Keynotes on Day One Emphasize Importance of 5G, SDN and OpenRAN

The importance of high-speed connectivity and widely available broadband networks was made exceedingly clear when millions of workers and students were forced to remotely access mission-critical business and educational resources in reaction to the global pandemic. Throughout Day One of The 2020 INCOMPAS Show, a virtual event taking place September 14-16 via the ConnectIN portal, several telecom industry thought leaders and policymakers, speaking at the numerous sessions and keynotes, discussed the important role technology played in keeping the country connected during those unprecedented times, as well as what must be done by technology providers and legislators to meet the future needs of businesses and consumers.

“INCOMPAS stands for competition, and our work to make the communications market more competitive could not have been more effectively affirmed, and more clearly, than by the response to meeting the need for broadband during this pandemic,” said INCOMPAS CEO Chip Pickering, during his opening remarks. “This week you will hear how critical broadband is needed today, and how our companies have responded to the needs of their customers and communities, as well as what is needed to ensure we meet the demands of the future.”

(Continued on page 4)
Multiple Wavelengths up to 100 Gbps
Over 90 communities served
Extensive 11,500+ mile self-healing, diverse fiber network
Connectivity to regional, national and global carriers
Switched and dedicated Ethernet capable
Dedicated and shared Internet options
Lit buildings and custom builds
Data Centers & Carrier POPs: Cheyenne, Chicago, Denver, Des Moines, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Omaha, Angola, Sioux City, St. Louis, and more
Nebraska statewide coverage - multiple routes with ability to bypass Omaha

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FirstLight Announces Large Dark Fiber Sale

FirstLight, a leading provider of fiber-optic data, internet, data center, cloud and voice services to carrier and enterprise customers throughout the Northeast and mid-Atlantic, has been selected for a high-capacity, long-haul dark fiber solution in its regional market. The dark fiber path traverses from the Lynn, Mass., landing station, across the state and extends into Eastern New York, making this one of FirstLight’s most expansive, single dark fiber sales to date.

The solution reportedly will provide diverse long-haul and metro fiber from a cable head end in Northeastern Massachusetts to Albany, N.Y., to ensure reliability and redundancy. While FirstLight is not disclosing the customer’s name, large hyperscale cloud providers and carriers would likely be interested in leveraging this unique route.

“Customer needs are shifting when it comes to connectivity in today’s environment,” said Patrick Coughlin, chief development officer at FirstLight. “Organizations are no longer looking for gigabits of capacity, but rather terabits on multiple diverse paths to keep pace with digital transformation and remain competitive. FirstLight’s owned infrastructure, scalable capacity on unique routes and ability to provision services quickly positions us to be the provider of choice for enterprises and carriers that require robust connectivity solutions.”

Exclusively owned and operated by FirstLight, the network is designed for ultra-high availability to support today’s heavily connected business environment. FirstLight’s dark fiber solutions allow organizations with dynamic bandwidth needs, that have the in-house resources and expertise to manage a dark fiber network, to leverage FirstLight’s superior fiber optic infrastructure to deliver connectivity using their own interfaces.

“At FirstLight, we pride ourselves on delivering high-quality, performance-oriented solutions in response to the needs of the market,” added Kurt Van Wagenen, president and CEO of FirstLight. “Our dark fiber solutions provide customers with the capacity and flexibility they need to meet demanding bandwidth requirements, along with the security and reliability for which FirstLight is known.”

Tilson Named to Inc. 5000 for 10th Consecutive Year

Tilson, a national network development and information infrastructure professional services firm based in Portland, Maine, has earned its 10th consecutive spot on the annual Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America. It is the only Maine-based company ever to rank 10 consecutive years. In the 38-year history of Inc. 5000, there have been only 113 companies that have made the list 10 times, a mere half a percent of listed companies, according to Inc. Media. As an honoree of the Inc. 5000, Tilson shares this prestigious ranking with organizations such as Microsoft, Intuit, Oracle, Zappos, Under Armour, Jamba Juice, Timberland, Clif Bar, Pandora and Patagonia.

“We’re incredibly proud to have executed on a decade of sustainable growth, and I’m deeply grateful to the employees of Tilson who have made this happen with their dedication to our mission,” said Tilson CEO Joshua Broder. “Our mission to build America’s information infrastructure and keep Americans connected has never been more important than it is right now.

While 2020 has been a challenging year in so many ways, America’s information infrastructure needs are greater than ever, and our ambition and growth goals are to meet those needs.”

