

Tri-State Appalachian Region Ultra-High-Speed Fiber Optic Network

"In the past, residents in the Appalachian region have done without the leading-edge resources that the higher populated, urban areas have enjoyed. Now, through the efforts of BalsamWest and WNC-EdNET, we are seeing parity in the connectivity and pricing of this technology, which is increasing the area's ability to develop its intellectual property and compete on a level playing field."

Bill Gibson, Executive Director of the Southwestern Commission

"Knowledge and timing are critically important for any venture, and BalsamWest had a tremendous advantage thanks to the critical research, support and advocacy provided by Southwestern Community College. With Southwestern's assistance, BalsamWest was able to make smart choices at critical decision points. Their research helped us see into the future of an industry that was recreating itself for an online world of global competition.

The technology choices we made at the beginning, which were informed and supported by Southwestern Community College, are enabling us to expand our core network within the region and to urban centers around us. Drake Enterprises and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians and their strong commitment to the people of the area have taken a good possibility and turned it into reality. It's all been about working together and working smart, and the schools of the southwestern region of North Carolina are the big winners."

John Short of BalsamWest FiberNET

"What makes this project unique is the tremendous collaboration and cooperation among the six counties. Through the guidance and leadership of WRESA and the Southwestern Planning Commission, the generosity of Golden LEAF and Cherokee Preservation Foundation, and the dedication to the community of Drake and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, we are deploying a network that not only is already recognized statewide as the model for regional networks, but will also serve as a phenomenal springboard for social economic development."

Leonard Winchester, Chairman of the procurement committee for Western Region Education Service Alliance (WRESA) and former rural school district technology coordinator for Swain County

"Ultra-high-speed connectivity to every school in the six western-most counties of North Carolina will be a tremendous asset to the children of this region. There is no question that this is going to enhance the delivery of educational instruction to students so that they have the very best opportunity for a world-class education."

Roger Metcalf, Western Region Educational Service Alliance (WRESA)

“This technology infrastructure is going to bring the world to these children and give them better opportunities than previous generations in this region. With the BalsamWest fiber optic loop, our schools will have a more advanced technology network that will save us money, allowing us to invest in more equipment and services. With this advanced electronic highway, students will have unprecedented access to the latest global educational resources and materials available, preparing them for work and responsibility.”

Robert White, superintendent of Swain County Schools

“The schools of southwestern North Carolina are the beneficiaries of three important policies adopted by BalsamWest: “empty pipes”, open access and metropolitan area carrier wholesale pricing. These policies allow the company to truly act as a collaborator in support of education and regional advancement and promote affordable and competitive access to the area that BalsamWest serves, which in turn improves quality, lowers pricing and increases choices for all.

BalsamWest offers its high capacity transport circuits as “empty pipes” to providers of voice, video, data and other digital services. The company does not sell the content that flows through its pipes, so it is not a competitor of those who do. This is an important policy because it removes any incentive for BalsamWest to restrict choices of content and services into and out of the area by creating price or other barriers to advanced infrastructure access. BalsamWest offers open access to its fiber, which provides virtually unlimited capacity at the lowest possible cost. The WNC-EdNET is a reality thanks to BalsamWest’s open access policy. BalsamWest’s pricing is intentionally disruptive, as much as 25 times lower than prevailing market rates, in order to create an attractive environment for electronic enterprises of all types – public, private and nonprofit.

Drake Enterprises, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and Southwestern Community College have scored a touchdown in BalsamWest, and the schools – the home team – are winning.”

Sherry McCuller of BalsamWest

“With the help of strategic local partnerships, we are blazing a trail for students and future generations to access world-class resources that will provide unlimited educational opportunities. Teachers can conduct lessons in ways never imaginable before, and children can connect with classmates in different counties, states and even continents.”

David Hubbs of Drake Enterprises, Ltd.

"This project is one of the biggest and most important of its kind for this region. It will make a huge impact on our children, our families and our community. We look forward to seeing the results and reaping the rewards of this investment in our people."

Michell Hicks, Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians