

August 2025

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Intelligence

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THE MAGAZINE

Innovation > Leadership > The Cable Community

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TOP OPS

PEAK PERFORMANCE
AT BLUE RIDGE

ZIPLY FIBER'S ASCENT

POWELL SUMMITS TO
FOUNDERS CIRCLE

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR MEMBERS HONORED IN THE CABLEFAX 2025 TOP OPS ISSUE!



**INDEPENDENT OPERATOR
OF THE YEAR**

Lifetime Achievement Award

Julie Laulis, CEO, Cable One

Outstanding Broadband Innovation

Hotwire Communications

Fiber Provider of the Year

Ziply Fiber

Internal Communications Excellence

WOW!

Work Culture Award

Shentel

Regulatory Impact Award

Ross Lieberman,
SVP Government Affairs, Hotwire

Tech Trailblazer

John Keib, Chief Technology
and Product Officer, GFiber

Product Launch of the Year

Mediacom Mobile

Internet All-Stars

Armstrong
Blue Ridge Communications

Congratulations to all Cablefax 2025 Top Ops honorees!
We salute you for making a difference in the communities you serve.



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Ed Note

MSO OF THE YEAR TBD

For the first time in our Top Ops issue's history, there is no MSO of the Year. It's certainly not due to a lack of innovation or dedication. In fact, there's so much of it that it's impossible for us to single out just one winning operator.

Charter and Cox are combining, opening the door to exciting opportunities in mobile, video and beyond. Comcast, which led the way in a customer service overhaul more than a decade ago, looks poised to do it again through a developing emphasis on simplicity and transparency. Optimum owner Altice USA is in the thick of a turnaround project, recently forging an HFC-backed debt issuance for working capital and to get some existing obligations off the table. Cable One is in the midst of a management change, with longtime CEO Julie Laulis (one of the issue's Lifetime Achievement honorees) set to retire.

And the list goes on. The industry's multiple system operators are in such a state of dynamic change that we need to see how it all shakes out. So, stay tuned for the 2026 MSO of the Year. It's a tight race.

In a year of such transformation, there's plenty to showcase. Independent Operator of the Year Blue Ridge is the embodiment of a mid-size operator with a hometown feel—something that's reflected with it once again ranked as a top provider in CTAM/HarrisX's Internet Satisfaction Survey. Armstrong took home the blue ribbon for the second consecutive year, with Comcast's score improving to runner-up. Fiber Provider of the Year Ziplly Fiber is a case study for overhauling long-neglected assets and transforming them into a state-of-the-art network with next-level power.

And CFX is bringing back its Founders Circle Award—a special honor reserved for the upper echelon of leaders who have transformed the cable and broadband industry. Outgoing NCTA President and CEO Michael Powell certainly fits the bill, becoming only the third visionary to receive the award.

We chose a mountain theme for this year's issue because the geologic wonders represent not only the tough climb, but the vision and perspective that comes once you're on top. Throughout this magazine are industry guides who are scaling new heights and showing others the path to the summit. Enjoy the climb.



Amy Maclean

Cablefax
THE MAGAZINE
cablefaxmag.com

svp, media group

Dave Colford
(631) 786-9796, dcolford@accessintel.com

editorial

editorial director, cablefax

Amy Maclean
(301) 354-1760, amaclean@accessintel.com

contributors

E.B. Moss, Cathy Applefeld Olson, John Saavedra,
Sara Winegardner, Noah Ziegler

advertising/business

divisional president, marketing & media group

Kerry Smith
(203) 899-8420, ksmith@accessintel.com

sales director

Amy Abbey
(410) 979-0171, abbey@accessintel.com

account executive

Harry Singh
(917) 832-0064, hsingh@accessintel.com

marketing

senior marketing director

Stephanie Cronk
(212) 621-4806, scronk@accessintel.com

event marketing manager

Lauren Toolen
(201) 249-1540, ltoolen@accessintel.com

subscriptions

Client Services
(800) 777-5006, clientservices@accessintel.com

design/production

senior graphic designer

Danielle Jamar, djamar@accessintel.com

senior production manager

Joann M. Fato, jfato@accessintel.com

List sales — Anteriad, 914-368-1090
(dzaborski@anteriad.com)

Reprint Inquiries for Cablefax: The Magazine,
please contact: Michael Kraus at mikraus@accessintel.com

ACCESS INTELLIGENCE, LLC

Chief Executive Officer
Heather Farley

Chief Financial Officer
John B. Sutton

Chief People Officer
Macy L. Fecto

Chief Digital Officer
Jason Brown

SVP, Event Operations
Lori Jenks

SVP, Corporate Controller
Daniel J. Meyer

VP, Production, Digital Media & Design
Michael Kraus

VP, Strategic Partnerships
Jonathan Ray

VP, Finance
Tina Garrity

VP, Administration
Michelle Levy

sales and editorial offices
9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850 • (301) 354-2000

Cablefax.com **Cablefax Daily.**

40 Wall Street, 16th Floor New York, NY 10005
(212) 621-4900 • www.cablefax.com

Cablefax: The Magazine is published four times a year—April,
August, October, and December—by Access Intelligence LLC,
9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850-4024.

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CLOSE-KNIT

Family Business Pushes Boundaries While Honoring Tradition

By Amy Maclean

A training session for Blue Ridge team members. The Palmerton, Pennsylvania-based operator employs more than 500.

With an all-fiber upgrade well on its way, Pennsylvania operator Blue Ridge has the sort of shiny network that catches the eye of private equity buyers. But President David Masenheimer is clear that if he has a say, the company his family has built is not for sale.

"We're here for the long haul. It's not about making a big score or anything like that. I worry about the community. If we were to get out of the business, I don't know that anybody's keeping their headquarters in Palmerton. When you drive down the street here in Palmerton, there's the [sister companies] Palmerton Telephone Company, PenTeleData and different Blue Ridge offices. We are fully integrated into the community and we plan to stay that way."

Those close ties are also why he thinks Blue Ridge once again finished as one of the top three MSOs in CTAM/HarrisX's Internet Service Satisfaction Survey. "What I like to hear from friends and neighbors that are using Blue Ridge service and have interactions with our call center folks is, 'Everybody's so friendly,'" Masenheimer says. "They deal with a lot of difficult customers and difficult problems sometimes, but I think we always keep a positive and friendly attitude. They undergo a lot of training, but I think it starts in the hiring process. We hire friendly people. That's a key

personality trait."

Blue Ridge Communications serves more than 215,000 customers in northeastern and southeastern Pennsylvania, including the Poconos. It is part of Pencor Services, which includes the Time News newspaper in Lehighton, Pencor Construction, Palmerton Telephone and PenTeleData—a consortium of cable and telephone companies (including Blue Ridge, Service Electric Cable TV and Communications, Service Electric Cablevision and Ironton Telephone) that has engineered one of the largest privately owned fiber optic networks in the nation.

Blue Ridge came into being in 1951 when the late Claude Reinhard founded Palmerton TV Signal Corporation by erecting an antenna on top a mountain to capture the TV signals from Philadelphia. It's grown a lot, now ranking as a top 25 cable provider in the U.S. But it has continued to be a family business, with Claude's sons Fred and Donald on the Pencor board for more than 50 years. Masenheimer, Claude's grandson, has been on the board since 2002. His father Fred Masenheimer has been on the board for 50 years and is Publisher Emeritus of the Times News.

When Pencor opened an ice cream shop in 2011, it opted to name the establishment

"Claude's Creamery" after the company's founder. You can pop in today for a Claudehopper—soft serve vanilla ice cream infused with mix-ins and sandwiched between a Snickers, Oreo or topping of choice.

Dave Masenheimer's brother Mark Masenheimer actually started the creamery—a break from his other job as VP, Operations at Blue Ridge where he's in charge of a fiber upgrade project that's about a third of the way complete. He's the marketing whiz, ensuring that Blue Ridge customers have the latest and greatest (plus a scoop of chocolate).

"It's been about two or three years now [on fiber]. At the time, you had the option to go DOCSIS 4.0 or fiber, and we thought this was the futureproof way to go and would save us on operations in the future," Mark Masenheimer explains. "Where fiber has launched, we are seeing the benefits of more uptime, better symmetrical speeds, less trouble tickets."

Originally, the company thought the fiber project would take about five years. Now, it's more of an eight-year plan. "We had some other larger cable operators come through our territory and really ripped through municipalities, tearing up people's lawns and roads and things, and when we came in a little bit later,



Blue Ridge Communications partners with various non-profits within its service area for its annual Spread the Warmth community initiative. Last year, the company donated over 1,100 coats to children.



Blue Ridge leadership meeting to review operational performance and discuss plans for the future.



we had higher hurdles because of that, dealing with the municipalities and everybody was already sore from the initial onslaught of the underground, so we shied away," explains Dave. "We're focusing on overhead aerial and then going back and doing underground at a slower pace. We're going faster now by not trying to finish a system before moving on to the next system."

Mark describes Blue Ridge as a "mid-size operator with a small-town feel." But small town doesn't describe Blue Ridge's service offerings. Over the past two decades, Blue Ridge has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade its systems and networks to the highest technological fully-digital standards. Internet offerings go all the way up to 2 Gig. And over the past 12 months, it's added a 5 Gig and 8 Gig offering in some areas.

