PC Telcom
CONNECTIONS

In Memory of Glenn Huwa

The PC Telcom family is saddened by the passing of Glenn Huwa, a member of our Board of Directors in good standing for almost eight years. We extend our deepest condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time.

Contact

Holyoke Office:
240 S. Interocean Avenue • PO Box 387
Holyoke, CO 80734
970-854-2201 • 866-854-2111
Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm

For help during non-business hours, please call 970-854-2201 or 866-854-2111.

Internet Tech Support: 970-854-7500
Toll Free: 866-398-1660
Email: customerservice@pctelcom.coop
Visit Online: www.pctelcom.coop

Office Closure:
• Friday, March 29th for Good Friday

PCtelcom

UPGRADE TO Managed Wifi
& IMPROVE YOUR WIRELESS COVERAGE

$9.99/MO

➡ Manage Wi-Fi with your smartphone
➡ Boost performance and reliability

➡ **UNINTERRUPTED STREAMING TO ALL OF YOUR DEVICES**

Call PC Telcom's friendly staff or scan the QR code to sign up today for **2 MONTHS FREE!**

866-854-2111
pctelcom.coop

Common Misconceptions About Calling 811

At least a few days before you dig on your property, you must call 811 to get underground utility lines marked. This helps prevent unintended consequences such as injuries, damage to your property, utility service outages to the neighborhood, and potential fines and repair costs.

Some homeowners, however, are confused about when they need to call 811. So we're clearing up some common misconceptions here:

"It's just a small project. I don't need to call." Wrong! Every digging job requires a call — even "small" projects like planting trees and shrubs. Some utility lines are buried just a few inches underground.

"I am digging in a spot that was previously marked." You still need to call. Erosion and root system growth can alter the depth or location of buried lines, or your utility companies may have completed work on their lines since the last time you dug.

"I assume my contractor or landscaper will call." Don't assume. Check with the company before digging begins to make sure a call to 811 has been placed.

PC Telcom thanks you for helping prevent damage to our infrastructure.

Vince Kropp Retires After Nearly Four Decades at PC Telcom

Vince Kropp, pictured at left, is retiring from his role of CEO/general manager of PC Telcom, and Kevin Lybrand is taking his place.

"Has it really been almost 40 years?" Vince Kropp asked this question as he prepared to close a long chapter of his life and pass the local telecommunications torch to Kevin Lybrand.

The January 23rd PC Telcom board meeting marked the official transition, as Lybrand assumed the position of CEO and general manager of the cooperative and Kropp entered retirement. Kropp will remain involved in part-time consulting to aid in the transition.

Meet Kevin Lybrand

Lybrand and his wife, Debra, moved to Holyoke from Macon, Missouri, where he'd been working in construction and engineering management for Chariton Valley Communications for the past four years. He started at PC Telcom on January 8th.

Many naturally wonder how newcomers will take to small-town life in Holyoke. Despite having spent some time living in bigger cities, Lybrand has never been a fan of the hustle and bustle. He grew up in a small town, moved to Holyoke from a small town, and is looking forward to becoming a part of the Holyoke community. "It's nice when you know your neighbor," Lybrand said.

Lybrand brings 24 years of experience in the telecommunications business to his new position. In keeping with his preference for smaller communities, he's been moving to increasingly smaller companies over the years. He spent time working for AT&T and CenturyLink before making the switch to working for Chariton Valley. Like PC Telcom, Chariton Valley is a co-op. But unlike PC Telcom, it has about 90 employees.

Challenges and Benefits

Kropp acknowledged that with just 11 employees, PC Telcom requires its management to wear many different hats at times. Though that's certainly a challenge of working at a smaller cooperative, both Kropp and Lybrand agree that the benefits are numerous as well.

"You can get lost in the shuffle at big companies. You're just a number on a piece of paper," Lybrand said. He appreciates that in smaller settings, it's more like family and there are more opportunities to get to know customers.

Vince Kropp Retires

Continued from page 2

A few of the highlights PC Telcom saw under Kropp's management were the purchase of old Charter properties around 2005 and the installation of fiber starting in 2007. Around that same time, PC Telcom began working on upgrading outlying communities with fiber as well, and that process continues today.

