER CONVENTION ENCOUNTERS THE MAGIC OF BROADBAND  
IN WALT DISNEY WORLD®**

*First General Session Explores Changing Demographics of Telecom,  
Update on Save Rural Broadband Campaign*

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FLA. – The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) today held the First General Session of its 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Winter Convention at Disney's Contemporary Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. More than 400 registrant and guest attendees are on hand for four days of networking and educational opportunities focusing on how the ubiquity of broadband and recent reforms to the Universal Service Fund (USF) and intercarrier compensation (ICC) are setting the course for rural telecommunications' next chapter.

The agenda for the first general session included a brief welcome by OPASTCO President John Rose and 2011 OPASTCO Chairman Ron Laudner of OmniTel Communications in Nora Springs, Iowa. Former Senator Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) spoke on behalf of the Save Rural Broadband campaign, and the convention's keynote speech was delivered by Dr. James H. Johnson, Jr., of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). Dr. Johnson's appearance was sponsored by the Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative (RTFC). This winter's agenda is made possible by the generosity of the convention's Premier Sponsors: Platinum Sponsors CoBank, Ericsson and OmniTel Communications; Gold Sponsor RTFC; and Bronze Sponsor John Staurulakis, Inc. (JSI).

The session opened with a brief welcome and update from OPASTCO President John Rose, who noted that OPASTCO's staff in Washington, D.C., remains continuously engaged with the FCC and Congress on advocating for rural interests despite the recent FCC order reforming rules governing USF and ICC. OPASTCO also continues to present a unified message with its association counterparts the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA) and the Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA). "I've always been proud of our industry, and what we're capable of," added 2011 OPASTCO Chairman Ron Laudner during his opening remarks. The dramatic technological changes that have transformed telecommunications remain nonetheless daunting for rural providers, but Laudner reminded those in attendance that the pioneers of rural telecommunications in the 20<sup>th</sup> century met with so much success because they had adapted to what was then a leading-edge technology.

“America is a stronger country when we're all connected,” stated Sen. Byron Dorgan. As OPASTCO members and their colleagues throughout the rural telecom industry are well aware, last fall's USF/ICC order adopted by the FCC precariously positions rural providers and, moreover, the communities they serve. The Save Rural Broadband campaign, a joint effort by OPASTCO, NTCA and WTA, continues to advocate for support mechanisms that will embrace robust, advanced technologies and ensure the viability and sustainability of rural communications networks. “The potential of pulling the rug out from under rural America, and leaving you on the wrong side of the digital divide, means that you won't be able to recover economically,” stressed Sen. Dorgan. “Where is the plan for rural America? It's not there. And that's a big, serious problem.”

Dr. James H. Johnson, Jr.'s keynote address concluded the first general session. Dr. Johnson, the William Rand Kenan, Jr. Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship and Strategy at UNC-CH, discussed how changing demographics throughout the U.S. will continue to transform all industry sectors, including rural telecommunications. In short, rural telecommunications providers will need to rethink their recruiting strategies in order to ensure that they remain competitive in an increasingly global marketplace. This will include recruiting younger workers, as well as placing more emphasis on recruiting talented women and professionals of different ethnicity or cultural background. “If you ignore [these demographic shifts], you ignore them at your own peril,” said Dr. Johnson. Those companies that choose to adapt, however, will find themselves at a far better advantage than their competitors.

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The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) represents more than 460 small, 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 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](http://www.opastco.org).