The operator is also a firm believer in convergence, launching Blue Ridge Mobile. A 300 Mbps internet package retails for \$29.95/month for 12 months, with the

ability to add two unlimited mobile lines for \$15/month during that time. Blue Ridge partnered with Telispire to launch its MVNO Blue Ridge Mobile service about three years ago. While many other cable operators are brand new to the mobile game, Blue Ridge came in with some learnings, with Pencor a Verizon reseller for years.

"So, we had a lot of expertise in mobile to begin with. In terms of getting customers to switch, when you bundle our mobile with our home internet, I believe you have the best product out there," says Mark Masenheimer. "To me, it's like what the bundle of video and internet and home phone was. Where people are going for their entertainment, their information, it's on their phones and on their home internet. To be able to have the fastest speed into the home, a great partner for mobile and offer a discount, it just reminds me of when we were first touting the triple play."

Both brothers are quick to point to their grandfather and two uncles for instilling a forward-thinking mindset. "They paved the

way for us to be successful and become the operator of the year. They deserve it as much as anybody, and they're actually still involved in their late 80s and mid-90s," says Mark.

Pencor currently has 13 family members working at the company, though he reckons there were as many as 20 over the years. And non-family employees are also a lot like family.

"One of the things with hiring, we kind of tap into a family. We'd hire the dad, the mom, the kids and their kids' kids. We have generations of families who have worked for the company," notes Dave. "The CTO for Blue Ridge, his father was the Chief Engineer at our Palmerton Telephone Company. His brother works with him in the engineering department at Blue Ridge."

And while there may be no plans for selling Blue Ridge, it has shown interest in acquisitions. Last year, it acquired Carbondale-based Adams Cable, extending its footprint in Pennsylvania but also into the New York communities of Afton, Colesville,

FAST FAX

Blue Ridge Communications is part of the Pencor Services, whose subsidiaries employ approximately 1,100 people. Blue Ridge serves some 215,000 customers, primarily in northeastern and southeastern Pennsylvania.

The privately held operator acquired Adams Cable in October 2024.

Blue Ridge began its Spread the Warmth community initiative in 2018, making a clothing donation for every new internet connection or upgrade added in November. Over the years, it's donated thousands of blankets and warm clothes to nonprofits in its service area.

Deposit Town, Deposit Village, Kirkwood, Sanford, Windsor Town and Windsor Village.

Not surprising given the philosophy espoused by its leaders, Blue Ridge retained the vast majority of Adams Cable employees in the same roles pre-transaction. "Blue Ridge is committed to the idea that the best way to serve the communities it operates in is to do so with experienced and qualified personnel located locally in those communities, and that will continue to be the case in all the Adams CATV communities affected by this proposed transaction," the operator told the New York Public Service Commission in its petition for transfer of control.

There are still significant portions of Blue Ridge's territory, including Palmerton, where it's the only traditional internet provider in town. "We used to say we built cable where nobody else wanted to. When you look at some of the areas in northern Pennsylvania, there were more deer than people," Dave adds.

Like many of its independent operator brethren, Blue Ridge has traditionally been wary of government funding. Dave suggests

some of the changes to the BEAD program may spark a little bit of interest, but it won't be a major player. "The places that we haven't built to are probably better served by satellite. To run fiber to some of what I would call the holes in our footprint, it really doesn't make a lot of sense to spend a lot of money to get to a house and who purposefully built their home in the middle of the woods for the seclusion of the Poconos," he says. "There are better ways of providing them internet service than running six miles of fiber to their home."

Blue Ridge faces competition on a number of fronts, with Comcast overbuilding parts of its footprint and offering service in the Lancaster area. Astound Broadband overbuilt it in Lehigh County. It also sees encroachment from Frontier and Windstream. Don't let that emphasis on a collegial spirit mislead you when it comes to business though.

"Just because we're small, we're not country bumpkins here," quips Dave. "We're going to prove that we can stand toe to toe with some of these larger companies that come into our area. There are very, very competitive natured folks in my family." ▲



Blue Ridge employee assisting a customer at a local payment center.



THANK YOU!

For selecting Blue Ridge as a
Cablefax Top Ops Honoree
for the Independent Operator of the Year.

We owe this success to our hard-working
employees and incredible customers!



We care because we're you.

 **Blue Ridge**
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SIMPLY, ZIPLY

ZIPLY FIBER IS JUST GETTING STARTED

By Noah Ziegler



Ziplly Fiber's transformation from a newly formed regional player into one of the fastest-growing and most innovative broadband providers in the U.S. is a case study in focused execution, network-first thinking and customer-centered leadership. With operations spread across four states, the company has quickly become a model for what modern fiber providers should strive for.

Guided by an experienced leadership team since its formation five years ago, Ziplly has built a reputation for delivering the fastest residential internet in the U.S.—offering as high as 50 Gig speeds.

"It's a generational opportunity. We're building infrastructure that our communities use for business and education and fun for generations," CEO Harold Zeitz says. "Our focus is on a few very small things. We're really focused on creating a great experience for our customers, and we believe it starts with the best and fastest network. So, 50 Gig, we think that's a part of it. It's not so much that we're trying to put out a press release [saying], 'We've got 50 Gig.' We actually deliver 50 Gig to customers."

When Ziplly launched in May 2020, it inherited what Zeitz describes as a "downtrodden

company" after acquiring the Northwest operations of Frontier Communications. Rather than patching up old infrastructure, the team focused on a clean-slate approach to put fiber at the center of the spotlight and simplify processes.

That strategy is paying off. Ziplly's built fiber to over 150 markets across Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, many of them being rural or underserved areas prior to the company's arrival. In 2024, Ziplly built 2,500 miles of fiber, expanded to more than 20 new communities, achieved its highest-ever customer satisfaction scores and introduced WiFi 7 technology to support wired speeds of up to 10 Gbps and wireless speeds up to 3.5 Gbps.

"It starts with two concepts. One is, service always works. No one ever has to reach out to you," says Chris Denzin, COO. "Then, the other one is, everything is same-day. There's an immediacy to install the service. You've got those two concepts that drive everything, so if you think about 'everything just works,' you have to invest in your network. You have to have redundancy, diversity. You have to manage capacity. All of those things go together to deliver a great experience."

At the heart of Ziplly's strategy is an aggressive yet disciplined approach to network buildouts. To accelerate those projects, it has leaned into soft-surface deployment methods that allow Ziplly to trench through soft ground faster and more cost-effectively, which minimizes disruption and allows for larger reach.

"In the Northwest, there's a lot of rock—we call it cobble—it's because of the way the glaciers form the area. Some parts of the country, there's sort of loamy soil and farmland, it's easier to dig in, etc., and so sometimes methods of going underground are slow and expensive," Zeitz says. "We always try to come up with new methods, and one of these methods is this soft surface. It's a larger vehicle that sort of rides along between the road and the private property where there is not a sidewalk. It's basically slicing in 18-36 inches deep, while it's pressing in the conduit, and then we put fiber right in it"

Another practice Ziplly follows is that between every two homes, it installs a flower pot and it splices and coils up the drop so it's already set up for installation. Not only does that enable faster builds at lower costs, it ties back to the "same-day" priority with regards to

FAST FAX

Ziply's soft-surface deployment method allows its fiber builds to reach 30-40% more homes compared to traditional approaches.

Ziply says it is the only ISP to deliver 50 Gig symmetrical service across its full fiber footprint.

The company supported more than 400 community events across its footprint in 2024.

repairs and other maintenance-related tasks.

The company runs the network at a capacity lower than other providers typically do, thus enabling customers to experience 0% congestion and minimal interruptions when trying to access the internet. It's part of the effort to make the customer experience as seamless as possible. Since its formation, Ziply has improved its Net Promoter Score by nearly 100 points and averaged higher than 70 in each quarter throughout 2024. Additionally, Ziply's proud of the 4.48-star rating with nearly 1,500 reviews on the Better Business Bureau's website, and a 4.4-star judgment via Google based on 1,400 reviews.

"We're easy to do business with. We don't require bundles, we don't have contracts, we don't have data caps, we don't have installation fees. We removed a lot of the friction from the process, and we always focus on having the customer experience at the forefront of every interaction. Whether they're going to the website or calling the call center, you don't have to traverse a complex IVR tree to get to us. You can get a human by pressing a button," says Denzin.

Ziply's ambitions haven't gone unnoticed. In November, it was announced Bell Canada entered an agreement to acquire Ziply Fiber for approximately C\$5 billion in cash and the assumption of outstanding net debt (C\$2 billion) to be rolled over at transaction close. In July, the deal got a stamp of approval from the FCC, further paving the way for the next era of Ziply's early dealings.

"We have more to build. We have more communities to serve. We anticipate and planned to expand at a rapid rate, and we'll continue doing that," Denzin says. "We have a new partner, Bell Canada, or BCE, so a great partner. They've got tremendous success over long periods of time building and operating the very best fiber network in Canada, and certainly we want to continue to expand our capabilities here. It's naturally aligned [with] two companies that are very prideful in having the very best fiber network."

Ziply may not be the largest provider in the country, but the Northwest certainly knows its name now. Rapid expansion, pinpoint execution and willingness to venture into where others won't make Ziply a force to be reckoned

with in the years to come.