Operating with nearly 600 employees across 20 locations nationwide, Tilson has experienced growth in excess of 200 percent, said the company. Continued growth plans for the coming years is underscored by its recent leadership additions including Alda Licis, vice president of Infrastructure, who formerly held various leadership positions at Zayo Group; Greg Edmondson, vice president of Network Development and former vice president of Telecom Solutions for Quanta Telecom; and Andy Spurgeon, vice president of Strategic Initiatives, previously chief of Operations for BroadbandUSA.

“The companies on this year’s Inc. 5000 come from nearly every realm of business,” said Inc. editor-in-chief Scott Omelianuk. “From health and software to media and hospitality, the 2020 list proves that no matter the sector, incredible growth is based on the foundations of tenacity and opportunism.”

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“Technology has made us more agile and resilient in response to this virus,” said Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), during the opening keynote address, “so we owe a debt of gratitude to the enterprising men and women who pushed the industry forward, like some of the people that are on this call today.”

Sen. Wicker spoke about the “government’s unprecedented response to the pandemic,” including the tough decision to shut down a roaring economy in the interest of public health and the various stages of stimulus relief.

Moving forward, Sen. Wicker stressed the importance of passing and funding the Broadband DATA (Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability) Act, which would require the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to change the way broadband data is collected, verified and reported. In hopes of addressing the remaining digital divides, the bill would require the FCC to collect and disseminate more granular and local broadband service availability data (broadband maps) from wired, fixed-wireless, satellite and mobile broadband providers.

Wicker also mentioned his work along with Sen. Brian Schatz, (D-Hawaii) to pass the CONNECT for Health Act, which seeks to create an opening for more healthcare providers to incorporate telemedicine into their practices.

“Telehealth will revolutionize healthcare delivery to this country,” said Sen. Wicker, “and there is no better time than now, when millions of patients have to stay home for their own safety and health concerns.”

5G networks, in particular, will play an important role in both closing digital divides and enabling technologies, such as telehealth, noted Michael Dell, chairman and CEO of Dell Technologies and fellow morning keynote speaker.

“5G represents the most transformative change in our generation,” said Dell. “It’s not about making phone calls faster. It’s about connecting things and making an intelligent world through enormous amounts of data. It’s not just an evolution of 4G.”

Achieving the potential of 5G, however, will require new distributed architectures using software-defined networks and a widespread embracing of open and interoperable hardware versus proprietary systems, said Dell. He pointed to the work around the OpenRAN initiative, which seeks to design and build Radio Access Network (RAN) solutions based on general-purpose, vendor-neutral hardware and software-defined technology. Dell referenced VMware’s ongoing efforts to help DISH build the nation’s first cloud-native 5G network on OpenRAN technology.

“This is really a game-changer for U.S. 5G leadership and shows that open, interoperable, software-defined 5G is not pie in the sky,” said Dell. “It is actually here now.”

These important discussions continue today, with Day 2 morning keynote presentations from Rep. James Clyburn (D-S.C.), Rep. Mike Doyle (D-Pa.), FCC Chairman Ajit Pai, FCC Commissioners Brendan Carr and Geoffrey Starks, and Ligado CEO Doug Smith. Head to the ConnectIN portal for details and times.

DHS Selects MetTel for Managed Security, Primary Internet Access Provider

MetTel, a digital transformation and communications company, today announced that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the federal agency charged with securing the nation, has selected the company for managed security services nationwide and as its primary internet access provider.

MetTel’s selection for the DHS IP service – Primary Network EIS task order – is MetTel’s third significant award from a cabinet-level agency under the General Service Administration’s (GSA) Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions (EIS) contract. This newest task order follows an award for the Social Security Administration earlier this year. MetTel will provide Mission Essential Functions to DHS, helping to safeguard DHS internal networks and systems against ever-evolving security threats.

The MetTel awarded DHS-IPS-Primary Network will provide real-time information technology and communications operations and support to the DHS throughout the 50 states and U.S. territories of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands.

“The U.S. Department of Homeland Security had stringent requirements for this internet requirement contractually managed by the Defense Information Technology Contracting Organization,” said Robert Dapkiewicz, general manager and senior vice president of MetTel Federal. “MetTel was the lowest cost to the government with a fully compliant technical proposal, which is especially important because the government has an ever-growing need to secure high-performing communications technology at the best price. This, and all of our wins, past and future, are built on the foundation put in place by our federal practice’s founder, the late Diana Gowen.”

