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concerns. My tenure as CEO of Windstream began in December 2014. Since that time, we have worked tirelessly on a comprehensive overhaul of the entire company's network and processes. Windstream is on a different strategic path today and we have already made

significant progress in Georgia and the Ninth Congressional District. This progress comes despite the rural nature of the area, which makes it physically and economically challenging to deliver high-speed Internet and voice services. I know well these small, rural communities because they are similar to

the one where I was raised in Central Illinois and that Windstream serves across the country.

The following tables show Windstream's strong record of investment in recent years, as well as the results that it is producing:

Georgia			
	2014	2015	2016*
Network Investment	\$18M	\$63M	\$ 38M (estimated)
Speed Capabilities	3 Mbps+ Capable: 84% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 56% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 16%	3 Mbps+ Capable: 91% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 75% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 40%	3 Mbps+ Capable: 95% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 84% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 48%

Georgia Ninth Congressional District			
	2014	2015	2016*
Speed Capabilities	3 Mbps+ Capable: 91% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 61% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 21%	3 Mbps+ Capable: 95% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 77% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 40%	3 Mbps+ Capable: 97% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 86% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 46%

*All 2016 speed capabilities are projected based on current funded plans

The facts speak for themselves but I will restate some of the accomplishments of our employees in Georgia and, in particular, those who call North Georgia their home. I know they share the pride I feel about their hard work in the last year, and their continuing efforts in 2016. Here are a few highlights:

In 2015, Windstream investment surged to more than \$60 million – triple the amount of the previous year. This investment supported upgrades to every part of the network – from neighborhood network nodes, to regional network facilities, to the cables that connect it all together.

In recent years in the Ninth District and Georgia as a whole, we have converted nearly all of our middle mile plant to fiber and upgraded the electronics to work with these new fiber facilities. As a result, 97 percent of the customers in your district are now served by a fiber-fed node for their broadband, which will eliminate back-haul congestion.

With this investment and our upgraded plant, we now offer faster speeds (10-100 Mbps) to 77 percent of the locations we serve in the Ninth Congressional District. Moreover, 40 percent of the locations can get at least 20 Mbps.

95 percent of the households in the Ninth Congressional District can receive at least three Mbps Internet service from Windstream. We expect that coverage to expand to 97 percent by end of 2016. The remaining households are located at such a distance from our network that it would be cost prohibitive to upgrade their service.

Although it is substantially more expensive to serve rural areas like the Ninth District, we charge the same

prices throughout Georgia and the rest of the nation.

We have accomplished a lot in the past several years, but we are not satisfied to stop here -- our work continues in 2016. In the Ninth Congressional District, the Windstream team has already completed work on an additional 53 sites in the first 56 days of 2016, to deliver faster and more reliable connections to more than 5,000 customers. As these efforts continue, we will end 2016 with fewer than two percent of our customers served by middle mile copper facilities and 86 percent of households in your district capable of receiving 10 Mbps or faster high-speed Internet service.

Throughout 2016, we will continue to deploy technology with new capabilities, including software that extends our faster speeds further in the network. In addition, we will continue our work with major online providers to position their computer servers in local Windstream facilities, so that high-bandwidth traffic can reach end users faster and with less disruption to other customers.

The spinoff in 2015 of some of our facilities to a Real Estate Investment Trust has helped us make these investments. As we said when we announced our plan, the spinoff enabled us to reduce our debt (which makes the company healthier so it can do more for our customers) and increase our investment in our network. Our substantial investments in Georgia and your district would not have been possible otherwise.

But our customers need more than technical performance. I also will work with our North Georgia team to stand up the following three initiatives, aimed at delivering a much improved service experience:

Communication -- We

will pursue broader customer outreach initiatives to ensure that more households become aware of new speed tiers in their local area. This outreach will include local advertising, direct communications to upgrade-eligible households, and more frequent announcements when upgrade work is completed.

Local Leadership -- I will appoint a President of Georgia Operations to ensure a single point of accountability as we work to deliver on our commitment to excellence. In addition to a primary focus on operations, this executive will work in tandem with our Government Affairs team to respond swiftly to concerns and questions of you and other officials.

Rapid Response Team -- Finally, I will establish a team, based in Cornelia, to respond specifically to any Ninth District customers who contact your office. Individuals who believe their needs have not been addressed should contact this team directly at 706-894-1330. Customers may also visit any of our local retail locations in Blairsville, Dahlonega, Cleveland, Commerce, or Cornelia. Our retail associates stand ready to support the needs of our customers between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

I again want to emphasize Windstream's commitment to servicing the needs of the communities of North Georgia. We are proud to serve the Ninth Congressional District and rural communities across Georgia. Should you be interested in learning more, I would also like to renew my previous invitation to schedule an in-person meeting or a follow-up phone call.

Respectfully,
Tony Thomas

Union County Judge completes professional development training

Judge C. Dwain Brackett of Union County has successfully completed in-depth judicial training requirements through the Georgia Probate Court Judges Certificate Program.

Brackett is one of the first probate court judges in Georgia to complete the 72-hour professional development curriculum. Judges and associate judges who finished their coursework are eligible to receive certificates at the Georgia Probate Court Judges Annual Meeting in April.

The Georgia Probate Court Judges Certificate Program is a basic course coordinated by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government in collaboration with the Council of Probate Court Judges and the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education at UGA.

The Institute of Government inaugurated the certificate program in 2012 to enhance the proficiency of probate court judges and associate judges throughout Georgia. The program provides critical training in the skills necessary to administer probate courts in an efficient, professional manner. Coursework allows judges to strengthen their command of court procedures, gain deeper insight into the intricacies of guardianships and estates, and more.

Judges must successfully complete 12 hours of continuing education every two years to maintain the certificate.

"Through the Georgia Probate Court Judges Certificate Program, these dedicated judicial officials acquire critical knowledge and professional skills to help them better serve the

public and their communities," said Laura Meadows, director of the Institute of Government.

For more information about the Georgia Probate Court Judges Certificate Program, contact Institute Associate Director Stacy Jones at (706) 542-9771 or jonessb@uga.edu.

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government, a UGA Public Service and Outreach unit, provides training, offers technical assistance and conducts applied research to help state and local governments operate efficiently and effectively and provide improved service to the public.



Judge C. Dwain Brackett

Collins...

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poor customer service. CEO Tony Thomas wrote me in January of 2015, that they "have some catching up to do in some areas" of my district, and yet despite this admission nothing has improved. As a recipient of federal funding, and preferred tax status, Windstream is accountable to Congress, and their customers in Northeast Georgia, for their business practices. Customer service is not the problem – I've talked to many qualified professionals who work for the company, who understand that the real problems are with woefully inadequate infrastructure. Windstream can establish all the hotline phone numbers they want, but until they take their responsibility to rural communities seriously, I will continue to hold them accountable for how they spend federal funding."

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