"I've learned a lot in my career from lots of other folks, and we focus on three things here: we focus on we think simple wins, simplifying and automating things is super valuable and we like to think that we're always figuring out ways to get better," Zeitz says. "It doesn't have to be sort of magic, big-step functions ... What I think is just super cool is that this is going to be here for generations. My kids and their kids will be using this." ▲



Celebrating Michael K. Powell

2025 FOUNDERS CIRCLE HONOREE

For over two decades, Michael K. Powell has been a transformative force across the telecommunications, cable, and broadband industries.

With bold vision, unwavering leadership, and a deep commitment to innovation and inclusion, he has helped shape a future of boundless connectivity and opportunity.

As he steps into his next chapter, we honor his extraordinary legacy—not just as the leader of NCTA, but as a catalyst for progress whose impact will be felt for generations to come.





MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Powell Shapes Leadership Path at NCTA

By Amy Maclean

FAST FAX

Powell was nominated to the FCC by President Bill Clinton and sworn in on November 3, 1997. He was designated its chair by President George W. Bush in January 2001 and continued in that capacity until April 2005.

He serves on several nonprofit boards, including the Mayo Clinic, The William and Mary Endowment Board and America's Promise Alliance. At America's Promise, he co-chairs the Grad Nation project, an effort to address the high school dropout crisis.

Powell replaced NCTA President/CEO Kyle McSlarrow in April 2011 as the association's top executive. In February, he announced plans to retire later this year.

If you ask Michael Powell to reflect on his memories of running one of the country's largest trade associations, don't expect him to regale you with stories of backroom meetings with Washington powerbrokers or all-night legislative strategy sessions.

When he was considering taking the job leading NCTA, he felt hesitant for a long time, uncertain if he wanted the title of lobbyist attached to his name. He asked his father, the late Colin Powell, Secretary of State under George W. Bush, for his opinion. "He said you have the wrong idea—you're a trade association CEO. You're not a K Street paid-for-hire. You're running an association," Powell recalls. "Fifteen years later, that's what I would tell the next CEO. You are a CEO, you are not the top lobbyist. And your value and your talent will be whether you build great teams and empower and inspire them to do great work. And to fight hard, but fight with their industries' best interests, with a degree of honor."

There have been plenty of fights since Powell joined the association in 2011—from multiple net neutrality battles to ongoing spectrum wars to varying opinions over how to best bring broadband to the unserved. But when the retiring NCTA chief reflects on his job, he estimates he spends about 75% of his time on people development. "I am coaching, I am hiring. I am at HR and finance. I am worrying about whether we are going to renovate the

theater, and is that strategically important?" he says. "I'm worrying about whether in the new budget we should invest more in x and y. I spend a lot of time thinking strategically, not tactically. I think my job is to be the strategist, not to be the tactician."

His legacy—including eight years at the FCC, with the majority of that time as chairman—is widely respected by the associations' cable operator, TV programmer and technology members. "In his decades of leadership, from the FCC to the NCTA, Michael has played a pivotal role in bringing Americans everything the internet has to offer," says Dave Watson, CEO of Connectivity and Platforms at Comcast. "His vision helped accelerate our nation's adoption of essential technologies like broadband, smartphones and WiFi networks, forever changing the way we connect and live. We are grateful for all he has done for the industry and the country during this incredibly dynamic time."

During Powell's time at NCTA, he's seen a lot—from the introduction and rise of TikTok to 5G's explosion and cable's own mobile business growth. Streaming video has surged as linear has declined. Fiber-to-the-home and DOCSIS 4.0 deployments are delivering faster speeds with better latency than ever before. When he signed on to the role, he never expected to stay more than three to five years. Instead, it'll be nearly 15 when he leaves this fall.

He credits the extended stay to the fantastic



Michael Powell with a gift that shows him as a college senior in ROTC speaking at a Virginia Military Institute conference. Years later, his father Colin Powell was invited to speak at the exact same conference.

community of people within NCTA, including its members. "Unlike so many trade associations, ours is really still CEO run. I get to work with top notch colleagues who are the bosses of their companies, not their general counsels or senior VPs," Powell says. "I've gotten to be friends with everyone from [former ESPN President] George Bodenheimer to [Ex-Charter CEO] Tom Rutledge to [Comcast CEO] Brian Roberts. People don't realize how different that is. I get to have a board, kind of an assembly of real bosses, and I get to learn from them and they value my opinion. That's very rewarding."

While he's modest, Powell likes to think he helped the industry shed the Jim Carrey Cable Guy image it was shackled by when he started the role. "I do feel like, even though it's not a fully completed project, that we helped pull the industry out of this kind of hole of inferiority, and put them back at the front seat of the technology community and the industry. And we really rebranded our identity from a dying video service to a cutting-edge infrastructure service. They did it with product, and I think we did it with narrative and initiative," he says. Under his leadership, the association rebranded in 2016 from the National Cable & Telecommunications Association to NCTA - The Internet & Television Association.

"When I came to this industry, it had its head down, not enough bravado," Powell says. "This is garbage. This is one of the most innovative

industries in the world. It's one of the greatest American success stories. It's innovated at every pivotal point. When everybody said they were dead, they pivoted and revived themselves. I think it's a great American industry—by the way, an all-American industry before it was cool."

Part of Powell's legacy is helping cable tell its story—whether through turning a technical standard like DOCSIS into the easy-to-understand 10G, holding symposiums that look at the possibilities behind technology, using a narrative-driven approach to policy, including in his own testimonies before Congress, and last year's release of the short film "Every Last Mile" detailing what goes into connecting rural America. "The idea that this town runs on logic is bullshit," he says of Washington. "We had to turn ourselves into a good storytelling machine. And I think we really did a good job of that. I think when we go to the Hill people know we're going to come and reduce this to its essence. It's going to be clear, it's going to be comprehensible and it's going to be a story that means something to me."

For over 15 years, Dane Snowden saw Powell's work first hand, first at the FCC as his Chief of the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau and then at NCTA as his Chief of Staff and later COO. "His leadership is defined by intelligence, courage and an unwavering passion for the cable industry. But what truly set Michael

"WHAT TRULY SET MICHAEL APART WAS HIS ABILITY TO SEE WHERE THE PUCK WAS GOING—ALWAYS ANTICIPATING THE NEXT SHIFT IN POLICY, TECHNOLOGY OR PUBLIC PERCEPTION, AND POSITIONING THE INDUSTRY TO LEAD, NOT FOLLOW."

apart was his ability to see where the puck was going—always anticipating the next shift in policy, technology or public perception, and positioning the industry to lead, not follow,” Snowden says of his former boss. “His secret? A deep intellectual curiosity and a relentless commitment to understanding every nuance of an issue. No one came to the table better prepared. He encouraged that same rigor from his team—as a leader who shaped, challenged, mentored and elevated those around him. Working with Michael wasn’t just a professional experience—it was a masterclass in leadership, and a gift I carry with me to this day.”

Powell’s office in NCTA’s headquarters on Massachusetts Avenue is filled with reminders of exemplary leadership and framed moments of magnitude, both personal and professional. There is Buffalo Soldier artwork, something his father collected. The gavel from his FCC chairman days. His Cable TV Pioneer plaque sits near a window. A calvary sword from his time in the U.S. Army that he was delayed in receiving because of an injury that curtailed his military career. Among the most meaningful memorabilia are his two presidential commissions for serving on the FCC that are signed by the President and Secretary of State. When Powell got his second commission from Bush, his father was the Secretary of State. Look closely at Colin Powell’s signature and you’ll see a smiley face inside it. Hints of his mom and dad are hidden all around the office. “I need my parents here,” he says, holding a framed gift someone sent of himself and his father speaking at the same Virginia Military Institute conference years apart.

Reflecting on his time at NCTA, he takes pride in the fact that when a policy fight didn’t go the industry’s way, he and his team still found a way to win, finding ways for companies to navigate the new reality and adapt. But what he’s most proud of is creating a culture around competency, curiosity, compassion and creativity that thrives within NCTA’s walls and with its members.

“My dad was right. This job isn’t cheap. I don’t think of myself as a lobbyist. I think of myself as a CEO. When somebody says, ‘What do you do?’ I say, ‘I am the CEO. I run this ship,’” he says. “I think I’m a good storyteller, but I want to be a leader, and that means leading people. And so, yeah, I’m very introspective, more than extrospective. But at the same time, I want to win. And I think we’ve won. I’ve done net neutrality 25 times, and I can retire, because it’s freaking finally dead, I think.” ▲

“I WOULD TELL THE NEXT CEO, YOU ARE A CEO, YOU ARE NOT THE TOP LOBBYIST. AND YOUR VALUE AND YOUR TALENT WILL BE WHETHER YOU BUILD GREAT TEAMS AND EMPOWER AND INSPIRE THEM TO DO GREAT WORK. AND TO FIGHT HARD, BUT FIGHT WITH THEIR INDUSTRIES’ BEST INTERESTS, WITH A DEGREE OF HONOR.”



The Cable Show 2013 General Session featured Powell interviewing then-FCC Acting Chairwoman Mignon Clyburn.



In 2017, NCTA and CableLabs presented their Near Future event, a half-day of demos and talks from futurists and technologists.

INCOMING CALL

Mediacom Mobile Showing Full Signal

By Sara Winegardner

It's been one year since Mediacom Mobile went live in all of the provider's markets, and the adventure has been one full of lessons for the company.

