

# FTTH: It's More Than Technology



It's a key to digital equity for communities across the U.S.

For more than 20 years, I've covered the evolution of fiber to the home (FTTH) and broadband and seen an array of proprietary approaches, from Active Ethernet and Broadband PON (BPON) to GPON and XGS-PON. These technologies no doubt raised the bar regarding speed and scale – but that's just a small part of why they have been so influential. This is my last issue of **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES**, and I'd like to reflect on what FTTH will mean for society going forward.

Ryan Meche, director of LUS Fiber, sums it up well: "Fiber to the home is more than just a technology," he says. "It is a vision of digital equity and empowerment for all communities."

## OVERCOMING HEADWINDS

How does fiber empower communities? Look at East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, and Brownsville, Texas.

In 2022, East Carroll Parish secured a \$4 million grant to build FTTH in an underserved part of the state, but its joy was shattered when ISP Sparklight challenged the grant, claiming it served nearly 3,000 area homes. But a fortuitous partnership between three organizations committed to digital equity worked to overcome the challenge. Today, because of their effort, customers are connected.

Meanwhile, the National Digital Inclusion Alliance cites Brownsville as one of the worst-connected U.S. cities. Elizabeth Walker, assistant city manager of Brownsville, told attendees at the **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** Summit about a high school

valedictorian who couldn't send her speech to the school principal because she didn't have broadband.

"The digital divide is genuine, and it is crushing the potential of the next generation of those who expect to lead us," Walker said.

Through a public-private partnership with Lit Communities/BTX Fiber, Brownsville will have a middle-mile network that allows any broadband provider to deliver service.

## FIBER'S BROWNFIELD MOMENT

Another opportunity is rehabilitating low-income brownfield markets that have been largely ignored by large ISPs with fiber. Brandon Gibson, co-founder and senior vice president of real estate for Flume Internet, said older buildings' wiring couldn't support broadband. "We're seeing problems [in which] people are not connected or are severely under-connected," he said.

By providing 1 Gbps to 6,000 Lower East Side neighborhood units via the New York City Housing Authority, Flume highlights a brownfield moment for fiber broadband.

**BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** will continue to advocate building fiber to every home – and will continue its annual Top 100 list to recognize organizations leading the way – to show that fiber is not just a technology; it's a tool to empower communities, residents and businesses. 🙌

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