# Twin Valley Launches Pulse Internet

After a small, family-owned telco wins an award for creating a "smart rural community," what's next? Gigabit service, of course.

By Masha Zager / *Broadband Communities*

**T**win Valley Telephone of Kansas traces its beginnings to the early 1900s – the era of 20-party, grounded iron phone lines strung on hedge poles. But the company, which is still owned and managed by the family that bought it in 1947, has been an early adopter of new communications technology and is committed to improving the quality of life in its service area. Today, Twin Valley serves more than 6,600 customers over 2,400 square miles.

In 2006, Twin Valley tripled its size by acquiring 13 exchanges from Sprint and, over the next several years, upgraded all the former Sprint areas to fiber-to-the-premises infrastructure. In 2008, it became a competitive provider in the town of Clay Center and undertook another large FTTP project there, gaining the predominant market share even though it was the third Internet service provider in town. In the meantime, it built fiber to the node in its six original exchanges (eventually upgrading them to VDSL) and became one of the first rural telcos in the United States to offer IPTV.

Once its business customers had high-speed Internet access, Twin Valley leveraged its network by offering them hosted IP voice. However, it had bigger ambitions for business services – such as data center and cloud services – and it needed a more advanced facility to provide them. In 2011, Twin Valley made the strategic decision to acquire ISG Technology, a regional data center operator and cloud service provider with a national reach.

By 2014, Twin Valley subscribers were enthusiastically adopting all this new technology. Farmers used high-speed Internet to monitor fields, control equipment remotely and transmit data directly from tractors to their office computers. One agricultural equipment manufacturer installed a videoconferencing system to market its products worldwide. Another manufacturer adopted a cloud-based enterprise resource planning solution.

Local anchor institutions have also made good use of the network. The economic development agency started offering Web-based training for businesses. The medical center implemented electronic medical records and digital transmission of medical images, enabling doctors and patients to make timely decisions. The school district issued iPads to all students. Schoolchildren learned to make videos and show them on their school TV stations.

Impressed by the creative use of broadband in its service area, Twin Valley applied to NTCA– The Rural Broadband Association for its Smart Rural Community Showcase Award and was one of 13 companies selected for this honor. NTCA's Smart Rural Community initiative recognizes trailblazing rural telcos and communities for their efforts to make rural communities vibrant places to live and do business. "We really view it as a community award," says Scott Leitzel, vice president of operations for Twin Valley. "We put the story together with help from our customers. Without the community, we wouldn't have won the award."

**THE NEXT STEP: GIGABIT**
Winning a Smart Rural Community award is a tough act to follow – but Twin Valley was determined to follow it up with something
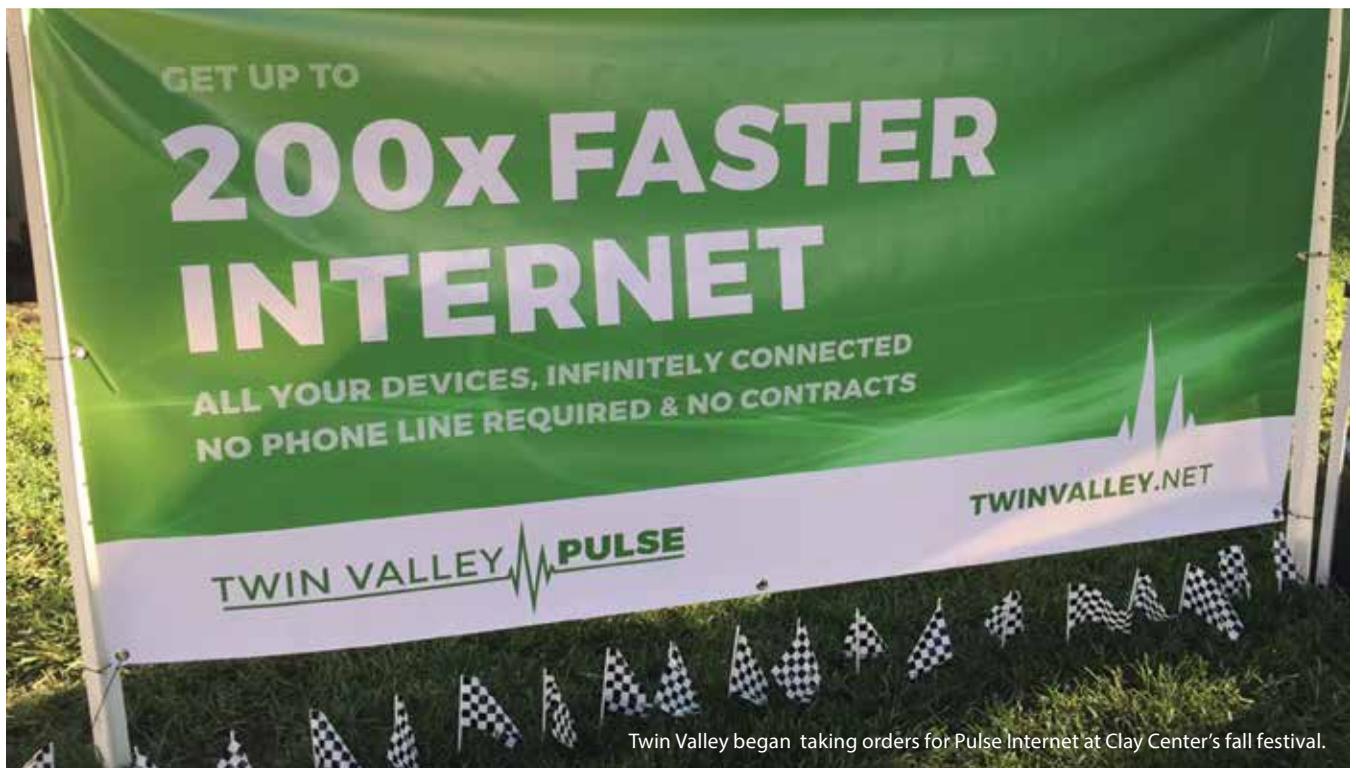
Twin Valley began taking orders for Pulse Internet at Clay Center's fall festival.

