



broadband association of north dakota

BAND Together Newsletter

Executive Director Report: 75 Years Strong - Celebrating Milestones, Dedicated Teams, and the Enduring Power of Local Fiber in Rural North Dakota

June is a busy month for many of our cooperative members, as it is annual meeting season across North Dakota. These meetings provide an opportunity for members to hear updates on their cooperative's financial health, enjoy a meal with neighbors and friends, and participate in the democratic process by electing board members. As Executive Director of BAND, I always try to attend as many annual meetings as my schedule allows.

This year has been especially meaningful, as several of our members are celebrating their 75th anniversaries. One standout example is SRT Communications, North Dakota's largest telecommunications cooperative, which is celebrating its **75th anniversary throughout 2026**. Founded in 1951 to bring telephone service to rural north-central North Dakota, SRT recently returned more than \$4M in capital credits to members, **including a special \$750K distribution** to mark the milestone.

It's remarkable to reflect on how these small telephone cooperatives were formed decades ago to bring basic telephone service to rural North Dakota and how they have evolved into world-class fiber broadband providers. Their commitment to serving their communities remains as strong today as it was when they were first established.

One common theme I hear during annual meeting reports is the appreciation expressed for the employees who make these companies successful. Many cooperatives recognize employees for milestones of 5, 10, 20, and even 30 years of service. These individuals are the backbone of our industry – and the heart of our communities. They are the technicians who respond when a fiber line is cut, often in challenging weather conditions. They are the customer service representatives who assist subscribers, the engineers who plan future networks, and the crews who work tirelessly to keep communities connected.

Our member companies are also among the largest employers in many of the communities they serve. They provide quality jobs and benefits that help sustain rural North Dakota. Just as importantly, their employees are deeply invested in their hometowns. They volunteer in their communities, support local organizations, coach youth sports, and raise their families in the towns they serve. They play an important role in keeping rural North Dakota strong and vibrant.

National conversations about broadband often focus on alternatives such as low-earth orbit (LEO) satellites or cellular-based solutions. While these technologies have their place, they simply do not offer the same performance, reliability, or long-term capacity as the fiber networks built and maintained by BAND members. Fiber networks deliver symmetric multi-gigabit speeds (1 Gbps+) with typical latency of just 1–10 milliseconds. In contrast, LEO satellite services typically offer 50–400 Mbps (on shared capacity) with latency of 20–60+ ms that can vary with weather or network congestion. Fixed wireless and cellular solutions often face capacity constraints in rural areas. Only fiber is truly future-proof: capacity can be scaled dramatically through electronics upgrades rather than new spectrum, satellites, or towers.

Just as importantly, BAND members employ more than 1,000 North Dakotans who live, work, and contribute to our rural communities every day. BAND's members also serve subscribers across every county in the state.

It's always inspiring to witness democracy in action and hear directly from the member-owners guiding these remarkable organizations. As consumers and policymakers consider the future of broadband, I encourage them to remember the value of investing in local providers. Supporting our members means supporting local jobs, local families, and the long-term vitality of rural North Dakota.

BAND Member Spotlight: DRN

DRN's reliable fiber internet attracts growth in rural North Dakota

DRN Read iTech (DRN), the long-standing southeastern North Dakota cooperative that delivers reliable, high-speed fiber-based internet service across rural communities, is putting its guiding principle of "Concern for the Community" into action in a very tangible way. By investing in essential fiber infrastructure, DRN is connecting families and businesses while also enabling the kind of economic growth that strengthens entire communities—including support for the youngest residents.



Grand Opening for The Nest. From left: Claire Woodstead, Nest Director; Kent Schimke, DRN CEO/GM; Verla Jung, Child Care Aware start-up and community engagement coordinator; Sheila Kriewald, Child Care Owner, The Nest; Kari Nishek, DRN COO; Gary Mertz, Mertz Lumber, contractor; Ralph Neu, DRN Board President; Paul Wedell, Mertz Lumber, contractor; and Mike Ost, DRN Read iTech. Contributed / Verla Jung

You may remember last year's coverage of DRN's partnership with Applied Digital and its new high-performance computing data center in Ellendale. DRN's robust fiber network provided the high-capacity, low-latency connectivity critical for this type of facility. The resulting jobs and housing development have increased the need for quality childcare among working families and caregivers.

DRN and The Nest – Ellendale Childcare Center held a grand opening and open house earlier this year. "The center represents more than just a building—it symbolizes our shared commitment to families, children, and the future of our community," said Kent Schimke, DRN CEO/General Manager, during the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The Nest – Ellendale Childcare Center opened in February and offers dedicated spaces for infants, toddlers, Pre-K and after-school care. Owned and operated by Sheila Kriewald, a veteran educator and childcare professional, the center is licensed to serve up to 50 children and meets all regulatory requirements.

DRN is a cooperative guided by the principle of "Concern for Community" and benefits families in Ellendale and surrounding areas but also aligns with DRN's mission to enhance the quality of life for our employees and the broader community. This is just one example of how DRN's fiber investments and community focus work together to enhance quality of life in Ellendale and beyond.

DRN Achieved Operation IFAST Certification to Combat Domestic Sex Trafficking

DRN Read iTech (DRN), which provides essential high-speed fiber-based internet service that powers education, healthcare, commerce, and daily life across rural southeastern North Dakota, takes seriously its responsibility to help keep those connections safe. Rural America is not insulated from the dangers of sex trafficking, and most of these crimes begin and are managed online.



Operation IFAST, Internet Service Providers Fight Against Sex Trafficking, is a national initiative led by Guardian Group, a nonprofit organization dedicated to disrupting and preventing the sex trafficking of women and children in the United States.

Earlier this year, DRN's staff [completed specialized training](#) to recognize and report trafficking indicators, established collaboration with local law enforcement, and made an annual investment to support critical counter-trafficking efforts.

Underscoring this issue was a [recent radio interview](#) with Dickey County State's Attorney Kimberly Radermacher and Oakes Police Chief Matt O'Brien which DRN has worked closely with on this project.



"DRN is honored to stand alongside Guardian Group and a growing network of companies nationwide who are taking bold action to help end human trafficking," said Kent Schimke, DRN CEO/General Manager. This certification reflects DRN's broader commitment to building and maintaining a secure, reliable fiber network that serves the entire community responsibly.

For more information on DRN, visit drn.coop or [contact me directly](#).

Upcoming Events

July 7-8

BAND's Summer Meeting (Bismarck, ND)

Nov. 30-Dec. 2

BAND's Annual Meeting (Bismarck, ND)



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**Carissa Swenson,
Executive Director**

I am happy to provide information or speak at an event. If you aren't already subscribed to this newsletter, [please join our mailing list](#).



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