

2021, Here We Come!

Dear Members,

Summer is approaching, but 2021 has already been a busy year. Last quarter we had our first virtual Annual Meeting and electronic vote. I was extremely happy with how everything worked. I think the only hitch in the entire project was our post offices were slow to get voting information to our members as they were still fighting the Covid backlogs. But, voting was done over a three week period, so it all worked out. The major voting spikes were centered on the days right after emails were sent to our members with their voting credentials. The opening day of voting, Sunday, February 21 we had 62% of our quorum met because members with valid emails on file received the information via email. The hard copy letters didn't start reaching people until the next day and some didn't get to areas until that following Friday. On March 4, another email reminder went out which caused another spike. In recent years we have really struggled to get our required 5% quorum. We exceeded the quorum on day two this year. On day twelve, we broke an all-time record high. We ended with 20.35% of members voting. We will be asking members to update their email addresses throughout the upcoming year so more efficiencies can be achieved. The virtual meeting was held Saturday, March 13. Our experience with this first virtual meeting and electronic voting has set the stage for future years. In 2020, the cost was almost \$27,000 and we had 137 members attend. Adding the cost of electronic voting to 2020 that cost would have been just over \$33,000. In 2021, the cost was less than half with the big cost being the electronic voting, Annual Reports (printing and mailing) and prize drawings. And for less than half we had 400% more members participate. Definitely a win win for shareholders as this cost savings will go to the bottom line which is allocated to our member's patronage accounts. The meeting was live streamed and recorded for later playback. We had one grand prize winner who won a year of free internet or phone service credit and we gave away 100- \$20 bill credits to take the place of the prior 100 turkeys and hams.



Jiff Buffington of our Mokane exchange retired after nine-years of service. David Horstman was elected to take his position. Adam Elley from the At-Large Southern area (Tebbetts, Mokane, Rhineland, and Big Spring exchanges) was re-elected as well as Jake Anderson from the Williamsburg exchange. I would like to thank the other candidates and I would like to thank all the members who took time to vote electronically to make this such a successful event.

In the ongoing effort to replace federal support, Phynx began building fiber internet in Montgomery City in March. The Economic Development Group and the City of Montgomery City had applied for a disaster recovery grant which was later re-purposed for broadband. The grant would not have built the entire city, and we would have had to compete with other providers to service the town. Instead, Phynx will be building the City and the Economic Development will again try to re-purpose those funds to get broadband to other rural areas of Montgomery County with the help of Phynx. With weather and crew availability permitting, we should be able to be finished in about one year. This adds another 1,360 homes passed to our serving territories. We will be connecting Montgomery City to the Kingdom network via Highway B which adds several more homes passed to those numbers.

All of the Phynx areas will of course help us reach our goal of replacing the expiring Universal Service Funds (USF). In April, we had already replaced 64.4% of the 2001-2019 average USF revenues. A year ago, we had replaced 35.3% so nearly a 30% increase in just one year. USF is currently scheduled to end December 2026, so with five years left to replace it, we are well underway.

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In April each year, we normally travel to Washington DC to meet with our congressional leaders. In 2020, that trip was cancelled due to Covid. In 2021, the face to face meetings were still not allowed due to Covid, but we were able to meet with congressional leaders and staff virtually. Our topic of focus this year was related to all the taxpayer dollars being allocated for broadband expansion. Covid highlighted just how far behind our nation is when it comes to connecting every American to the internet. Parents and children working from home during the pandemic, was a real challenge for our country. One that has to be addressed. Congress has/is releasing billions of dollars for this expansion. Our industry has been providing Internet since it's dawning, so we want to make sure as the money flows to carriers that the carrier receiving the funds have experience and are qualified to provide the service they claim they can in order to get the money. In addition, we want to make sure that monies are not given to a carrier to overbuild another carrier that provides the same service already. Kingdom hopes to possibly take advantage of some of these dollars to help expand and grow our territory. Our group met with the offices of: Representatives Blaine Luetkemeyer, Jason Smith, Sam Graves, Billy Long and Senators, Josh Hawley and Roy Blunt. We had hoped to make contact with Representative Vicky Hartzler, but that connection never happened. I have been doing this annually since 1999 and feel that we have always been well received by all of our congress members. Maybe next year we will get back to the face to face meetings but if not, the virtual meetings certainly were a great replacement.

In other news, in the past Kingdom has participated in the Foundation for Rural Services National Scholarship program, but this year we decided to bring it in house to guarantee we have scholarship winners. These students had to submit an application, a 500-800 word essay on "How your life would be affected if you didn't have access to the Internet?" In addition, they collected two letters of recommendations, and submitted 7 semesters of transcripts to the selection committee. We had seven submissions and awarded \$1,000 scholarships to August Cross, son of Leslie and Kyle Cross in Mokane exchange and Matthew Lampkin, son of Karen and Brett Lampkin in Rhineland exchange. August plans to attend college at the University of Central Missouri and Matthew has been accepted to Northwest Missouri State University. Congratulations to both and we hope they keep up the hard work! Hopefully we will be seeing you out and about at community events this year, but until then: enjoy your summer and keep your families safe and healthy!

Lifeline Assistance

Low Income or Disabled? Stretch Your Communication Dollars With Lifeline

The Lifeline Program

Eligible low-income and disabled consumers can receive up to \$24.00 in reductions on their bill as a credit against monthly charges. The disabled service program is only available for voice subscribers. The lifeline service program discount is based on both voice and broadband subscribers.

Eligibility

To qualify for Low-Income Lifeline in Missouri, you must participate in one of the following programs: MO HealthNet (f/k/a Medicaid), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA), Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit Program or have household income at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

To qualify for the Disabled Lifeline in Missouri, you must participate in one of the following programs: Federal Social Security Disability Benefits, Veterans Administration Disability Benefits, State Blind Pension, and State Aid to Blind Persons or State Supplemental Disability Assistance.

The Benefits

Qualifying consumers will receive a discount on home phone service, which includes voice grade access to the public switched network, single-party service, access to emergency services, access to operator services, access to inter-exchange service, access to directory assistance, and voluntary total toll blocking, which prevents the placement of any long distance calls OR a service bundle of home phone service and broadband internet.

For further details, call to speak with a Customer Service Representative or visit our website at: kingdomtelco.com