Mediacom SVP, Operations, Product Strategy and Consumer Experience Tapan Dandnaik says the goal in entering mobile was to be a part of the new bundle that would provide customers' greater value and to more effectively compete with fixed wireless. He's satisfied with Mediacom Mobile's growth and position in the marketplace today, but that doesn't mean getting to this point was easy. It meant developing something that many companies have had years to create and invest in. There's a unique learning curve that comes with that.

"I think what has been foreign to us is that most of the time, we've come into the market as the first entrant, and now we're coming into a very mature market with a lot of competition. From a marketing standpoint we're realizing after talking to our industry brethren that it takes years to create that awareness," Mediacom Group VP, Marketing Kristi Salmon says.

Mediacom isn't shying away from the pressure, dedicating the necessary energy to get potential customers to feel more comfortable getting their mobile product from what has come to be known as an internet company.

Key to navigating that learning curve have been Mediacom's customer service agents. Mediacom launched mobile to employees prior to rolling it out to consumers, allowing those agents to become experts and true brand ambassadors. They've been the touchpoint between leadership and interested consumers, educating the entire company on the different layers of concern. Customers were coming to the table with questions about cost savings on



Mediacom's marketing has played up how its mobile service can save customers money over the traditional wireless carriers.

each plan, whether they would be able to bring over or purchase certain mobile devices and potential buyout or financing options.

"I think we're getting close to a point in the next 30 to 60 days where we'll have a majority of things [covered] that the agents find as a hurdle to get over," Dandnaik says.

It has already implemented a device store, setting it apart from many of the smaller operators with mobile offerings. While Mediacom does not yet have a device deal with Apple, customers can buy Apple devices through that online marketplace. Plans are currently in place to test a device payment plan this summer with Mediacom's MVNE partner Reach and, if all goes well, launch it sooner than later.

Eligible Mediacom customers can currently receive a free unlimited line for 12 months when they add Mediacom Mobile, but Salmon

believes it would seem appropriate to layer in a device- or buyout-related promotion around the holiday season. Through it all, the team is identifying small fixes to the user experience to ensure subscribing is simple. "What's exciting for me is we're doing things that someone hasn't done and we're launching it in a way that is the Mediacom way. We're not throwing tons of dollars at it. We're doing it in a smart, effective way," Dandnaik says. "There are things that are hard now, but once we have it there, a lot of our smaller partners will benefit from what we're doing because at the end of the day, this is something they'll be able to leverage."

With the growing pains largely weathered, Mediacom has big plans for Year Two of mobile. It expects to bring multi-gig and symmetrical speed broadband to one million homes by the end of next year, and each time an upgrade is completed, it creates an opportunity to talk with folks about Mediacom Mobile.

"Every time we get an opportunity, we are reminding customers that we have a mobile product and how we can bundle and save you money. At the end of the day, the messaging is that we can save you at least 30%, if not more," Dandnaik says. "Not only are we a leader on the internet side, but we're also providing you value with mobile as well." ▲

FAST FAX

Mediacom first filed for the "Mediacom Mobile" trademark in September 2022.

Interested consumers must be subscribers to one of Mediacom's broadband tiers in order to subscribe to a Mediacom Mobile plan.

Technology company Asurion partnered with Mediacom Mobile in December to offer trade-in services and comprehensive device protection to all of the provider's wireless customers.

CHECK UP

HOTWIRE DEPLOYS DIAGNOSTIC CHECKLIST FOR WHOLE-HOME WIFI

By Cathy Applefeld Olson

Innovation doesn't necessarily come from remaining within a specific sector. In many cases, pioneering new territory means looking outside the box for inspiration and guidance.

That's exactly what Hotwire Communications did when it came to creating its new home WiFi assessment tool, a product that not only provides customers with a user-friendly report about how well their WiFi service works in each room in their homes but opens opportunities to upsell, helps future-proof against WiFi failure and augments customer satisfaction. Whereas before when technicians would recommend additional routers to improve network performance, customers often didn't understand the "why" behind those suggestions because they lacked the data to reinforce it. The tool enables technicians to perform an in-home diagnosis in real time and show—not just tell—customers where their network coverage needs improvement.

"We realized there really wasn't any other brand doing this. You can run something on your support app that's self-serve, but no one is walking you through it and it's not assessing all the rooms of your house. So, we actually started looking at benchmarks outside of the telco industry and we started mocking up our own design," says Matt Wilson, Hotwire VP of Customer Experience.

"We started with energy companies that do an assessment of your house to see where are you losing heat or AC. They have a bunch of images of your house, and they are red and green depending on where you're losing that control."

The team also looked at the auto mechanic and physician sectors to analyze the types of diagnostic checklists they use and when it came to the customer-facing piece, they assessed the presentation of various high-end consumer brands. Hotwire Co-founder and CEO Kristin Johnson "is always encouraging us to compare ourselves to the best luxury brands people love, like Ritz or Mercedes, not just to other telcos," he says.

While they were researching, Wilson and his team came across a Canadian company called RouteThis, which helps service providers optimize residential WiFi installations, repairs and support. RouteThis had developed a lot of what Hotwire was looking for, and partnering made perfect sense to deliver agility to technicians and easily digestible information to customers.

"Because it was going to be customer facing, we said it has to be simple. It can't be a bunch of engineering jargon. The risk is going way too complex because there are so many different stats we can get back from an engineering perspective and when you get a bunch of telecom people together you run the risk of, 'Let's show all of it and have a crazy report.' What we liked about RouteThis is they did keep it really simple. The pass and fail were, 'What can you do in that room? Can you watch 4K video, can you

game, can you work from home on a video conference, or can you barely stream video on your phone?" Wilson says.

So far, Hotwire has been using the tool solely for its WiFi installs in new homes. Since launch in February, "we surveyed the customers and we've had better NPS," Wilson says. "And we've been getting a lot of great feedback from technicians and their supervisors, that this just makes it more standard. It isn't really open to interpretation. You're getting a report and it's really obvious where the WiFi is good. And we are having some good upsell benefits because we are pointing out coverage gaps and making a case to the customer about why it would be a good idea to have additional WiFi coverage—and we have a few products for that."

As the team builds on some of the engineering behind the diagnostics, expansion plans are also under way. "Right now, it's a simple version, and we started in our line of business where homes are new construction, and our idea is to expand this or a next generation, where there are more engineering tests with it, throughout the footprint," Wilson says.

"Next would be the properties we convert, where we come in and we become the bulk provider of the property. That would be another great way to elevate that experience. This is the cherry on top, when we go in and do our consult and just surprise the [customers] with something totally different." ▲

FAST FAX

Hotwire to date has used the home WiFi assessment tool in about half of its new-construction customer homes, or about 10,000 homes.

The tool uses maps systems to provide the shape of a given house and then the technician walks through and pauses in each room, where the app prompts him/her to name the room and run the diagnostics.

Hotwire is the first U.S. company to work with Canadian-based RouteThis.

NETWORK MAGICIAN

Nafshi's Embrace of Technology Keeps Comcast Bustling

By Noah Ziegler

After serving five years in the Israeli military, Elad Nafshi earned a law degree from Tel Aviv University, before adding an MBA from the University of Rochester shortly after. His journey in telecom started in 2000 when he joined RCN (now Astound) to be a Project Manager for the company's foray into VOD services. Nafshi climbed his way up and eventually took on the responsibility of RCN's internet and telephony product lines. In 2005, he made the switch to Comcast, a decision that's blossomed into 20 years of ushering transformation and next-generation technology.

But times have changed quite a bit since the early 2000s, and even more so in the early 2020s. Nafshi has led Comcast through a period of rapid evolution marked by two parallel developments: the rollout of DOCSIS 4.0 and the integration of artificial intelligence across the company's network infrastructure. Together, these efforts work hand-in-hand in strengthening Comcast's ability to offer multi-gig symmetrical speeds

"It's very rare in a career when you get to really bring out a whole new standard of what high-speed data means for the tens of millions of homes that are connected to our network," Nafshi says. "When you really take a step back and look at the underlying technology that enables DOCSIS 4.0 ... it's being able to offer multiple-gigabit symmetrical services over the coaxial network, the same network that we rely on today and will rely on into the future, and really enable us to embed deeply a whole new generation of AI capabilities that enable the technology to work as is. It's just an incredible accomplishment."

It's not just about the need for speed; Nafshi and Comcast have invested in making the network smarter. In 2020, Octave, an AI-based platform that optimizes bandwidth across households, was used for managing the pandemic-induced increase in usage on

its network. Although it was still newer technology, Nafshi said it delivered a 45% capacity increase at a time when there was three years' worth of capacity growth in a two-week span.

In the five years since, Comcast has poured more than \$20 billion into various investments to make its network more efficient. Nafshi and his team have molded a platform that can identify issues on its own and reduce the impacts on customers. Those self-healing powers are a boost for technicians, too, with additional abilities to better monitor and target things like fiber cuts or power outages.

"The capabilities that we gain by implementing and deeply embedding AI capabili-

FAST FAX

Comcast serves 39 states and connects over 64 million homes.

Comcast saw an 11% decline in energy used to power its network and business from 2019-2024. In that same period, network traffic ballooned by 76%.

