



GEORGIA

Rural Utilities Service • Telecommunications Program • Telecommunications Loan Program

Rural Telephone Cooperative Takes Networking To New Level

For over two decades, a 42,000 square foot spec building stood empty near the downtown of Metter, Georgia. From time to time, a business would claim the space, then move on. Buildings like this one, empty upon establishment, blot the towns of rural America. But for Metter, second life has poured into the building, transforming the space into the headquarters of the globally partnered concrete pump and product assembly companies, CPE America and Everdigm.

How did a rural town of 4,000 end up on the shortlist of multinational, multimillion dollar companies? Beyond a profitable trading spot, the local area features appealing regulations, robust education, strong partnerships, and not least, reliable infrastructure, says Executive Director Molly Olson of the Candler County Industrial Authority. While the traditional utilities--water, sewer, and energy--are prerequisites, for telecommunications, Olson says, "The impact of fiber connectivity is a huge advantage and one of our top selling points."

General Manager Dustin Durden of Georgia's homegrown Pineland Telephone Cooperative (Pineland) cautions that the presence of broadband doesn't mean businesses will come. Instead, he reframes the statement, saying, "Not having broadband is an eliminating factor." In a small town where public-private cooperation is key to sustaining a strong local economy, Pineland is doing its part to ensure that its communities have access to leading edge broadband. A USDA partner since the 1950s, Pineland has steadily developed its network capacity, offering diverse services and now, fiber technology. In the last ten years, Pineland has received two awards from the USDA's Rural Utilities Service, totaling over \$28 million. With these funds, Pineland is constructing over 1,800 miles of fiber and deploying expanded video and gigabit enabled packages to customers in its exchanges.

Easing the companies' move to Metter, Pineland worked with the Industrial Authority to ensure that the fiber connection to the former spec building was ready. Both Olson and Durden emphasize the importance of fostering collaborative energy across businesses, public institutions, and the workforce. From its local partnerships with the Industrial Authority and the Chamber of Commerce, among others, to its 66-year federal partnership, Pineland's wide-ranging investments in its nine county service area are as extensive as its fiber network.



CPE America President and CEO Sebastian Falzon stands in front of an Everdigm concrete pump at the company's globally connected headquarters, located in Metter, Georgia.

Obligation Amount: \$12,224,000 Telecommunications Loan in 2007/\$16,498,000 Telecommunications Loan in 2014

Date of Obligation: 2007 and 2014

Congressional District: Representative Allen, District 12; Senators Isakson and Perdue

Partners: Pineland Telephone Cooperative, Inc.

Demographics: Businesses, specifically in collaboration with the Candler County Industrial Authority

Impact: Economic development is accelerated as Pineland works with the local governments and organizations to ensure that leading edge broadband access is available to businesses and residences.