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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2012

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Committee Members Needed

As a member of West Central Telephone Association, you are eligible to serve on the Nominations and Election Committee. Members of the committee are responsible for appointing qualified candidates to run for directorship, collecting ballots, and verifying election results at the annual meeting held in May.

If you are interested in serving as a committee member, please contact West Central at 218-837-5151 before February 10, 2012. You may also express your interest by emailing tonym@wcta.net.




West Central
 Telephone Association
We Connect You.™

FCC's USF Reform Could Hurt Rural Telcos

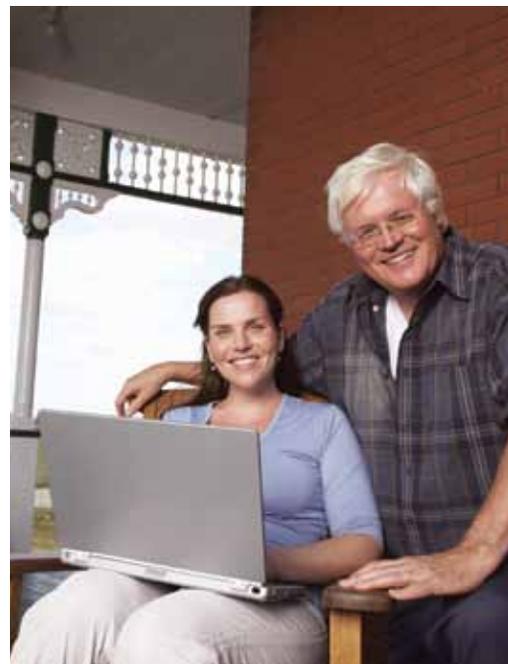
Over the past year, we've discussed the FCC's National Broadband Plan that was to overhaul much of the existing support that is given to ensure that all Americans have affordable access to communications services. We've urged members to contact Congressmen and the President, urging them to save rural broadband, and many of you have. However, on November 18, 2011, the FCC released their order for Universal Service Fund (USF) and Intercarrier Compensation (ICC) reform. WCTA staff and industry experts have been poring over the 740-page order to determine how it will affect us.

Some of the changes in the order come as no surprise but will still adversely affect our bottom line. Many of the old methods by which we previously recouped our high-cost loop and switching investments will eventually be reduced or eliminated.

All of the reforms will be phased in—some in as short of a timeframe as the next six months, but many over the course of the next five to ten years, to allow us time to adjust our business plans.

Many of the old funds being eliminated will be replaced with new funding avenues, such as a "recovery mechanism" through the newly created "Connect America Fund." We are still investigating how our bottom line will be impacted once it's all said and done.

New Intercarrier Compensation rules should help reduce the call termination problems we've been seeing caused by unscrupulous companies trying to avoid our terminating fees. VoIP calls will also no longer be able to get a free ride on the USF-funded network.



The FCC is still taking comments on many of the details of the orders and the details are still being hashed out. The FCC will also face numerous legal challenges to implementing the changes to USF that the order addresses including lawsuits brought forth by NTCA, AT&T, several rural companies, and public utilities commission.

We should know more clearly how these orders will affect us in the coming weeks, and will work to keep you informed.

Lovely Symbols of Valentine's Day

What would Valentine's Day be without these traditional symbols of affection? While familiar to us today, you may not know their origins in history:

Sweethearts Conversation Hearts®

These tiny heart-shaped candies with an embossed message have been around since 1902. Back then, besides hearts, there were also shapes such as postcards, baseballs, horseshoes, and watches. Beginning in the early 1990s, the manufacturer (NECCO) decided to update the sayings each year. That's why messages such as "E-mail Me" have joined favorites like "Be Mine."

Rosy-Cheeked Cupid

A popular little angel on Valentine's Day, this mythological cherub flew around shooting arrows into one's heart. According to legend, people struck would not perish but live to fall in love with the first person they saw.

Red Roses

They've long been known as the "flower of love" because mythology says roses were the favorite of Venus, Roman goddess of love. The red rose symbolizes love and passion, and giving red roses on Valentine's Day is a cherished tradition.