A common theme among Kropp's highlights is that they were all big steps toward expanding the company's footprint and improving its service, which has always been important to him.

"It was certainly a pleasure to work with the public," Kropp said. "We've got a great membership that has been supportive over the years." He also commended the employees and board members, who have continuously been positive and focused on doing their best for the needs of the company.

Continuing a Legacy

Likewise appreciative of the work done before he arrived, Lybrand added, "I just want to continue Vince's legacy — actually the legacy of the Kropp family as a whole." Kropp's father, Daryl, managed the phone company for nearly 40 years himself.

Having started as a tech and worked through different departments, Lybrand is well-equipped for the challenge of wearing multiple hats as CEO and general manager. Looking ahead to the future, he's excited to continue aggressively going after as many broadband grants as he can. His former company put in 850 miles of fiber in rural areas last year, all funded with grant money, so he knows firsthand the impact that can be made.

"With grants and everything, we're getting to do something today that hasn't happened in 100 years," Lybrand said, explaining that building new infrastructure is something that makes him excited about the future.

Plans for Camping, Boating, and Fishing

When he isn't busy with work, Lybrand and his wife, who is retired, are looking forward to getting involved in the community. They're also excited for the camping and boating they'll get to do in the area.

As for Kropp, he's been preparing for retirement throughout the past year. He's planning to fish and spending time near the water at his home at Lake McConaughy.

Throughout his long history with PC Telcom, Kropp has known countless customers. Though he doesn't really count it himself, his first job with the company was cable splicing when he was still in high school in the late '70s. In 1985 he moved back to Holyoke and began working as a tech. His first year as general manager was in 1990, and he's served in that capacity ever since.

Changes in Telecommunications

Much has changed at PC Telcom and in the world of telecommunications as a whole during Kropp's tenure. In fact, when he started working as a tech, there were still a few open wires around from the days of party lines. Of course, one of the biggest changes he saw was the addition of internet services, from dial-up in the late '90s to high-speed internet in the '00s — which wasn't very speedy at all by today's standards.

PC Telcom Helped Fill Local Pantries

During the months of November and December, PC Telcom held a Food Drive to help stock the shelves at our local food pantries. The community exceeded our expectations with donations, and we greatly appreciate your generosity! Thank you to everyone who donated to our Food Drive. You helped us collect over 300 items as well as some cash donations. Most importantly, you helped individuals and families in our area get the nutritious meals they needed to thrive this past holiday season.

Each person who donated was eligible to receive a scratch card with a chance to win a Colorado Lottery ticket as well as an Arlo Camera. The lucky winner of the Arlo Camera was Lupe Cano!

Although the holidays season is over, don't forget throughout the year that food banks are still open and accepting items.

Phishing Emails are Getting Harder to Spot

Remember the "Prince of Nigeria" emails with broken English, spelling mistakes, and grammar errors that tried to get would-be victims to send their life savings? Phishing emails designed to steal money or information have become much more sophisticated and convincing through the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT.

Generative AI chatbots enable cybercriminals to create perfectly written phishing emails in any language that include personal details and sound legitimate. They can mimic the writing style of the trusted organization being impersonated — such as a business, government agency, or financial services provider — by analyzing past writings and other publicly available information.

It's no coincidence that the launch of ChatGPT at the end of 2022 was followed by growth in the number of malicious phishing emails being sent. This technology helped skilled and experienced attackers launch targeted attacks at scale.

According to IBM, ChatGPT's capabilities can closely match the success rate of human ones. A team of IBM researchers recently released the results of an A/B testing experiment they ran with a global health care company's approximately 1,600 employees. In the experiment, half of the employees got a phishing email written by IBM's X-Force team, and the other half got an email written using ChatGPT. Of the employees who received the human-written email, 14% fell for it and clicked on a malicious link. The ChatGPT-written email convinced nearly as many, 11% of the employees, to click on the link.

ChatGPT developer OpenAI put in safeguards that prevent the generative AI chatbot from responding to direct requests for a phishing email. However, social engineers have been able to work around those safeguards by asking for information in several steps (instead of directly) before requesting an email be written using the information.

Here's the bottom line: Cybercriminals will continue to take advantage of AI tools to become more efficient and effective when launching malicious phishing attacks. That means all of us need to become more careful and skeptical of the emails we receive.