In its network, 99.7% of the changes Comcast makes are fully automated.

ties—whether it's structured, whether it's generative or whether it's agentic, end-to-end on our network—is something that I very much look forward to continuing to push and drive here at Comcast and across the industry," Nafshi says.

In another example of Nafshi's leadership, he was elected to serve as Chair of the SCTE Board of Directors in March. It's the latest feather in the cap of a pioneer who dives into the innovations that customers feel—from cloud TV and digital set-top-boxes, to DOCSIS 4.0 and AI. ▲

EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR



INTERNET ALL- STARS

In the increasingly competitive world of telecommunications, providers are laser focused on how to attract and retain customers. The customer experience is at the heart of everything a successful operator does—from tech upgrades to billing changes to frontline service. For the second year in a row, Cablefax is pleased to present the CTAM and HarrisX Internet Service Satisfaction Survey, which measures the state of the customer experience across connectivity providers.

From January to December 2024 CTAM and HarrisX asked a nationwide sample of 77,706 households how satisfied they were with their home internet service from their provider. The top three providers among the 10 MSOs large enough to be included in the survey are the same as 2023, with Armstrong taking the top spot with a 76% overall satisfaction rating. Comcast jumped from third place to second, edging out 2023 runner-up Blue Ridge with a score of 71% compared to 69%. Here's a look at what sets these operators apart from the pack.

1

ARMSTRONG®

WHAT'S NEW?

The operator, whose service footprint spans parts of Kentucky, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, increased residential internet speeds in 2025. Zoom, its flagship offering was increased from 300 Mbps to 500 Mbps; Zoom II from 500 Mbps to 750 Mbps; and Zoom Express, its most affordable tier, doubled in speed to 50 Mbps in fiber markets. Armstrong also doubled speeds for every tier of commercial internet service.

DIFFERENTIATORS:

Simplicity and transparency are key for customer experience. Armstrong is tackling both by rolling out a new, completely redesigned Plume Home app that gives customers an easier way to manage their home WiFi network. While free professional installation and local support remain important differentiators for the operator, Armstrong increased efforts to enable new customers to have the ability to self-install their broadband service. All Zoom internet customers also receive free Trend Micro's Maximum Security to keep their connected devices secure and additional protection from the Plume Home app. It offers all new customers interested in video service options to subscribe to its EXP Stream product, powered by TiVo.

WHAT'S ON TAP?

Armstrong launched WiFi6e last summer and continues to explore the potential of WiFi7. The company enhanced its DOCSIS 3.1 offerings in 2025 to deliver 100 Mbps upload speeds and additionally is enabling symmetrical speeds over DOCSIS in key markets using high-split technology. It's also continuing to expand its FTTH footprint through its Network of the Future initiative and deploying XGS-PON to provide symmetrical and multi-gigabit speeds. Armstrong continues to expand its network capacity and believes its investment in FTTH technology will eventually yield speeds of 50 and 100 Gbps for its customers along with enhanced reliability.

2



WHAT'S NEW?

Like Armstrong, Comcast has increased speeds over the past year. Xfinity Internet tiers and NOW Internet were given 50% to 100% faster upload speeds, with increased download speeds across most internet tiers. It also introduced ultra-low lag internet, which uses low latency technology designed to enhance connectivity for latency-sensitive applications such as gaming, videoconferencing and virtual reality.

DIFFERENTIATORS:

In April, Comcast heeded the call for simpler and more transparent pricing and launched a five-year price guarantee and a simplified pricing structure that includes both unlimited data and the Xfinity WiFi Gateway. Gone are contracts and early termination fees, with Comcast internet plans now the same across the country. Plus, every plan includes an unlimited line of Xfinity Mobile "On Us" for one year.

WHAT'S ON TAP?

Comcast is launching its most powerful device yet, the XB10 gateway. It's just started rolling out the device, which supports WiFi 7 and DOCSIS 4.0, delivering multi-gigabit symmetrical speeds over WiFi. That makes it perfect for high-bandwidth activities, like streaming 4K videos and online gaming. The XB10 also includes AI technology to assist with providing a consistent experience.

3



WHAT'S NEW?

Work continues on building a state-of-the-art fiber network throughout Blue Ridge's entire service area so it can bring even greater reliability and internet speeds to our customers. The operator has added two new speeds 5 Gig and 8 Gig. It's also continued its strong partnership with eero, deploying eero Pro 7, Pro 7 Max, eero Outdoor 7 and eero for Business.

DIFFERENTIATORS:

Helping set Blue Ridge apart is its constant solicitation of customer feedback. It doesn't just listen. It acts to make investments to improve reliability, speed and personalization. Talk to anyone who works for Blue Ridge and they will stress that the biggest differentiator is its local focus. That includes two local origination channels providing local sports and news coverage that's available on linear as well as its TiVo-fueled Blue Ridge Stream service.

WHAT'S ON TAP?

As Blue Ridge continues its fiber network expansion, look for multi-gig speeds to become the norm. The operator is also experimenting with bundled offers featuring mobile and broadband, including a \$15/month mobile plan with 1GB of shared data.

FROM SERVICE REP TO SERVANT LEADER: JULIE LAULIS'S FOUR- DECADE TELECOM JOURNEY

By E.B. Moss

As a girl, Julie Laulis dreamed of being in the air as a pilot. She instead helped drive over-the-air competition, soaring from her start as a Hauser Communications customer service rep to eventually landing as CEO of Cable One, Inc.

Telecommunications was a nascent industry when she began 42 years ago. "No one was an expert," she says, noting that women could carve unprecedented paths. "I could tell I was going to have a chance in this business."

Laulis has dedicated decades to the field. She doesn't see it as a linear journey but a continuous reinvention reflective of the industry itself. "I know a lot of people don't necessarily think of the cable industry as being innovative, but it has been a dynamic, changing atmosphere where you just can't get bored."

After spending 10 years in marketing at Jones Intercable, Laulis was hired to do the same at Cable One. Her organizational and leadership skills became apparent, leading to the COO title in 2008. But her experience in customer service and brand management also proved useful when cable companies began losing leverage with programmers as customers found other avenues for content. "We did have this strong, reliable infrastructure that could deliver content to consumers in a different way, i.e., broadband, and we controlled the customer relationship there," she explains.

That insight sparked the bold rebrand in 2018 of Cable One's customer-facing products into "Sparklight," a broadband-first business with an expanded national footprint. "Our plant is majority fiber and 'Sparklight' connotes that. The icon implies the light that goes down the fiber, or internet protocol, but for us internally it signifies a baton, for the power of team. Because if you run a relay race, you hand the baton off from one to the other, saying that no one person drives this place," says Laulis. The brand color is an homage to the red and blue of the original Cable One brand. "You blend them together and it creates the color purple, which we all try to wear every day," she adds.

Laulis' personal brand mirrors that, preferring to blend in and offer accolades to the team at every opportunity. She finds inspira-



tion in her company's frontline workers—the technicians who have actually saved lives, and customer service representatives who go above and beyond within their community. "What I love doing the most is traveling to our systems and spending time with our people, which probably sounds a little Pollyanna-ish, but what they do is hard, face to face work."

When predecessor Tom Might suggested she take the top role, her initial response was "no." But after careful consideration she did accept, driven by a powerful motivation: "I had women mentors that I could emulate and go to for advice. I feel like I've been very fortunate. ...So, I wanted to be a role model to younger women and women of the future to say, 'look, you can do whatever you want to do.'"

Jana Henthorn, former President and CEO of The Cable Center, saw that in action. "I was

fortunate to work with Julie in the early and exciting days of Jones Intercable," she says. "She has consistently exemplified the very best of leadership and vision with her business smarts and EQ savvy."

"Julie brings a rare combination of ingredients to Cable One: a relentless drive for excellence and a nurturing management style," says Wally Weitz, founder of Weitz Investment Management and Cable One board member. "She is fiercely loyal to all of her colleagues and the epitome of a servant leader."

Laulis says of her leadership style: "My role as a servant comes from my faith. I try not to think of myself." This humility, combined with relentless innovation, has been her hallmark, leading to numerous honors, including being named one of the Most Influential Women in Arizona Business. She was inducted into the Cable Center's Cable Hall of Fame in 2023 and the Cable TV Pioneers in 2024.

As she prepares to transition from CEO, Laulis remains committed to the company's future. She'll continue advising Sparklight, ensuring the momentum of transformation doesn't slow. Her legacy won't just be about technological advancement, but about creating opportunities, evidenced by her insistence that "it's never one person—it's about the team."

That may be true, but to hear it from former Cable One CEO Might, "Julie is a first-class leader who inspires all Cable One associates to constantly exceed expectations. Her selfless and unending devotion to Cable One, her family and her community is legendary. There is no better person than Julie Laulis."

Like a spark traveling down fiber, Laulis will continue to illuminate paths for others. ▲

FAST FAX

Satisfying her early career goal as a pilot, Laulis took her first lesson just this year.

As CEO, she led Cable One through the acquisition of seven brands and strategic investments in 10 companies.

Laulis is an avid runner and has competed in the New York City and Marine Corp Marathons and half Iron Mans. "I like doing hard things."

TEAM DREAM

Shentel Gives Back to the Community and Its Employees

By John Saavedra

Shentel, which operates a network across eight states in the eastern United States, is providing more than just broadband to the communities it serves. The company has built a work culture that emphasizes giving back, via charitable initiatives and development programs designed to help employees continue to grow in their careers, as well as an environment where every voice matters.

