



CORNING

Tri-Co Case Study

Tri-Co Connections (Tri-Co) is a recent undertaking of Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative (TCREC) in north-central, rural Pennsylvania. It will provide its members plus some additional homes (more than 23,000 homes total) with fiber-to-the-home internet service. The co-op is a trusted local organization as it has been servicing its seven member counties since its formation in 1936. At the time, electricity was unavailable and/or too expensive to reach the average consumer. Through the Rural Electric Act of 1936, the government lent money to electrify rural America.

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative brings electricity to its members in parts of seven Pennsylvania counties (Bradford, Cameron, Clinton, Lycoming, McKean, Potter, and Tioga) for a total service footprint of approximately 5,000 square miles.

The Challenge

In 2019, TCREC recognized that its members were faced with another challenge. This time, the region needed fast, reliable internet service. Even before the pandemic began in 2020, it was clear that better broadband and higher bandwidth were necessities, not luxuries. So, the organization started plans to bring stronger internet service to the region. When TCREC began its fiber build in November 2019, Tri-Co Connections was born, with the first customers receiving residential service in April 2020.

The Solution

“We never had an interest in becoming an internet service provider,” says Aaron Young, Tri-Co’s COO. “But the facts were that the traditional ISPs had no intention or plan to serve our members with what they were asking for, and those same members asked us to intervene. Our CEO and Board of Directors were convinced we needed to step in.”

Today, the seven-county build, slated to be completed in 2025, is on track thanks to Corning’s commitment to providing the fiber needed to complete the build—including direct connections to member homes.

In year two of a six-year project, 50% of homes passed are subscribing to either Tri-Co Connection’s 100 Mbps or gigabit services. For context, these numbers would probably be higher if they did not include the many seasonal/summer homes in the region’s footprint.

While Tri-Co is conveniently located just 20 miles south of Corning's U.S. headquarters, the decision to partner with Corning came down to competitive pricing, supply-chain availability, and the noted brand recognition and respect among Tri-Co Connection members.

"Corning has more than lived up to its reputation," explains Young. "Our timing was aided by the fact that when we launched, the pandemic made it clear just how critical better internet connections were. And thankfully, Corning has been a great partner working with us to overcome supply-chain challenges when they arise to deliver a quality and reliable product. By helping us navigate and overcome challenges like supply chain disruptions, we are ensured a steady flow of materials and don't experience any slowdowns in our construction."

Corning is providing Tri-Co Connections with multiple different fiber strand counts and accompanying equipment (enclosures, splitters, fiber housings, etc.) to the ONTs in homes.

Young adds that "...the team at Corning has been engaged and focused on our project during every step of the process. Corning is interested and invested in our project and delivers top-of-the-line materials at a competitive price. We can be comfortable in the fact that what we are deploying in the field is going to last without issue for many years to come, from a well-established company quick to respond and stand behind its products."

The Impacts

Tri-Co's Director of Regulatory Affairs and Economic Development, Rachel Hauser, says the region is already seeing big impacts from its investment in better broadband service. "Beyond the fact that we've created jobs at Tri-Co Connections for construction and support," explains Hauser, "we're creating an infrastructure that will foster business creation and work-from-home opportunities. Additionally, we are seeing part-time, previously summer-only residents spending more time here while some are even moving here full-time."

Hauser explains Tri-Co Connections is part of an initiative to teach senior citizens how to use the internet to improve their quality of life. Likewise, schools are utilizing technology to teach youth about the job opportunities that could allow them to stay local and earn family-sustaining wages. Through these opportunities, residents no longer have to leave their area to pursue a career.

Leona Hilfiger of The Carpenter's Shop talks about what Tri-Co Connections has meant to her: "Our phone and internet service has been amazing as we are able to move past slow internet speeds and outages throughout the day. Most of our customers are out of the area, so we send and receive pictures and drawings daily, and being able to get those in a timely manner so we can process orders on time is key to keeping our customers happy."

For the Tri-Co team, fiber-to-the-home broadband service is changing the game for rural co-op members. More reliable connectivity means members have access to the same quality service that more populous communities enjoy. Thanks to Tri-Co, online options such as telemedicine, distance learning, and remote work are within reach, giving participating communities and their residents more opportunities to flourish.

The logo consists of the word "CORNING" in a white, serif, all-caps font, centered within a solid dark blue square background.

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