even better. The next logical step, the company decided, was to offer gigabit service to the 2,000-plus homes and businesses in Clay Center. "Gigabit is more than a speed test," Leitzel says. "It's the support for a connected lifestyle – the possibilities for just about anything. We're privileged to empower our customers to do whatever they want to do – whether that's to connect all their devices or run businesses out of their homes – all at an affordable rate."

The fiber that Twin Valley installed in Clay Center in 2008 was, of course, future proof and did not have to be replaced. However, the company replaced its old central-office and customer-premises equipment over a 6-month period with the ADTRAN gigabit platform. ADTRAN had previously helped Twin Valley upgrade its non-FTTH exchanges to VDSL, and Leitzel describes the vendor as "hands-down the best partner."

Working with ADTRAN, Twin Valley tested the equipment replacement on some friendly customers until it was able to perform the process in 20 minutes. This testing built confidence that the remainder of the replacements would be seamless.

In addition to upgrading its FTTP equipment, Twin Valley had to recalculate its backhaul requirements, upgrade some conduit, and bolster its core routers to guarantee redundancy.

## LAUNCHING PULSE INTERNET

In September 2015, Twin Valley launched the new service, branded as Pulse Internet. A kickoff event brought nearly 60 business executives to company offices to hear what Pulse would mean for the business community. Ben Foster, Twin Valley's president and CEO and a fourth-generation family member of the original purchasers Joe and Mildred Foster, told the audience, "Twin Valley has long held the distinction of innovation and early adoption. From DSL deployment, to being the first rural local carrier in the nation to launch IPTV, to the deployment of fiber infrastructure, we've worked hard with our local leaders to ensure that our citizens have access to advanced communications and the many benefits that those services enable. We look forward to building on our success for many years to come."

Foster says business leaders see Pulse Internet as part of an encouraging local trend, along with new town projects

that include a pool, a park and an animal shelter, that "allows Clay Center to thrive through proactive and positive action as a community."

Community leaders have been equally impressed. Lori Huber, director of the Clay County Economic Development Group, calls gigabit service "a game changer in that it will allow for significant economic growth opportunities," adding, "Gigabit broadband is more than an economic investment in the broadband infrastructure for Twin Valley – it's an investment in the people and future of Clay Center."

Jimmy Thatcher, mayor of Clay Center, calls the gigabit network "an essential infrastructure component to our community." He says Clay Center's "big three" advantages are "our reverse osmosis water system, our own power plant to ensure reliable energy and the fact that we have advanced fiber broadband from Twin Valley."

Twin Valley officially began taking orders for Pulse Internet at Clay Center's annual fall festival, Piotique. Toy cars racing under a banner labeled "How Fast Are You?" impressed the need for speed on town residents, and the first gigabit Internet customer was connected

Racing toy cars conveyed the need for speed.

what Pulse gigabit Internet can do for them," says Leitzel. "Pulse Internet delivers the capacity to allow Twin Valley subscribers and their families to take full advantage of innovative new communication, automation and entertainment services that require a more robust connectivity backbone – such as advanced Web applications, 4K ultra-high-definition television, virtual reality applications, smart devices, Internet video streaming, home automation and so much more."

And after that? You can bet that Twin Valley won't be resting on its laurels. The company intends to continue deployment of Pulse Internet to the remainder of the communities it serves. ❖

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on October 5. Residential service is indeed affordable; stand-alone gigabit service is just under $100 per month and, when bundled, as low as $75.95 per month. An entry-level speed of 100 Mbps is available for as little as $39.95.

"We couldn't be more excited to tell and show our customers just