

Don't-Miss Sessions At Fiber Connect

Conference attendees in Orlando this year will tap into a wealth of FTTH knowledge and experience. Learn from the trailblazers in the field.

By Masha Zager / *Broadband Communities*

The educational program at the 2019 Fiber Connect conference in Orlando, Florida, will run from Sunday, June 2, through Wednesday, June 5. Everyone will come away with valuable information – communities and providers just beginning to investigate fiber to the home, those planning or funding their first networks, and even experienced providers seeking to market, operate and use their networks more effectively.

Many time slots have three or four concurrent – and equally important – sessions, so any organization can benefit from sending multiple attendees. Here are just a few sessions you won't want to miss.

SUNDAY, JUNE 2, is devoted to the Fiber Broadband Starter Kit, which is especially relevant to organizations starting down the path to fiber. However, nearly all sessions will offer new insights even to experts.

Marketing and Promoting Fiber in Your Community is led by Katie Espeseth of Chattanooga EPB, a municipal provider that is legendarily successful at promoting its fiber network – and using its fiber network to promote the city. Other presenters include Sean Kio of Burlington Telecom, Leslie Blevins of Bristol Tennessee Essential Services and Mike Birdwell of Sequachee Valley Electric Co-op.

This powerhouse team will outline best practices for communicating with and acquiring

customers. Find out what different age groups are looking for, how to use social media and other tools to reach customers, and how to ensure that your network serves everyone in the community. Most important, learn to communicate the story of your network in a way that resonates with people throughout the community.

Managing a Legacy Fiber Network draws on the expertise of veterans in fiber network operation. The best way not to make rookie (or any other) mistakes is to learn from the mistakes – and the successes – of those who have “been there and done that.” Joseph Jones of On Trac, a fiber installer that has deployed FTTH networks since 2002, will lead the session. Presenters include Melissa Wright of Smithville Communications and Ron Frye of LUS Fiber, two highly successful fiber operators.

In addition to detailing the challenges of operating a fiber network over many years – and the best ways to address those challenges – this session will shed light on the benefits that accrue to FTTH communities.

Fiber Partnerships and Funding in Rural America tackles one of today's hottest issues: bridging the metro-rural digital divide. Many rural communities have concluded that no single party – public or private – can solve their connectivity problems; instead, multiple stakeholders must work together in creative ways. Telecom attorney and local-choice

advocate Jim Baller will lead a session that includes two rural fiber operators – Joe Buttweiler of CTC and Brian Gabriel of Mainstream Fiber Networks – and Randy Klindt of Conexon, formerly a fiber operator and now a consultant who helps electric cooperatives get into the broadband business.

Panelists will share their experiences creating and managing broadband partnerships. Allocating responsibilities, risks and rewards among partners is always challenging, as is overcoming differences in institutional cultures. These speakers have succeeded in making partnerships work, and they'll show you how to do it, too.

MONDAY, JUNE 3, offers a full day of sessions on the business, technology and operational aspects of fiber networks, along with an awards luncheon, a keynote on esports and a series of presentations in the Expo Hall theater.

Fiber Broadband Case Studies for Multifamily Properties brings together experts on deploying fiber to the living unit in multiple-dwelling-unit (MDU) communities. Fiber to the unit, once a novelty, is now a must-have for new buildings in many areas and even a retrofit option for owners and providers concerned about increasing property values; adding new, high-value services; and developing customer loyalty.

John George of OFS, which sells equipment for deploying fiber inside MDUs, will lead the session. Presenters include representatives of three operators that have deployed FTTH in many urban MDUs: Mike Wolf of Cincinnati Bell, Brad Moline of Allo Communications and Dan O'Connell of CenturyLink. Learn from them how to overcome technical challenges (it doesn't help that each MDU building needs a unique solution!) and how to improve the business case by marketing successfully to MDU residents.

Overview of Fiber Around the Globe delivers news of FTTH from around the world. U.S. operators and news media understandably focus on events at home, but there are important lessons to learn from fiber deployers in other countries. Why is the fiber rollout taking place at a different pace in each country? Does it make sense to talk about "winning the race" for fiber? If so, who's winning?

Gregg Logan of C Spire, which is deploying FTTH in Mississippi, will lead the discussion. Presenters include Roland Montagne of the analyst firm IDATE; CommScope's Eduardo Jedruch, who heads the Latin American chapter of the Fiber Broadband Association; and Michael Render, a market researcher who has tracked the deployment of FTTH in North America since 2001.

TUESDAY, JUNE 4, will feature keynotes on the internet of things and artificial intelligence, an armchair discussion with fiber newsmakers and another full day of business, technology and operations presentations.

Accelerating Small-Cell Densification Using Next-Gen PON Cost and Scale Advantages explores the connections between FTTH and 5G wireless networks. Everyone agrees

that 5G, which requires vast numbers of fiber-wired small cells, will complement next-generation FTTH technologies. However, the details of the convergence between wired and wireless networks are still hazy to many operators.

Robert Conger of ADTRAN will explain which fiber access technologies are best suited for various wireless deployment scenarios, and why. He'll also speak about 5G models that could become economic game changers by supporting a variety of enhanced wireless services.

The Rock and Your FTTx Installation and Maintenance Program Will Roll is not Scot Bohaychuk's bid for membership in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Rather, the Clearfield product marketing manager will present information on best practices for deployment and maintenance of outside plant in a variety of challenging conditions. Learn how to make installation and repair cost-efficient in rocky or sandy soil, in hot or cold climates, and in recovery from hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and snowstorms.

Attendees will gain confidence in their ability to build and maintain fiber networks in any kind of terrain – and to train their crews to operate in challenging circumstances.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, the Fiber Connect conference concludes with a morning program focused on 5G wireless networks. A keynote on Verizon's 5G deployment program will start the morning, followed by several sessions on 5G technology and deployments.

The Technology and Components of 5G presents a deep dive into 5G: what distinguishes this generation of wireless technology from earlier technologies, the timeline for availability of 5G components, the impact of 5G on the fiber plant that will support it and the coexistence of 4G and 5G technologies.

Joe Jensen of Corning will lead the session, and panelists include David Sumi of Siklu Communications, Kevin Wynne of Comsof Americas, Ana Pesovic of Nokia and Erik Gronvall of CommScope. ❖

Masha Zager is the editor of BROADBAND COMMUNITIES. You can reach her at masha@bbcmag.com.