

America's Fiber Network

NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PARTNERS CREATE AMERICA'S FIBER NETWORK, A SUPER-REGIONAL FIBER OPTICS COMPANY

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Six energy and telecommunications companies today announced the creation of America's Fiber Network LLC, a new super-regional, high-speed fiber optics company with a network of more than 7,000 route miles, or 140,000 fiber miles, connecting major markets in the eastern United States to secondary markets with a growing need for broadband access.

The initial footprint of fiber in America's Fiber Network (AFN) puts the company in position to reach areas responsible for roughly 35 percent of the national wholesale communications capacity market.

AFN is a new telecommunications company formed by AEP Communications, a subsidiary of American Electric Power (NYSE: AEP); GPU Telcom, a subsidiary of GPU, Inc. (NYSE: GPU); Allegheny Communications Connect, a subsidiary of Allegheny Energy, Inc. (NYSE: AYE); FirstEnergy Telecom, a subsidiary of FirstEnergy Corp. (NYSE: FE); CFW Communications (NASDAQ: CFWC); and R&B Communications.

AFN serves as a "carrier's carrier," providing telecommunications capacity to Internet service providers, competitive local exchange providers, long-distance providers and wireless communications companies. Customers already under contract include many of the nation's leading telecommunications companies.

The wholesale communications capacity market in the United States was \$3.7 billion in 1999 and has an annual growth rate exceeding 30 percent. Much of the growth is driven by increased Internet traffic and the corresponding demand for increased bandwidth for voice, data and video transmission. While the number of Americans using the Internet has grown from fewer than 5 million in 1993 to as many as 88 million in 1998, Internet penetration still is only about 30 percent.

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"The Congress, White House and other government leaders have expressed concern about the 'bandwidth divide' -- smaller markets left behind by the Internet and the rapid expansion of e-commerce because of limited bandwidth availability," said Pete Thomas, vice president of AEP Communications. "Businesses and residents in these markets have the same need for data exchange and information access as those in major markets. America's Fiber Network is bridging that bandwidth divide.

"Many telecommunications companies are focusing on connecting what's known as Tier 1 markets -- cities like New York, Chicago, the District of Columbia and others that make up the largest metropolitan areas in the United States," Thomas said. "Others are focusing on smaller regions. America's Fiber Network takes a super-regional approach, reaching underserved markets like Athens, Ohio; Binghamton, N.Y.; Morgantown, W.Va.; and Charlottesville, Va.; and connecting them to the Tier 1 markets."

AFN will operate an integrated network with more than 7,000 route miles of fiber in an area that stretches from New York City to Chicago and from Rochester, N.Y., to Johnson City, Tenn.

The majority of the network consists of high-capacity fiber optic cable installed in the last three years, which provides America's Fiber Network with approximately 140,000 fiber miles. A route mile describes the distance covered by total installed fiber optic cable. Fiber miles -- the number of strands of fiber in a length of fiber optic cable multiplied by the length of the cable in miles -- more accurately defines the capacity of the fiber network.

"This is a unique new telecommunications company," said David C. Brauer, vice president, strategic initiatives, for GPU Service. "America's Fiber Network has a robust fiber optic network, customers under contract and revenue.

"Concentrating fiber capacity in the new company creates a larger, integrated network operated by a company focused on serving the telecommunications market," Brauer said. "America's Fiber Network is truly a case where the value of the network as a whole is much greater than the value of the individual parts."

AEP Communications, GPU Telcom and Allegheny Communications Connect are majority owners in AFN, with approximately 90 percent of the new company.

Minority owners are FirstEnergy Telecom, CFW Communications and R&B Communications. A.T. Kearney, the global management consulting subsidiary of EDS (NYSE: EDS), served as a strategic advisor in creating AFN and formulating its strategic plan.

The venture partners intend for America's Fiber Network to function independently and grow quickly.

"Today's announcement is an excellent start for America's Fiber Network, but we are already discussing ways to grow this company," said John W. Flinko, vice president of Allegheny Communications Connect. "We will quickly expand the AFN network to more than 10,000 route miles by the end of 2000, including the addition of new partners with existing fiber assets."

America's Fiber Network is conducting a national search for a chief executive officer and executive management team with experience in the telecommunications industry. Thomas will serve as interim president until the search is completed and the management team is in place.

America's Fiber Network has filed with the Federal Communications Commission for exempt telecommunications company (ETC) status.

AEP Communications LLC is a subsidiary of American Electric Power, a multinational energy company headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, that serves 3 million customers in portions of Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

GPU Telcom Services, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of GPU, Inc., of Morristown, N.J., a registered public utility holding company that serves half the land areas of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Worldwide, GPU delivers electricity to 4.6 million customers.

Allegheny Communications Connect, an Allegheny Energy company, delivers telecommunications services over an advanced fiber optic network to customers throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Allegheny Energy, Inc. is a diversified energy company headquartered in Hagerstown, Md.

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FirstEnergy Telecom delivers advanced telecommunications services over a fiber optic, broadband network. It is a subsidiary of FirstEnergy Corp., of Akron, Ohio, a diversified energy services company that serves more than 2.2 million customers in northern and central Ohio and portions of western Pennsylvania.

CFW Communications, doing business as CFW Intelos and Intelos, is an integrated communications provider with headquarters in Waynesboro, Va. The company provides a broad range of services including Digital PCS, local Internet access, high-speed DSL Internet services, and local and long distance telephone services.

R&B Communications Inc. is a diversified telecommunications company with headquarters in Daleville, Va. R&B provides local telephone, paging, voicemail, and Internet services, wireless cable television services, sells business telephone systems and operates fiber optic networks.

Information on America's Fiber Network can be found at www.americasfibernet.com.

Certain statements above constitute forward-looking statements with respect to the companies involved in the joint venture: Allegheny Energy, Inc., American Electric Power, CFW Communications, FirstEnergy Corp., GPU Inc, and R&B Communications. Such forward-looking statements involve known and unknown risks, uncertainties, and other factors that may cause the actual results, performance, or achievements of the above-mentioned companies to be materially different from any future results, performance, or achievements expressed or implied by such forward-looking statements. Such factors may affect the above-mentioned companies' operations, markets, products, services, and prices. Such factors include, among others, the following: general and economic and business conditions; industry capacity; changes in technology; changes in political, social, and economic conditions; regulatory matters; integration of the operations of the above-mentioned companies; regulatory conditions applicable to the transaction; the loss of any significant customers; and changes in business strategy or business plans.

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