As part of the contract with the UDHIS, MetTel specifically will provide IP service at multiple locations at bandwidth capacity of up to 10 gigabits per second; a managed security service solution; and access to the MetTel EIS Federal Portal, which delivers to DHS real-time visibility to the latest technology to monitor and access reporting and performance details on the IP services delivered via the MetTel network.

During the last 18 months, MetTel has announced IT communications projects with a range of government clients, including the City of Phoenix, The United States Marine Corps, The Pentagon and the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA).
In this competitive world, it helps to have a partner you can rely on for the connectivity solutions you need to grow your business and serve your customers. Whether it is cell tower and small cell backhaul, construction services or connections to central offices, data centers, carrier hotels or end users FirstLight is that partner.

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Miles of Fiber: ~20,000 | Lit Locations: ~9,000 on-net and ~30,000 within close proximity
ZenFi Networks and Telia Carrier announced a strategic partnership to deliver enhanced backbone connectivity to wholesale and enterprise customers throughout the New York and New Jersey metro region. The partnership enables ZenFi Networks to offer expanded digital capabilities across its dense footprint through seamless and cost-efficient connections to all major cloud providers through Telia Carrier’s global IP backbone.

The collaboration reportedly enhances ZenFi Networks’ footprint outside of the New York City and New Jersey metro region, empowering customers to expand their reach to more than 300 points of presence in 120 global markets. The partnership also gives Telia Carrier access to ZenFi Networks’ expansive fiber footprint, spanning more than 1,100 route miles, to provide diverse access to enterprise destinations across New York and New Jersey, a market with one of the world’s densest concentrations of commercial business.

“Like Telia Carrier, ZenFi Networks is focused on the customer experience,” said Rob Pulkownik, Telia Carrier’s head of Channel Sales. “We’ve found that the core values of the two companies are in alignment. Both organizations focus on the customer with rapid delivery, collaboration and transparency as guiding principles. The complementary nature of ZenFi Networks’ metro NYC footprint and Telia Carrier’s number one global IP backbone adds up to a consistently positive experience for our shared customer base.”

The collaboration leverages both firms’ technology and infrastructure to ensure quick deployments, to increase scalability and reduce downtime while delivering diversity and high levels of resilience.

“We have had a long-standing relationship with Telia Carrier and are excited for the evolution of our partnership. Our mutual customer-centric values create a collaboration that better serves our customers,” said Walter Cannon, vice president of Business Development at ZenFi Networks. “Telia Carrier’s expanded global reach complements ZenFi Networks’ ability to offer enhanced solutions and services to our channel partners, our wholesale customers and enterprise businesses within and beyond our regional footprint.”
Internet and Cell Services Increasing in Value, According to ShareTracker Survey

ShareTracker has released new data on subscription "switchers," analyzing internet, TV and cell spending during the last 18 months. The results should come as welcomed news to service providers.

The survey found that subscribers who switched to new internet and cell providers in 2020 actually paid more per month on average for the new service than they did for the previous service. In contrast, in 2019, these "switchers" reduced costs by switching. Likewise, pay TV switchers' savings in 2020 declined to $11 per month from nearly $20 per month in 2019.

On the whole, internet customers are switching to services that likely provide more speed for a similar monthly expense, ShareTracker analysts surmised. This is likely due to increased work-from-home orders due to COVID-19 quarantines. Similarly, the smaller savings with pay TV are due to people increasing, or keeping, entertainment options.

Interestingly, respondents 18 to 34 years of age who switched paid 6 percent more for internet in the second quarter of 2020 and 9 percent more in the first quarter. Altogether, this group paid 10 percent less in 2019.

"Switchers are increasing spend on necessities, most likely to improve their work-from-home experience," said ShareTracker analysts. "This demographic also had an increase in pay TV spending when switching, again reflecting a need to be entertained while in quarantine."

Also in the second quarter of 2020, cell service switchers aged 18 to 34 paid an average of $6 more for their new service than non-switchers, notably in lower-priced brands, while shrinking the price differences between switch/no-switch among the "Big 3."

A more sobering stat is the fact that while 2Q20 cell switchers aged 18 to 34 paid more for their new services, overall spending has been trending downward since 2019, ShareTracker figures show.

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**Average Monthly Savings (Increase) - all Switchers**

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Source: ShareTracker

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Remote Care Partners Announces Financing Program for Health Care Customers

Tampa, Fla.-based Remote Care Partners, Inc. (RCP), provider of a cloud-based platform for population and remote care program management, announced that it has signed an agreement with Blue Elephant Capital Management that provides 12-month financing to health-care organizations for remote patient monitoring devices deployed by RCP. This financing program is expected to help RCP generate $900 million in incremental revenue and $500 million in net revenue for its healthcare partners.

