

SkyBest Joins with Verizon Wireless to Deliver 4G LTE Mobile Broadband to Rural Areas

Written by Steve Frank
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SkyBest Communications, Inc. announced today that it has entered into an agreement with Verizon Wireless as part of Clear Stream Communications, LLC. to participate in Verizon's LTE (Long Term Evolution) in Rural America Program. Through this program, Clear Stream customers will have access to a 4G LTE network, the state-of-the-art global standard for high-speed wireless data services.

Clear Stream Communications, LLC., composed of SkyBest, Wilkes Telecommunications, Piedmont Communications and Carolina West Wireless, will lease Verizon Wireless' 700 MHz upper C block wireless spectrum in the companies' service areas where Verizon Wireless has not already constructed wireless network facilities. Verizon Wireless and Clear Stream will collaboratively build and operate a 4G LTE network using Clear Stream tower and backhaul assets and Verizon Wireless' core 4G LTE equipment.

The consortium currently serves customers in Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, Wilkes, Surry, Caldwell, Catawba, Burke and Alexander counties.

In addition to 4G LTE coverage in their local service area, Clear Stream customers will have access to Verizon Wireless' 4G LTE network nationwide and those of other rural carriers in the program. Verizon Wireless customers also will be able to roam on 4G LTE networks built by program participants.

"Our mission at SkyBest has always been to bring the latest in telecommunications technology to our customers, and we're ready to take a giant leap forward to secure access to 4G technology through this program," said SkyBest Chief Executive Officer Jimmy Blevins.

"This consortium represents the latest in a series of productive endeavors we have forged with Wilkes and Piedmont to deliver state-of-the-art services to the region. By working with Verizon, we can accelerate the deployment of 4G and be poised to address the future needs of our customers. We feel this is a perfect complement to our fiber optic network and a natural progression for our current service offering."

Construction of the 4G LTE network in northwestern North Carolina will begin in 2012. Service will be widely available throughout the consortium's footprint by the end of 2013.

The regional consortium represents one of a handful of rural carriers who have announced their participation in the LTE in Rural America Program. Other carriers--Bluegrass Cellular, Cellcom, Cross Wireless, Pioneer Cellular, Strata Networks and Thumb Wireless--have leased spectrum covering, in total, more than 1.8 million people and nearly 58,000 square miles in Kentucky, Oklahoma, Michigan, Wisconsin and Utah.

"We are extremely pleased to have Clear Stream join the LTE in Rural America program. Together our companies will be the first to offer a 4G LTE high speed mobile data network in rural northwestern North Carolina," said Molly Feldman, VP of Business Development for Verizon Wireless.

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Verizon Wireless launched its 4G LTE network last December in 38 markets, covering one-third of all Americans, and in more than 60 commercial airports. The company will expand its 4G LTE network to an additional 140 markets by the end of 2011, and plans to cover its entire 3G footprint with 4G LTE by the end of 2013.

The 4G LTE network provides speeds up to 10 times faster than current 3G networks, making it the fastest mobile network in America for downloading songs and movies, video conferencing, multiplayer gaming and more.

Based in West Jefferson, SkyBest Communications is a wholly-owned subsidiary of SkyLine Membership Corporation, and provides a variety of telecommunications services. These range from basic dial tone services and enhanced calling features like Caller ID and Voice Mail to long-distance, broadband Internet, business systems, security systems and digital TV.