

WCTA expanding high-speed internet service



West Central Telephone Association has two locations: in Sebek, above, and in Menahga, below.



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By Matthew Johnson

West Central Telephone Association (WCTA) plans to continue expanding its broadband, or high-speed internet, service this spring, according to WCTA Marketing Director Geri Salmela.

The expansion began in 2015 when WCTA received four “Border to Border Broadband” grants. Since then, the area leader in fiber optic services has expanded its broadband network into rural Wadena, Otter Tail and Todd counties. And about 400 additional customers have also been added, according to Salmela, with expansion continuing in northern Todd County this spring.

“These people didn’t have broadband access at all, and in some cases their phone service wasn’t even reliable enough to complete a call,” she said.

WCTA will begin pre-wiring for the broadband installation on the rural, southwest side of Staples at the outset of the spring construction season. When construction is complete in the fall, WCTA should have the opportunity to start connecting even more customers to broadband as early as December or the beginning of January 2020. The high-speed internet service reaches speeds of up to 1 Gig, or 1,000 Megabits per second (Mbps), Salmela said.

In addition to expanding its high-speed, broadband internet service base, WCTA has also been expanding its services to businesses, as well. This includes the expansion into network administration, disaster planning, computer repairs/sales and service, on-site visits and anti-virus/anti-malware protection.

While reporting on these changes in service, Salmela noted, “One thing that has not changed is our commitment to our members.”

All WCTA services are provided over fiber optic cable, and new members can expect high-speed internet speeds of up to 1 Gig (1,000 Mbps), TV service that includes High Definition (HD), Cloud DVR that keeps record of recordings even if one’s set-top box breaks, hyperlocal weather and radar with the touch of a button, and RestartTV that allows one to start watching a show from the beginning.

WCTA telephone service includes voicemail capabilities and telemarketer call screening that eliminates Robo calls.

WCTA also provides Sidekick Assist, which provides personal security and the availability of self-monitored or 24/7 third party monitoring. This includes the incorporation of emergency medical pendants.

Home security services that are either self-monitored or 24/7 professionally monitored are also available from WCTA. The fiber optic cooperative installs the Honeywell Lyric brand of security system, which includes security panels, temperature control, motion sensors, water/leak detection, ring doorbells, cameras and more.

In addition, WCTA installs and maintains business phone systems; accesses control locks for businesses and schools, and provides surveillance and HD camera monitoring systems.

WCTA is one of about 260 cooperatives across the nation serving customer needs for telephone and TV service, as well as broadband internet over a fiber optic network. The cooperative was formed in 1950 with the mission of “providing affordable telephone service to members. We’ve undergone several technology and plant upgrades over the years,” Salmela said.

Still, she stressed that there is one part of the business that does not change: “Our commitment to our members.”

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