“The digital transformation of healthcare is of utmost interest to providers, patients and policy makers. The growing interest in remote care management evidences this trend,” said RCP CEO Gregg Smith. “Our business is to help healthcare providers adopt remote care management easily and without upfront investment, thereby accelerating rapid adoption to improve patient health outcomes and reduce healthcare system costs. Our partnership with Blue Elephant enables health-care providers to generate positive cash flow beginning with patient one in month one. The RCP platform and support services make it incredibly easy for healthcare providers to deploy remote patient monitoring and make it a meaningful part of their business models.”

Because Medicare does not provide upfront reimbursement to healthcare organizations for remote care medical devices, the difficult question of who pays for the upfront purchase of such devices can be an obstacle to deployment. The Blue Elephant/RCP financing covers 100% of the equipment cost, so no healthcare organization needs to deploy its scarce capital to immediately deploy remote care management services.

Today, RCP’s healthcare organization partners average more than $150 per month in gross revenues per patient and almost $100 per patient in net revenues after paying for RCP services and the equipment financing. At the end of the 12-month financing period, net monthly revenues are expected to increase by more than $20 per patient to almost $120 per patient per month.

“Part of our investment process is to always start off by asking, ‘What problem is this solving?’” said Kent MacWilliams, senior portfolio manager at Blue Elephant. “When Gregg and the team at RCP approached us about developing a program, they clearly laid out the obstacles for healthcare organizations of all sizes to achieve scale in remote care management, particularly in this economic environment. By providing a complete solution that includes financing for devices and systematic patient onboarding, RCP has resolved a key issue for their healthcare providers.”

Windstream Recognized for Support of Veterans

Advanced network communications and technology solutions provider Windstream continues to win accolades for its initiatives to hire and support military veterans. Windstream ranked tenth on this year’s “Best for Vets: Employers” survey by Military Times. Windstream has appeared in the list’s top 15 for the last four years. A total of 164 organizations submitted responses to the “Best for Vets: Employers” survey that ran from March to July of this year, and 144 made the list. The survey asked more than 100 questions seeking detailed information based on each company’s policies and practices related to veteran recruitment and retention, support for translation of military skills to civilian credentials, support for military spouse employment and accommodations for members of the National Guard and reserves.

Windstream also made this year’s “Best of the Best Top Veteran-Friendly Companies” list issued by U.S. Veterans Magazine for the fourth consecutive year. And for the first time, Windstream was named to U.S. Veterans Magazine’s list of “Top Supplier Diversity Programs.” The magazine polled hundreds of Fortune 1000 companies for this year’s “Best of the Best” evaluations. The annual review is an evaluation of the nation’s employers, initiatives, government agencies and educational institutions.

These non-biased studies are valuable resources for job-seekers, business owners, students, consumers, senior management, business associations, employment agencies and consumer groups, said Windstream.

“Windstream is honored that our ongoing initiative to hire and support military veterans continues to win recognition,” said Mary Michaels, chief human resources officer for Windstream. “We are especially proud of making U.S. Veterans Magazine’s list of Top Supplier Diversity Programs’ for the first time. This new ranking speaks to our efforts to expand a program that recognizes both the job skills and the public service of military veterans.”

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Tilson Promotes Kelly Brewer to COO; Expands Role of CIO Mike Dow

Tilson, a national network development and information infrastructure professional services firm, announced the promotion of Kelly Brewer to chief operating officer (COO) along with Mike Dow’s new role as Chief Innovation Officer, in addition to his current role as Chief Information Officer.

As COO, Brewer will lead Tilson’s ongoing operational growth and oversee more than 500 professionals who design, build, operate and maintain the network infrastructure for telecom carrier, utility and government clients across the country. Brewer’s expanded responsibilities include oversight and strategic integration of Tilson’s high-performing Consulting Division. Dow, meanwhile, in his new role will lead Tilson’s innovation efforts, which include research, development and commercialization initiatives for Tilson’s tool set and service offerings.

Previously, Brewer served as executive vice president of Telecommunications, where she led Tilson’s telecom units and oversaw the strategic planning and business development of Tilson’s largest division. Brewer joined the company in 2011 and established and led Tilson’s self-performing tower construction and engineering divisions serving wireline, wireless and utility customers. Her leadership helped drive Tilson’s double- and triple-digit growth percentages, particularly in the areas of engineering and construction self-performance capability.

