Inside Towers

FDH Velocitel Acquires Stainless Assets

FDH Velocitel, the newly formed infrastructure engineering and construction services company, has acquired the assets of Stainless, LLC, one of the nation’s oldest and most respected broadcast tower structural engineering firms. The acquisition includes an engineering team, CAD craftsmen, broadcast tower construction crews, and a library of over 7,500 structural drawings representing work that Stainless, LLC has constructed for the radio, television, microwave, and general communications industry since 1947. As many as half of the broadcast towers standing in the United States were fabricated by Stainless, LLC, of Lansdale, PA. “The acquisition of Stainless is a critical part of our growth strategy. As demands increase on our wireless infrastructure we'll need to add capacity. This capacity can be found in communications and broadcast towers. Most owners of these towers will rely on the original manufacturer for modifications to existing structures, and now that is FDH Velocitel. It is a perfect complement to our existing suite of wireless infrastructure services,” says Kevin G. Hostetler, CEO of FDH Velocitel.

Spirit Communications Completes SCANA Acquisition

Spirit Communications announced the completion of its acquisition of SCANA Communications, Inc. ("SCI"), including its interest in FRC, LLC, ("FRC") a fiber network joint venture between SCI and Spirit Communications. “The acquisition of SCI is a major milestone for Spirit and a key piece of our long-term strategy. This acquisition supports our facilities-based focus, increases our fiber footprint in South Carolina and improves the fundamentals of our business, both operationally and financially. We are acquiring a significant amount of fiber in South Carolina along with our joint interest in the FRC partnership, a multi-state fiber network”, said Bob Keane, President and CEO of Spirit Communications. Spirit Communications is also acquiring SCI’s cellular tower business, which includes the construction and management of cell towers for wireless carriers in the Carolinas and Tennessee. “This acquisition combined with our current operations makes us the largest fiber-based Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) in the state of South Carolina and continues our investment in North Carolina”, added Mr. Keane.

5 Pillars of an Effective Safety Program

Edwin Foulke Jr. of Fisher & Phillips LLP gave NATE UNITE attendees the five pillars of an effective safety program. Safety should be the number one priority for many firms, but can often be overlooked when a job needs to be finished quickly. “Do some of our best clients need towers put up
within a few days?” Foulke asked. “All the time. But then safety is not number one, production is.” No matter the client, safety should always be put first. Foulke’s five pillars are:

1. Strong management commitment
2. All employee involvement/engagement
3. Worksite analysis—root cause analysis
4. Hazard prevention and control
5. Training for employees, supervisors, and managers

When it comes to employee involvement/engagement, Foulke explained the difference between the two and how companies should strive for employee engagement when it comes to safety. “Once employees become engaged, they will take ownership of the safety program. The difference between involvement and engagement is two-fold: “You are all here so you’re all involved. But if you’re here and on your Blackberry, you’re not engaged.” Foulke also explained why hazard elimination is so important. “Why do we want to eliminate hazards? Because if you eliminate the hazards and people make mistakes, which they will, hopefully they won’t get killed.” Foulke stressed that every employee is human and will make mistakes, but it’s management’s job to eliminate hazards and train employees so when something does go wrong, an employee is not seriously injured or killed.

Upgrades in Albany

Verizon Wireless has upgraded three of its cellphone towers in Albany, Bethlehem and Latham, New York. The equipment upgrades will bring Verizon’s newest 4G XLTE technology that will double the speed of its 4G network. Verizon has been using the XLTE cell sites to upgrade high-traffic areas of its network that get stressed during peak usage periods. The technology increases the bandwidth available at the sites when needed. “The industry and tech world recognize this is a big deal, and we want consumers to know, too,” said Ken Dixon, chief marketing officer of Verizon Wireless. “We continue to offer the very best network, bar none. Now, XLTE provides an even greater advantage to customers by doubling the 4G LTE bandwidth and providing faster peak speeds in cities coast to coast.”

Groundbreaking Moment for Anna Maria

On February 20, Florida Tower Partners and city officials of Anna Maria, Florida, participated in a groundbreaking ceremony for the new cell tower that will be placed at city hall. FTP presented Anna Maria Mayor Dan Murphy with the initial lease payment of $365,000. FTP has a five-year lease with a city and a right to extend the lease for seven more five-year terms. The mayor and many residents are thrilled with the upcoming project. “We couldn’t have done this without you,” Murphy said. “Thank you for helping to bring the city of Anna Maria into the 21st century.” (The Islander) Construction for the tower began on February 23, and will hopefully be completed by May. The 162-foot structure will be able to accommodate six antennas. Verizon and AT&T have expressed interest in co-locating on the tower, The Islander reported.

$50,000+ in Tower Batteries Stolen
The Houston, Texas, have arrest warrants out for two men who allegedly stole batteries from several AT&T cell towers, and sold them for cash. Joshua Earnest Thornton, 32, and Joseph Rafael Perez, III, 27, are facing theft charges. Batteries were stolen from six different towers in the area between January 28 to February 3. The men allegedly went to ABC Scrap Metal four separate times and sold the batteries for cash. The owner ID'd Thornton and Perez. AT&T identified the batteries by their serial numbers. Police said the total cost of the stolen batteries was $52,500.

U.S. Cellular Reports Q4 Earnings

Yesterday morning, U.S. Cellular reported their fourth quarter earnings for 2014: Adjusted Income Before Income Taxes and Diluted EPS of $1.01 billion, $95.8 million and -$0.25. Service and equipment revenue were $849.8 million and $159.0 million and net postpay subscriber adds of 98,000. Wells Fargo Senior Analyst Jennifer Fritzsche wrote, "USM's top-line numbers were largely in line with Street consensus, helped by its second straight quarter of positive postpay net adds. We're also encouraged by its EBITDA guidance for 2015, which implies 10-30% y/y growth, suggesting that USM is focusing on profitability after two straight quarters of solid top-line growth. We look forward to USM providing an update on the competitive dynamic in its core markets and on any future plans to divest any other core or non-core assets."

Verizon Tower Unanimously Approved

Verizon Wireless is looking to build a new tower in Joliet, Illinois. Company representatives presented their proposal to the Zoning Board of Appeals last week explaining that there's a lot of activity in the city, and the west side has a weak spot in coverage. The tower would be used to handle the excess data traffic. Verizon considered a few other spots, but settled on a piece of land owned by
the Knights of Columbus. The tower would be 115 feet tall with a 50-year lease so the Knights of Columbus will have a continuing stream of revenue for the foreseeable future. The Knights welcome the project and consider it a win-win. However, some neighbors aren’t as thrilled and they showed up to last week’s meeting to voice their disapproval. Some community members oppose the tower for aesthetic reasons, calling it "unsightly." Unfortunately for the residents, the Zoning Board unanimously approved the special use permit for Verizon. The tower application will now be considered by the Joliet City Council.

**Taking Towers to School**

School Board's seem to be more and more willing to construct cell towers on school property. Most recently, the Oklahoma City School Board in Oklahoma approved an agreement with Branch Communications to install and operate a 150-foot tower at Capitol Hill High School. The district will receive $1,000 per month during the 10-year lease agreement. The district will also receive an additional $200 per month for every carrier that co-locates on the tower. This was requested after Branch Communications asked for a 10-year lease instead of five years. The tower should be up and running in about four months, and will be constructed 1,000 feet from the school.