"When we talk about Shentel's culture, we use the motto 'Win together.' That means working collaboratively as a team, but it also means balancing the needs of our shareholders, our customers and our employees, making sure that they're all shared in mutual success," says COO Ed McKay, who has been at Shentel for 20 years, first joining the company as a manager on the technology team. He calls his time at Shentel a "fun, very rewarding ride."

At the center of Shentel's approach is a positive people philosophy, according to CHRO Heather Tormey, who says "part of that is how we communicate, being very deliberate about that, and also providing meaningful opportunities for people to engage with each other."

One of the company's key communication and engagement forums is "Coffee Talk,"

where executive leaders visit communities and sit down for intimate, face-to-face chat sessions with local employees, who are also encouraged to provide direct feedback on the business. Tormey describes these regular talks as "deliberate inflection points," the place to discuss "what's working well, what do we need to improve on."

Employees can also take advantage of development programs, such as "Shentel University," a guest lecture series designed to teach new skills and leadership training. McKay also highlights Shentel's educational assistance program, which has helped numerous employees earn degrees.

Most impressive is the company's Shentel Cares program, which encompasses both donation drives that raised over \$35,000 for various organizations in 2024 as well as volunteer opportunities focused on combating housing insecurity and nutritional insecurity in local communities. This summer, the company also launched "Shentel Caring Days," volunteer events where employees sign up to work with one of Shentel's partner organizations. According to Tormey, past events have included "stuffing backpacks full of food at the food bank. Or

there was one at a school up in Frederick, Maryland, and we were teaching the kids how to cook and to think about nutrition from a different perspective." Shentel regularly works with Habitat for Humanity and Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.

McKay says that these volunteer events are "a great way for our employees and our leaders to work side by side to help these communities. I can say, personally, it's been very rewarding to not only help the communities, but also work with our employees and get to know them better at the local level."

When asked what companies must do to ensure their employees feel supported and excited to come to work, Tormey says they need to "provide an environment where people feel empowered, feel included, and that they have a voice." McKay adds "creating an environment of mutual trust and respect, and really giving employees an opportunity to develop and grow. I'm a prime example of that. The opportunities Shentel has given me, I'm very grateful for those." ▲

FAST FAX

Shentel owns an extensive regional network with over 17,200 route miles of fiber enabling, broadband internet, video, voice, high-speed Ethernet, dark fiber leasing and managed network services.

Shentel broadband homes passed have grown 128,000 (Q1 2024 vs. Q1 2025) to approximately 604,000, including 363,000 Glo Fiber passings and 241,000 incumbent broadband passings.

Glo Fiber data customers have grown 51% (Q1 2024 vs. Q1 2025) to approximately 71,000.



Shentel's volunteer program regularly partners with Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, which serves central and western Virginia.



The Shentel Cares initiative includes the Summer Backpack program, which aims to combat nutritional insecurity.

BULKING UP

Lieberman, Bulk Broadband Alliance Go to Bat for Bulk Billing

By Noah Ziegler



FAST FAX

Bulk billing arrangements have been used for more than five decades, but grew to include internet services in the early 2000s.

An estimated 5.6 million U.S. households currently have access to bulk billing options.

Carr's decision was the third time in 15 years that the FCC decided not to move forward on regulating bulk billing (2010 and 2017).

When the FCC unexpectedly signaled plans to regulate and restrict bulk billing arrangements in March 2024, it sent a ripple throughout the broadband industry—one that Ross Lieberman and many others quickly recognized as a threat not just to business models, but to affordable access for millions of customers.

The proposal sought to eliminate bulk billing arrangements that are used with multi-dwelling units, or require a tenant opt-out option in an effort to give consumers more choices for their communications provider. However, the industry pushback stemmed from the notion that bulk billing enables residents to see bills that could be as much as 50% lower than retail rates, among other factors that play a part in closing the digital divide.

"The model incentivizes building out, and most importantly, it's a powerful tool for closing the digital divide by eliminating upfront fees and credit checks," says Lieberman. "It overcomes key barriers to adoption, which is one of the reasons why government and non-profit agencies use it to connect low-income households."

At Hotwire Communications, where Lieberman serves as SVP, Government Affairs, that early warning sparked a campaign to reshape the conversation in Washington. He put his multiple decades of experience navigating Capitol Hill and federal agencies to work, and within weeks, the Bulk Broadband Alliance was born, creating a coalition of broadband providers, housing associations, bipartisan lawmakers, consumer advocates and more who were united around a shared goal: to defend the consumer benefits of bulk billing.

While Lieberman played an integral role in the BBA, he's quick to credit its accomplishments as "a group effort" with many stakeholders involved, including Hotwire's own Founder/CEO Kristin Johnson and Chief Strategy Officer Jonathan Bullock. In the early stages, though, folks had varying priorities and thoughts on how the BBA should approach advocacy efforts. Additionally, some of

the smaller bulk billing providers hadn't "done Washington" before, while others were familiar with the ins and outs of the processes.

Lieberman observed the initial landscape before reaching out to partners to offer support, using his experience with similar policy battles he's endured in the past. "Within a relatively short period of time, most came to see the issue in a similar light, and did begin to approach it in a more coordinated and consistent manner," Lieberman says.

Amid the beginning of outreach campaigns and budding support from external players, the BBA and Hotwire scored an early win. Johnson met with then-FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel—the first stakeholder to do so regarding the issue—two months after the FCC's proposal was revealed.

"Our message was straightforward. It was honed because we had many discussions up to that point with lawmakers and with others interested in this matter... and our message was rooted in the FCC's own precedent. The bulk model supports affordability, digital equity, infrastructure investment, and we emphasize that it aligns with the Commission's goals," Lieberman says.

The train didn't stop at Hotwire's meeting with the FCC. Over the course of the next year, the BBA expanded its reach and engagement with lawmakers and community leaders, adding to the choir that sang in support of bulk billing. The bulk billing ensemble eventually achieved its goal in January when current FCC Chairman Brendan Carr officially withdrew the proposal to ban bulk billing.

"It was consistent with a clear legal reality," Lieberman says. "Because on Jan. 2 of this year, the Sixth Circuit ruled that the FCC had exceeded its statutory authority in attempting to reclassify broadband internet access services as a Title II service, which effectively removed the agency's authority to regulate the delivery of broadband services through bulk billing arrangements. The FCC ultimately had no choice." ▲

SMALL BUT MIGHTY

NECTA Raises the Bar Across Its Multi-State Footprint

By Amy Maclean

Some state broadband associations tend to ebb and flow, lying dormant during quiet periods and reigniting when a hot piece of legislation pops up. But that's not the story of NECTA, which has grown and evolved with the industry for more than 60 years.

"I spent 12 years in state government, and I left and said I want to work in an organization that was about the future. I think that's exactly what NECTA is, what NECTA's always been about and what our members are," says NECTA President Tim Wilkerson. "I'm always talking to my colleagues across the country about thinking bigger, thinking different, bringing more energy into what we do because we have a great story to tell. There's no industry like ours."

The association was founded in 1961 as the Community Television Association of New England to promote the interests of the television industry, rebranding to focus on cable in 1982 as the New England Cable Television Association. In 2004, it broadened its horizons a bit more as the New England Cable & Telecommunications Association before evolving in 2022 to the New England Connectivity and Telecommunications Association.

"Anybody can be a NECTA member. You could be TJX [parent company of T.J. Maxx, Marshalls and HomeGoods], the largest private employer in Massachusetts, which is not a member of ours but they could be because of ecommerce. The thing I love about our companies is we improve the way we work, live, learn, play and heal. That's about making the world a better place," explains Wilkerson speaking via a video call over WiFi outside a Dunkin' Donuts—fitting for a Boston-based broadband exec.

Breezeline, Charter, Comcast and Cox are NECTA's chief members, but it has a varied roster of associate members and partners, includ-



A collection of snapshots from the 2024 NECTA Convention in Newport, Rhode Island.

ing construction firm Crown Castle, RSN NESN and law firm Day Pitney. "We are uniquely situated given our 64 years in existence. We are centrally located in Greater Boston in a region that plays an outsized role when it comes to sports, entertainment, programming, content creation," he says.

And then there's NECTA's ability to put those companies in a room with business leaders, top policy makers and technology innovators. The association boasts one of the industry's longest running and largest annual events, the NECTA Convention, which first convened in 1968. Last year's gathering in Newport, RI, was a who's who of thought leaders, including CFX's Executive of the Year Elad Nafshi, SQUAN board member Sandy Howe, Fubo SVP Ben Grad and the lieutenant governors of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Having its pulse on industry and government has NECTA ready to spring into action when there is key legislation on the table, such as efforts in Massachusetts to require ISPs to offer a low-cost broadband tier to low-income households. It's something many are already doing, but they're reluctant to add a government mandate as it feels too much like rate regulation. "I always say we're the only industry that I can think of that voluntarily has lowered the price of their products for those who are economically disadvantaged," notes Wilkerson. NECTA and its members have worked with lawmakers in Connecticut on a bill that takes a different approach to pricing, including provisions for pricing transparency without added fees.