Stay Connected During Winter Storms

In light of the increased use of wireless phones, cordless phones, and VoIP, WCTA wants to remind you that these types of telephone technology may not work if electricity goes out due to the snow and ice of winter storms. One item to always have on hand is a corded landline phone that plugs into the phone jack in the wall. Since a corded phone does not require electricity, it can be your backup method of communication during and after a storm—keeping you connected to emergency personnel, family, and friends.

It's important to understand:

- Once batteries wear out, cordless phones and laptops require electricity and will not continue to work during a power outage.
- Wireless phone systems and towers are not required to provide backup power, so wireless phones may not operate during a power outage either.

For safety's sake, we urge you to keep at least one corded landline phone in your home, along with a flashlight and other emergency items.



2012 Directory Photo Chosen

Dianne Ament of Sebeka submitted the winning photo featured on the cover of the 2012 WCTA Directory. Dianne sent several photos, as did many others, but the unusual close-up shot of a sandhill crane showing his distinctive red crown was chosen as the winner. Dianne won \$200 for her winning entry.

There were many wonderful photos—all sent digitally—which made the viewing and production easier, but choosing the winning photo more difficult! This year the majority of the photos were placed on the WCTA Facebook page and fans were allowed to "Like" their favorite finalists. The fans really helped narrow it down to the winning photo! **Thanks to all who participated in this year's contest!**



Color Contest Winners

Six fabulous artists placed first in their age division in the annual WCTA Holiday Coloring Contest. The winners include Cecelia Fowler, Riana Aho, Greta Hillukka, Julianna Lillquist, Sarah Elfstrum and Fordyce Johnson.

A heartfelt thanks to all of the schools, parents, and children who participated and made this contest special for our kids!

New Year's Resolutions

It's that time of year again when we tend to make New Year's resolutions. If your goals include getting organized and saving more money we've got a few ideas for you.

1. Stay on Top of Computer Maintenance

Begin 2012 with a plan for computer maintenance, then stick with it. Once you develop a routine, you'll be able to avoid the big computer problems by staying on top of the little ones.

Make sure you cover the essential tasks of doing regular data backup, defragging your hard drive, updating your antivirus and spyware software, and updating and installing patches to your operating system. You should also regularly delete your trash bin, temporary files, and any other files you no longer need. They eat up hard drive space and will start to impair your computer's performance.

Don't worry if you aren't sure tackling computer maintenance is something you'd like to take on—our staff can help! We can remotely access your computer, or you can bring it in.

2. Protect Your Kids Online

With undesirable websites and chat rooms, the Internet can clearly be a dangerous place for children to visit. If you're serious about parental controls, now's the time to take action. **SecureIT Plus is available for only \$5.95 per month and will help you manage your children's online usage with content filtering and access controls, time management tools, and activity reports, plus it can take care of all your computer maintenance mentioned above.**

3. Streamline Bill Paying

Save yourself time and trouble every month by switching to online bill paying this year. You'll no longer have to write all those checks, search for stamps, and allow days for "snail mail" delivery. **With online bill paying, you can pay your bills instantly—using your bank account or credit card—with just a few clicks.**

Good luck with your resolutions and may this year be a very successful one for you.



Don't Forget the Extras

Christmas is over, the wrapping paper has been cleared, and the New Year has begun. Did you purchase or receive a new computer, digital camera, or iPad 2? What about the little extra gadgets that make those items more enjoyable to use, or more accessible for the whole family? You can shop locally with West Central Telephone for many items that complement your new electronics—and at a great price!

Get a Netgear Wireless Router for only \$49.95 and connect your new gaming consoles, laptops, computers, and other internet-capable devices wirelessly to the Internet. Shop here for your SD cards for digital cameras and computers, micro-SD cards for cellphones, USB flash drives, special cables like HDMI for gaming consoles and LCD TVs, iPod and iPad speakers, iPad covers and cases, Smart Strip surge protectors and even PS3 accessories. There's still a great selection of items, all available at either the Sebekka or Menahga office.

Stop in and see what's in store for you!

Automatically Safeguard Your Precious Memories

In the event of a disaster, such as fire, flooding, or hardware failure, the family photos you've digitally stored over many years could be gone in minutes. Don't risk losing those precious memories along with other important files such as your personal financial records. **Sign up now for Online BackUP protection from West Central Telephone to keep your computer files safe.**

Online BackUP offers remote online backup that continuously monitors your files and automatically backs them up whenever they change. There's nothing to remember to do—simply set it and forget it. Your data is encrypted before it leaves your PC, then is stored offsite in a state-of-the-art data center. You gain peace of mind knowing your data is safe and readily accessible to you via the Internet.