“Kelly is a trailblazer and major contributor to Tilson’s incredible growth,” said Tilson CEO Josh Broder. “Since joining the team, Kelly has been instrumental in scaling up our wireless construction, engineering and OSP divisions, putting Tilson among the top industry leaders.”

As Chief Innovation Officer, Dow will leverage Tilson’s current strategic and academic partnerships, while pursuing new partnerships with other leaders in the information infrastructure innovation space – including key Tilson vendors and employees. Through this effort, Tilson will continue to invest in leveraging artificial intelligence, cloud computing and integrated systems for infrastructure monitoring and management.

“Mike has been crucial to every stage of Tilson’s growth: founding the company, leading our construction IT team and scaling our consulting practice,” said Broder. “The creation of our first chief innovation officer position reflects our increased focus on technology, innovation and the future of information infrastructure. Mike’s entrepreneurial spirit, coupled with his ability to adapt and pivot quickly in emerging markets has been extraordinary and make him ideally suited to lead Tilson’s new structured and disciplined approach to its innovation efforts.”

Bandwidth, NC State University Partner for Robocalling Study

New research from North Carolina State University (NCSU) has recently debunked some common misconceptions about robocalling. Last year, Bandwidth and NCSU partnered on a research study – the results of which are published in the paper, “Who’s Calling? Characterizing Robocalls through Audio and Metadata Analysis” – whereby Bandwidth provided the university with the use of a SIP trunk and 66,000 phone numbers that had been disconnected by Bandwidth’s fraud mitigation team for violations of the company’s Acceptable Use Policy. The study, which ran from February 2019 to January 2020, allowed the NCSU research team to collect data on various traffic patterns through call detail records (CDR) and SIP signaling.

One of the most surprising results of the 11-month study was that the number of fraudulent robocalling campaigns didn’t increase over time, instead remaining steady for the duration of the study. This finding was contrary to the commonly held understanding that robocalling was on the rise prior to the global shutdowns caused by COVID-19. Also contrary to the warnings against answering suspicious calls for fear of getting even more calls as a result, there was no increase in the volume of calls after they were answered.

In the industry’s push toward reestablishing trust in the communications between legitimate businesses and their customers, Bandwidth has taken an active and influential role. The company implemented a STIR/SHAKEN solution on its Tier-1 network at the end of 2019 and has completed interoperability with major carriers such as Verizon, T-Mobile and Comcast to allow the exchange of traffic. The FCC requires service providers to implement STIR/SHAKEN by June 30, 2021.

“We want to abolish robocalling entirely, and a project of this scope puts us one step closer to achieving (Bandwidth continued pg 11)
that,” said David Morken, founder and CEO of Bandwidth. “NC State’s research has expanded our understanding of the origins and behavior of fraudulent traffic traversing the world’s telecom networks. This research helps us examine the differences between unlawful robocalling campaigns and legitimate voice traffic. We believe data-driven analysis like this will one day make it easier for carriers and service providers to traceback the source of these fraudulent calls and intervene with call blocking techniques faster.”

“What was exciting was that we were able to identify calls that were identical or nearly identical, allowing us to group calls into groups that were clearly all affiliated with a single campaign,” said Brad Reaves, co-author of a paper on the work and an assistant professor of computer science at NC State. “So, effectively you can narrow down a big chunk of robocalls to only a few campaigns. And you can track those down. That’s a subject we’ll be discussing at greater length in the future.”

Yesterday, FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks announced the honorees of the inaugural Digital Opportunity Equity Recognition (DOER) Program, which was created to acknowledge the tireless efforts of Americans working to close the digital divide in communities without access to affordable, reliable broadband. Among the honorees is INCOMPAS member Starry Inc.

An innovative wideband hybrid wireless ISP, Starry concentrated on closing the digital divide in densely populated urban communities by launching Starry Connect in 2018. For $15 per month, residents living in their Connect communities across Boston, New York City, Denver and Los Angeles receive 30 Mbps internet access with no data caps or long-term contracts. At the time when Starry’s application for the honors was submitted, more than 16,000 units of public and affordable housing participated in the Starry Connect program.

“From rural areas to urban corridors, students to seniors, to say this year’s DOER honorees are a stellar group is an understatement,” said Commissioner Starks. “I am immensely proud of the work Americans are doing across this country to connect those who are being left behind.”

The program honorees will be recognized at a virtual reception on October 1 at noon ET.
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