

Star Communications awarded \$3.3 million in Great Grant Funds to serve rural areas in Bladen County and Sampson County

RALEIGH – A member-owned telecommunications cooperative based in Clinton, NC has been awarded \$3.3 million to expand high speed internet service to more than 1,400 addresses in Bladen County and 442 addresses in Sampson County.

Star Communications, a communications service provider, was one of 11 recipients to receive funding through the 2020 Supplementary Round of Growing Rural Economies through Access to Technology or GREAT, Grant Program.

The money will support broadband expansion in the Abbottsburg area in rural Bladen County and in underserved areas within the city of Clinton through Star's wholly owned subsidiary StarVision, Inc. according to Star. Star Communications will provide \$1.4 million in matching funds for these projects resulting in a total investment of \$4.7 million in the affected communities.

"Star Communications and its wholly owned subsidiary StarVision, Inc. are extremely pleased to be able to make this investment in the broadband infrastructure of both Bladen and Sampson counties" said Jeff Nethercutt, Executive Vice President and CEO for Star Communications. "Our customers expect and deserve the increased broadband speeds and enhanced telecommunications services that this grant will make possible."

In 2019, Star Communications was awarded an \$860,000 grant during the inaugural round of GREAT Grant funding for three areas in Bladen County. These grant funds received were matched in an amount of \$860,000 for a total investment of \$1.7 million. The projects in the Bladen County communities of Pusey's Store, Mote Road and Oak Grove Church were completed in July of 2020 and made available increased internet speeds and enhanced service to more than 400 addresses.

"Star Communications is focused on expanding our broadband infrastructure utilizing fiber-optics to bring high speed Internet to the rural communities that we serve. The expansion and improvements that are being achieved will help to bridge the digital divide between rural and urban areas in the years to come" said Nethercutt. "We would like to thank the North Carolina Department of Information Technology, our legislators and Governor Cooper for making the GREAT Grant possible. These funds will build a better North Carolina and improve the lives of many" commented Nethercutt.

Star Telephone Membership Corporation, is a member-owned cooperative, providing a variety of telecommunications services to its members in Sampson, Bladen, Cumberland, Duplin and Columbus counties in North Carolina. Along with its current focus of building a High Speed Internet network and Fiber-to-the-Home initiatives, Star is committed to enhancing the quality of life across the region through various charitable, educational and economic development programs.