



broadband association of north dakota

BAND Together Newsletter

Executive Director Report: Grateful for Connection—and the Communities It Strengthens

November always invites a moment of pause—a time to reflect on what we're grateful for and the people and comforts that make life richer. It's a season of appreciation and togetherness.

It's also a time to honor our Veterans and their families, whose courage and sacrifice protect the freedoms we hold dear. And, of course, it's when we gather around tables with loved ones, share a meal, and enjoy each other's company.

While these traditions remind us to give thanks, I've found myself grateful for something many of us rarely stop to consider—the quiet, constant presence of connection.

Here in North Dakota, connectivity is more than convenience. It's the thread that ties our communities together. It lets us stay in touch with loved ones serving far from home, join family gatherings virtually when we can't be there in person, and cheer for our favorite high school athletes from miles away. It helps our students learn, our businesses grow, and our communities thrive.

As we move deeper into the holiday season, BAND members continue to play an indispensable role in empowering rural communities with cutting-edge fiber broadband networks. These high-speed connections make it possible to stream holiday classics, host virtual reunions, and work or learn from home with ease.

Thanks to strong local investment and collaboration at every level, North Dakota now stands among the most fiber-connected states in the nation—a true testament to what can be achieved when like-minded people work together.

To all the BAND members who make that connectivity possible—thank you. Your dedication strengthens not only our networks but also the sense of togetherness that defines North Dakota.

From all of us at BAND, we wish you a warm, joyful, and well-connected holiday season.



BAND Member Spotlight: BEK Communications

BEK Communications Leads North Dakota in Cybersecurity Innovation Through Acquisition of CyberNet Security

Five years ago, [BEK Communications Cooperative](#) made a pivotal acquisition of [CyberNet Security](#), North Dakota's only pure-play cybersecurity firm, founded in 2016 by industry leader [John Nagel](#).

This strategic move not only fortified BEK's fiber-optic network against escalating threats but also extended advanced



protection to its over 12,000 members, rural businesses, and critical infrastructure across North Dakota.

In an era where global cybercrime is projected to cost [\\$10.5 trillion annually in 2025](#)—up from \$6 trillion in 2021—this integration positions BEK as a frontline defender in safeguarding digital assets.

Cybersecurity is no longer optional for broadband providers; it's also a mandate embedded in federal and state funding programs, which require robust risk management plans to qualify for grants.

For policymakers, this underscores the economic imperative: secure broadband networks drive investment in rural areas, where North Dakota's digital gaps such as affordability barriers affecting education, telehealth, and remote work can be bridged only with resilient infrastructure.

BAND members like BEK exemplify this by embedding cybersecurity into operations, aligning with North Dakota's whole-of-state approach that thwarts billions of threats annually through layered defenses and zero-trust models.

CyberNet Security brings formidable expertise, with its team possessing over 150 years of combined experience and more than 900 cybersecurity engagements nationwide. Services encompass system architecture design, vulnerability assessments, penetration testing, incident response, and risk management frameworks aligned with NIST and CMMC standards. This capability has earned BEK the [NTCA Cyber Champion Award](#) for three consecutive years (2023, 2024, and 2025), recognizing its excellence in rural broadband security.

A pressing challenge reshaping the threat landscape is artificial intelligence (AI), [with 78% of chief information security officers](#) reporting significant impacts from AI-powered attacks in 2025, including automated phishing, malware generation at scale, and deepfakes which have the potential to cause everyone to question the way they see and hear the world.

CyberNet Security anticipated this evolution, adopting AI-driven threat detection, behavioral analytics, and automated response systems to enhance situational awareness. For legislators, this proactive stance highlights opportunities for policy incentives such as workforce training grants to build North Dakota's cybersecurity talent pipeline, addressing national shortages while fostering economic growth through tech innovation and job creation in fields like autonomous transportation and digital governance.

Under the leadership of John Nagel, recipient of the [2024 North Dakota Tech Champion Award](#) for his progressive integration of technology with state values and Bismarck State College CyberCon 2025 Hall of Fame inductee, CyberNet Security advises businesses, agencies, and policymakers on cyber strategy and best practices. Nagel serves as BEK's Chief Security Officer and as President of CyberNet Security.

Nagel's roles, including appointments to the North Dakota Economic Development Foundation, board and advisory positions with the Department of Commerce, ISACA ND, InfraGard, Bismarck State College, and the University of Mary, amplify BEK's influence in shaping resilient digital policies.

By uniting broadband expansion with cutting-edge cybersecurity, BEK Communications and CyberNet Security not only protect North Dakota's digital ecosystem but also model how targeted investments can enhance national security, attract businesses, and support access.

BAND Around the State

Carissa traveled to northeast North Dakota and met with employees of BAND member [Polar Communications](#).

While traveling the area, she met with [Senator Jeff Barta](#), [Representative Jared Hagert](#) and [Representative Kathy Frelich](#).

Be sure to stay connected with BAND on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)!



Upcoming Events

December 1-3
BAND Annual Meeting (Bismarck, ND)



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**Carissa Swenson,
Executive Director**

I am happy to provide information or speak at an event.
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Broadband Association of North Dakota (BAND) | PO Box 1144 | Mandan, ND 58554 US

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