NECTA is a small organization, with four full-time employees, but you'd never know it looking at all it does across its five-state footprint. "Some of this I inherited, and some of it I was able to build on my own, but we're able to bring the right mix of people together to be able to punch so far over our head," Wilkerson says. "We're trying to solve problems, because ultimately, we're trying to create a predictable, regulatory and legislative environment where our companies say if we're going to do something innovative, we're going to choose New England." ▲

FAST FAX

NECTA is a nonprofit industry trade association representing ISPs, television and content creators and innovative companies in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

NECTA members employ approximately 12,000 individuals throughout New England with an economic impact of more than \$18 billion.

This year marks the 55th year for NECTA Convention. Last year's gathering was held in Newport, Rhode Island.

FULL CIRCLE

GFiber's Keib Turns Theory into Practice

By Sara Winegardner

It all began with a college essay.

While in graduate school at Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, GFiber Chief Product & Technology Officer John Keib wrote his thesis on emerging competition between direct broadcast satellite and hybrid fiber coax. He leveraged that to earn a position at Thompson Multimedia in 1994, eventually rising through the ranks of DirecTV and Time Warner Cable before arriving at GFiber.

He intentionally took on leadership roles along the way that allowed him to touch not only technology, but also marketing, sales, customer service and operations. And while he's been a part of several major industry developments throughout his storied career, Keib finds the current moment to be one of the most exciting he's ever been involved with.



FAST FAX

Keib received his B.S. in Human Ecology from Cornell University in 1991 and was a member of the university's wrestling team.

GFiber structures and markets its plans based on a consumer's lifestyle, and its \$70/month 1 Gig plan has been the same price since 2012.

Passionate about giving back, Keib has been a member of or held leadership positions with the ARC Foundation, the Metro Development Board, the Ronald McDonald House and the California State Chamber Board.

"The coolest one is the one we're working on now, which is how to reinvent a broadband experience for customers in a way that is much different than the rest of what I consider to be a tired and over-penetrated industry," he says.

Welcoming as many voices to the table has been key to Keib's success over the years, and a desire to build deeper conversations with the vendor community saw him establish GFiber Labs, the company's first in-house R&D initiative. It ultimately came from a need to introduce vendors to the benefits of the GFiber network and to create a live testing environment. GFiber teamed up with Nokia in June to complete a network slicing demo and more is planned later this year before rolling the capability out to customers. GFiber now also has a Trusted Tester pool of customers that is growing monthly, and it has been able to trial 50G speeds on live networks in Kansas City, among other achievements.

"This is one of the most scrappy initiatives that we've done. It is not a lot of overhead, and it really is weaponized in a way to make the customer experience better," he says.

Keib is the first to hold his title at GFiber, and while technology development is one of his core focuses, he believes those advancements can't be developed in a silo. Instead, he believes it is time to build a culture that

fully focuses on doing the right thing for customers, using all of his previous experiences to do so.

"The timing is somewhat perfect because all the things that are cutting edge and coming forward on the AI front are really about understanding all those levers that need to be pushed," Keib says. "It's really deciphering what is the long-term ROI for these services, not so much just from a financial payback, but for the advent of what we can do better for customers in that full circle view, and then also introduce new products and services over the next decade or so that customers haven't seen before."

Conversations around AI surround Keib and his teams, and he finds one of the greatest challenges with meeting this moment is the pace of the technology and the potential to miss out on opportunities if you're not thinking years ahead. Keib encourages everyone, regardless of industry, to be aware of how they're engaging with AI and to embrace the idea that they may not be trained properly on how to think for those platforms.

"I think you need to be ready to completely retrain your brain for how you think," he says. "Start thinking of things that you actually have never thought of, and spend more time brainstorming and thinking outside the box. Actually beg anybody for input who is not always neck deep in your industry." ▲

GROUP CHAT

WOW! BUILDS COMMUNITY AND GIVES BACK VIA THE INTRANET

By John Saavedra

For WOW!, which serves 19 markets in the Midwest and Southeast, communication is, of course, key, especially when it comes to its internal teams. In 2019, the operator launched "The Gig," its intranet and communications hub that's not only the go-to source for company news and resources but also a place where employees can form online communities, celebrate each other and create awareness for charitable causes.

"We didn't have any kind of communication hub for employees back in 2018. There was no place for employees to feel like they had an opportunity to contribute to the culture at WOW! from the standpoint of communication" recalls Debra Havins, VP, Corporate Communications. "So that was one of the first things my team and I started to put together when we came on board. This was a great way for us to ensure that all employees knew about anything that's going on at WOW! and a great way for us to build the culture."

FAST FAX

WOW!'s network now passes over 2 million households, business and wholesale consumers across Michigan, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

In 2024, WOW! employees raised \$10,000 for coworkers impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Among the operator's volunteer initiatives this year is a partnership with Habitat for Humanity to make critical safety repairs to a veteran's home in its Livingston County, Michigan market.

WOW! has been recognized multiple times for its human resources practices, winning the National Association for Business Resources' award for Best & Brightest Company to Work For in the Nation for the last seven years.

Driving the operator's approach to its internal comms hub is a people-first philosophy. It's why The Gig emphasizes stories that highlight employees. As Havins puts it, "Employees love to see information about themselves and about their coworkers that helps them feel more connected." After WOW! switched to a hybrid work environment, The Gig became an even more critical tool for maintaining employees' connection to each other and to the business. "Our stories range from what's going on in the news. But then, equally, in the same space, there's a story, for example, how one of our markets had an employee event where people had a cook-out."

Via The Gig, WOW! coordinates monthly social activities across markets as well as learning workshops and webinars. It's also where the operator spotlights its community engagement initiatives, such as volunteer opportunities and donation drives, including last year's fundraiser benefitting WOW! employees impacted by devastating hurricanes. These sorts of stories are regularly featured on The Gig to emphasize the company's culture of giving back.

Havins says internal analytics show that every WOW! employee uses The Gig in a year. Of course, reaching employees across a hybrid workplace can be challenging for today's comms teams, which is why WOW! uses mul-



Goldsboro Elementary Magnet School in Sanford, FL, received a \$45,000 donation from WOW! to expand its space center.

iple channels, such as a weekly newsletter that points to the top stories on The Gig, to get the word out. Employees can also participate in The Gig's community pages, which Havins describes as a "Facebook/Meta-style social media approach" where people can discuss important topics with one another, whether it be in the wellness group, belonging and inclusion group or any of the communities on offer. "Then other employees get notifications that posts are there, and they can like them [and] add their comments, so you can build that engagement."

Another way to engage with The Gig is through the Spirit of WOW! Awards, where employees can nominate coworkers who exemplify the company's core values of respect, integrity, spirit of service and accountability. Then there's the annual employee talent show.

"We've got some wonderful musicians, singers, painters and gardeners," Havins says, who is quick to add that last year's winner was actually a speed flyer. "Very, very interesting and exciting, but something I would never do myself!" ▲

WOW! donates \$10,000 to the Livingston County Habitat for Humanity to fund critical safety repairs for a veteran's home in the area.



THE CONNECTOR

VIAMEDIA'S VISION TRANSFORMS AD TECH

By Cathy Applefeld Olson

Rapid evolutions in television advertising ushered many companies into a mentality of "either, or" between traditional cable and streaming environments. Business at Viamedia, our 2025 Ad Tech Innovator, is booming because it opted to build bridges instead of choosing sides.

The largest indie advertising rep firm for video service providers in the U.S., Viamedia's customers are primarily mid-size and small operators. The company places more than 1 million ads daily in 220-plus zones in 28 states across 75 DMAs nationwide. Powering its solutions—which provide a single point of sale to more than 6,000 local, regional and national advertisers—is its Parrot ADS service that simplifies operations for simultaneous linear and CTV ad insertion.

"It's a different approach," says Wendell Decker, Viamedia CTO. "We have 20-plus years in the cable environment and what we found is, folks in the digital space really don't speak cable and folks in the cable space don't speak digital. We found ourselves being bilingual, and we were able to connect both."

The concept originated in 2019 when Decker and Viamedia's chief engineer were road-tripping from Kentucky to Georgia and got to talking about the ways the business was transitioning. "Everybody is trying to make



The Viamedia team is a mainstay at industry events. Pictured here at the 2024 NCTC/ACA Connects Independent Show in Nashville.

the cable mold fit into the digital impression mold," he says. "We thought, 'What if instead we could build something that would merge these two worlds and make it simple.' Let cable be cable and use pieces of each of these environments to execute a traditional spot cable schedule in a streaming dynamic environment. We were whiteboarding as we were driving and by the time we got there we had the framework for what is today Parrot."

As the core Parrot technology has expanded, so too have both Viamedia's turnkey and managed services business as the company continues to meet operators where they are. While some have migrated all of their subscribers to a streaming app-based product, some still don't yet have a game plan and others are somewhere in the middle. "We are a partner, and we have a service mentality and we're incentivized to make it work," Decker says.

Small and mid-sized operators, the company's bread and butter, are also benefiting from the addition of LocalFactor, which Viamedia purchased and integrated in March to help deliver greater precision, reach and efficiency.

"LocalFactor allows us to bundle these smaller opportunities into bigger opportunities," Decker says. "They bring a sales force that is targeting mid-tier agencies that cable may or may not have had a foothold in. So even if you're a tiny operator, we're going to be able to bundle you with a bunch of impres-

sions to make you part of the brand sale. "The small operators get the benefit of being hooked into something big at minimal cost... and the model is pay as you go, so it's like found money. That's one more thing, that's momentum."

At CDE Lightband, a Tennessee-based service provider, Chief Broadband Officer Christy Batts says Viamedia helps the company better support local businesses and subscribers. "Integrating Parrot into our Minerva-powered Cloud TV service has transformed our ad operations by streamlining workflows, improving efficiency and helping us deliver relevant and high-value content to our customers," she says.

The dynamic nature of the Parrot technology is also enabling operators to monetize inventory through another bridge—between traditional linear and programmatic demand.

"When we originally designed Parrot, the purpose was anything that's not sold, let's offer it up to programmatic demand. We're now in process of having that become a reality," Decker says. "We're doing that in a way that the digital buyers are very used to, but for cable operators this is all new demand they've never been exposed to. And again, we sit right in the middle making it as simple and painless as possible." ▲

FAST FAX

In March, Viamedia became the first U.S. ad sales firm to represent more than 100 video service providers.

During the past year, Parrot delivered 240 million-plus impressions, and it projects it will exceed 500 million impressions in 2025.

The percentage of customers that work with Parrot on a managed service model vs. full turnkey clients is 50/50.

OUTCOME ORIENTED

AMC Networks Redefines Innovation

By Cathy Applefeld Olson

A few years ago, upfront season was abuzz about data clean rooms and the ability for agencies to work directly with advertisers to securely match and combine first-party data with other datasets. What wasn't discussed as much was how cumbersome it could be to optimize clean room functionality so that data could freely flow and inform campaigns.

Enter AMC Networks Outcomes, an offering the company rolled out earlier this year that simplifies the process, speeds the delivery of campaign insights directly to advertisers and enables them to immediately use those insights to inform campaign optimization. Built into AMCN's Audience+ data and insights platform, Outcomes enables partners to view campaign performance, across all platforms, in real-time based on their desired consumer outcomes and provides a deeper understanding of audiences beyond transactional data.

"We found one of the biggest hurdles was getting access to the data from the buy side, the agency getting the advertiser to work with their data scientists within that large company and figure out how to connect first party data with the agency and then back to us as a programmer," says Evan Adlman, EVP of commercial sales & revenue operations at AMCN.

"With so much of the demand going into streaming and CTV, and the ability we have as a company to deliver cross-platform for any campaign, we thought it was really important to figure out how to take the burden off the advertiser. To create a way to expose our ad exposure data inside our clean room and figure out how to provide real time or near real time attribution for the campaigns that are running by working with the data providers we used to build a targeted segment."

Whereas client campaigns were previously adept at mining specific audience segments, that was the extent of the technological proficiency, according to Adlman.

"We would target them, but we never went back to that target audience, that dataset, to see if anything changed," he says. "A lot of the reports we've been relying on as an industry take somewhere between 45, 60, sometimes

70 days to get back. And what are you going to do with the information then? Everybody today is focused on a business outcome. With so much supply in the market, the only way to win for an advertiser is to be able to provide targeting to a specific audience and then be able to tell them what happened in a timely manner."

Outcomes has already been transformational for brands in the automotive, pharma, CPG and entertainment sectors.

Post Consumer Brands, for one, ran a campaign built with Audience+ that targeted a custom audience segment and ran across a gamut of AMCN inventory. The campaign, which ended Jan. 1, drove increased sales of Fruity Pebbles cereal, as reported by AMCN's CPG measurement partner NCS Solutions. Households spent 14% more on the cereal after being exposed to an ad, compared to the NCS National Household Panel. And households that saw the ad campaign also maintained a higher spend against Fruity Pebbles even after the campaign ended.

"There's a lot that can happen, and it's fairly easy to do now that we've built the product," says Adlman.

Similarly strong results surfaced in campaigns with two different major automakers. For one, the custom audience segment built with Audience+ that was exposed to the campaign purchased new vehicles made by that automaker at a 16.4% higher rate than a control sampling. A specific truck model was a target vehicle of the campaign, and viewers exposed to the campaign purchased 10.8% more of those specific trucks compared to the control sample. For the other, households exposed to the creative purchased new vehicles by this automaker at a 34.9% higher rate than a control



AMC Networks' Evan Adlman

sampling. An SUV model was a target vehicle of that case study, and viewers exposed to the AMCN campaign purchased 17.4% more new models of that SUV compared to the control sample.

"AMC is one of our most pioneering partners, consistently on the bleeding edge, delivering unified, cross-platform solutions for advertisers," says Comcast Advertising President James Rooke. "They are always among the first to raise their hand and test our latest ad tech innovations, and their track record of embracing new innovations gives me confidence in their ability to stay at the forefront of the industry."

There's plenty of runway ahead as AMC Networks drills down to educate the market about Outcomes benefits.

"I think we as an industry try to over-engineer everything we do, and we can't use something until it is absolutely perfect. This is a product that works end-to-end. We've tested it, we've piloted it and it is one of the upfront pillars we offered this year and are closing now," Adlman says. "I think clients see, 'This actually works. I can get some really deterministic results. And then there's so much extra data and analysis that's provided by us that can really drive other parts of their business.'"

FAST FAX

AMC Networks has more than 30 distribution channels reaching 110 million-plus ad-supported monthly active viewers.

AMC Networks launched Outcomes in February 2025.

AMCN clean room and AMCN Outcomes are built on the Snowflake platform.

From Door-to-Door to Industry Pioneer: **DAVID KLINE'S TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY**

By E.B. Moss

FAST FAX

Professionally: David was instrumental in the launch of household addressable advertising and interactive advertising at scale via RFI components.

Personally: David is a huge classic rock fan and actually attended the iconic 1973 Summer Jam concert at Watkins Glen, NY, featuring the Grateful Dead, the Allman Brothers and the Band.

He plays a mean game of tennis (a 5.0 player during his Ohio State days).



Some executives knock on opportunity's door. David Kline door-knocked to sell cable TV, and it led to him opening doors to an entire industry.

Kline went from college to selling cable subscriptions door-to-door in 1980 for Warner Cable in Houston. Each pitch sharpened his positioning of an industry he would help transform. After retiring some 45 years later in May 2025, ultimately rising to EVP of Charter and President of Spectrum Reach, Kline leaves a legacy of innovation, spanning traditional television to the streaming revolution.

"It seems like yesterday I was knocking on doors and dreaming of being a cable executive," Kline reflects. "I always believed that if you can dream it, you can do it in this industry. It sounds trite, but it's true."

That dream carried him through pivotal media roles, learning the affiliate rep side at Showtime to managing Sportschannel Ohio (now FanDuel Sports Network Ohio), where he applied his ability to think differently. For instance, Kline went beyond the usual cable-only rights pursued by other regional sports networks at the time and acquired all television rights for the Cincinnati Reds. That inclination to champion bold ideas became his trademark throughout a 15-year run as President and COO of Cablevision Media Sales, followed by leadership roles at Visible World (now FreeWheel),

then Ensequence.

When Kline joined Charter in 2015, he found his ultimate canvas for innovation. Under his leadership, Spectrum Reach evolved into a nearly \$2 billion advertising powerhouse, pioneering linear household addressability, interactive TV applications at scale and data-infused media campaigns using automation and multi-screen deterministic attribution.

Kline acknowledges that tech today has made it easier than ever to reach people at the right moment with the right message, reflecting on how addressable advertising has advanced since his early days—when a single commercial during a hit show like "M*A*S*H" could reach most of America. He leveraged that tech well, such as with his most recent focus on deploying programmatic advertising across political ads in the 2024 election cycle, and Spectrum Reach's groundbreaking alliance with Amazon Ads—making them the first MVPD local advertising reseller for the streaming giant.

Having served as Chairman of the Board of Directors for Blockgraph and on boards for Ampersand, Comscore and the Video Advertising Bureau, Kline's relationships extend beyond his own organization to influence industry-wide standards and practices.

For Jason Brown, Spectrum Reach's former

Chief Revenue Officer who succeeded Kline as EVP, their relationship has been a welcome one. "I have been fortunate to work with David these past couple of years leading up to his retirement. He has been a generous mentor, not only sharing his business insights and broad industry perspective, but his very on-brand New York-style humor," Brown says. "He leaves an impressive legacy of advertising firsts and industry innovation from which we will build. On behalf of all of us at Spectrum Reach, we wish him a fantastic and well-deserved next chapter."

Kline himself says, "I am truly humbled by this honor. As I reflect on my career, it feels like yesterday that I was knocking on doors in Houston, selling cable subscriptions. I've had the privilege of spending my entire career in an industry I love, alongside some amazing people, and to take an active part in its incredible evolution. As I move into retirement, I am filled with the wonderful memories and experiences I've had."

But, as he prepares for retirement, Kline's not closing doors—he's opening new ones. His future plans include continued board service, more tennis and golf, nonprofit work and family time, even remaining connected to the industry where his insights shaped television advertising's future. ▲

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Don't count Pay TV out just yet. MVPDs and content giants are partnering like never before and getting creative—striking bold deals that blend the best of linear and streaming. As streaming prices climb, even die-hard cord-cutters might start eyeing the savings of a hybrid bundle. In this high-stakes panel, industry heavyweights from both sides of the negotiating table break down what dealmaking looks like in Pay TV's next act.



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Distribution
Paramount Global



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For your leadership. Your heart. And the incredible legacy you leave behind.

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