Online BackUP. Only \$5.95 per month with up to 50 GB of storage. Place it on all your computers—it's still only \$5.95 per month. **Call today at 837-5151 or sign up on the Web at www.wcta.net.**



Welcome, New Members

Abbott, Ed.....	564-5706
Abbott, Traci.....	837-5804
Aho, Rosten R.....	538-6053
Allen, Teresa.....	564-5663
Andersen, Hannah.....	445-5690
Anderson, Brock.....	538-6065
Anderson, Reid.....	538-6066
Anderson, Stephanie.....	445-6085
Andreoff, Shantal.....	564-5716
Arthur, Michael.....	472-3395
Bienusa, Patrick S.....	445-5673
Blom, Lillian.....	445-5668
Bruggeman, Amie.....	445-5696
Butler, Joshua.....	564-5697
Daugherty, Kenneth.....	564-5667
Eckman, Marcy.....	837-6039
Ellingson, Gary Ray.....	837-6051
Erickson, Brenda.....	837-5008
Erickson Jr., David.....	445-5662
Garrett, Sharon.....	837-6083
Greeno, Marvin.....	472-3152
Hallikainen, Nicholas.....	564-5690
Hayes, Matt.....	445-5666
Heller, George.....	445-5600
Hillukka, Aaron.....	837-6034
Hjermstad, Thomas.....	564-3226
Josephson, David.....	564-5661
Kandoll, Neal A.....	538-4845
Kaul, Riana.....	837-6048
Laulainen, Rachel.....	564-5739
Marjama, Adam.....	564-5708
Massie, Daniel.....	564-6255
Mccray, Eric.....	564-5719
Miller, Bobby.....	445-5676
Neisess, Cari.....	564-5702
Nisius, Michael.....	837-6049
Oestreich, Jon.....	564-5694
Oyster, Jacob.....	564-5668
Paurus, Gregory.....	837-6060
Pederson, Andrew.....	564-5662
Peters, Stephanie.....	564-5691
Reger, Laurie.....	837-5992
Retzack, Wayne.....	564-5683
Roiko, Seth.....	538-6061
Schilling, Doris (Trinket).....	837-6067
Spangler, Joe.....	564-5726
Torma, Jerry.....	564-5758
Triebenbach, Jason.....	445-4207
Wagner, Bonnie.....	564-5717
Warmbold, Harold J.....	564-2388
Weaver, Lois.....	564-5722
Weilby, Steve.....	445-5667
Winkelman, Darrell.....	564-8501
Wuollet, Diane.....	445-5680

FRS College Scholarship Program

West Central Telephone has teamed up with The Foundation for Rural Service (FRS) to offer the FRS Scholarship to our members' high school seniors. The FRS college scholarship program awards 30 scholarships in the amount of \$2,500 each to winning applicants across the nation. By partnering with the FRS, West Central Telephone is able to make the scholarship program available to high school seniors in our area.

Applicants must:

- Be a graduating high school senior.
- Receive local telecommunications service from a current NTCA member (except for students sponsored by an associate member company) and be from a rural area.
- Be accepted by an accredited two- or four-year college, university or vocational-technical school.
- Have at least a C grade point average (GPA). FRS scholarships will be awarded to deserving students whose academic credentials fall within an average to above-average range.
- Express an interest to return to a rural community following graduation.
- Be sponsored by a contributor to, or supporter of, the Foundation for Rural Service.

Applications forms have been mailed to guidance counselors at all area high schools. The applications are easily reproduced and can also be downloaded from the FRS Website at <http://www.frs.org>.

Completed applications must be returned to our office by February 20, 2012, so that we may complete the Sponsor Certification and forward the applications to FRS. Please call Geri Salmela at 837-5151 or 800-945-2163 with questions. You may also email your questions to geris@wcta.net.

We are proud to once again support the FRS in this worthy endeavor. It should be noted that this scholarship opportunity is in addition to the regular West Central Telephone Scholarship Program, which will be featured in the next newsletter.

