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Cellular One Celebrates 20th Anniversary

Cellular One of East Central Illinois is celebrating its 20th year in 2011. The company turned on its first cellular towers in mid-January of 1991 and opened its doors for business shortly after.

“As a family-owned cellular company that has continuously operated under the same ownership since the original license was awarded by the FCC, we are unique in our industry,” said Cassy Carter, CEO/GM. “Most of the original license holders have sold to the much larger carriers.”

“We provide all our services locally, from the engineering to build the towers to the call center a customer reaches when calling with a question,” she continued. “We hire locally and put money back into our communities in the form of payroll, taxes, donations to local programs and organizations, and more.”

“A focus of the company always has been to give back to those who allow us to remain in business,” Carter said. The company has donated over \$500,000.00 in cash and services to numerous community and civic groups over the last 20 years, as well as encouraging employees to participate in local organizations.

Currently, Cellular One has 106 employees, with positions including sales, customer service, marketing, billing, IT, phone technicians, phone repair, engineering, internet technicians, shipping, receiving, credit, collections, accounting, human resources, and administration.

The headquarters is located at Towne Centre in Danville. Company stores are located at Towne Centre and the Village Mall in Danville, Hoopston, Paris, Casey, Charleston, Mattoon, Robinson, Newton, Lawrenceville, Olney and Flora.

The company started with five towers in its original eight-county service area. The towers were near Danville, Marshall, Edgar, Humboldt and Greenup providing analog service to residents in Vermilion, Edgar, Douglas, Coles, Cumberland, Clark, Crawford and Jasper counties. In 1999, Cellular One of East Central Illinois expanded its coverage area by obtaining the license for Lawrence, Richland and Clay counties to the south of its original area.

The initial service was provided through analog technology. In 1997, Cellular One was the first cellular provider, including the nationwide carriers, to offer digital cellular phone technology to east central Illinois. In 2005, a GSM technology overlay was completed. The company has started the process to build out 3G wireless technology.

“We have seen phones go from the bulky 3-watt car or bag phones that did nothing but make phone calls to today’s small, compact smartphones that make calls, send emails, take pictures, manage your calendar, play music and much more,” Carter said.

Other significant company milestones have included approval as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier in February of 2008, which brings federal Universal Service Fund fees collected on all telecommunications services back to our area to provide service in less populated areas. With assistance of USF funds, Cellular One has added nine new towers in the last two years and will start construction on four more in 2011.

In 2010, Cellular One applied for and was approved to receive over \$12 million in federal broadband stimulus funds and \$1 million in State of Illinois funds to match the company’s own investment to build out a high speed wireless broadband network throughout the area. Work on that project is underway and is to be completed by late 2013.

The company currently has 61 cellular towers. At the end of both of the ETC and broadband projects, subscribers will be served by at least 100 towers in the 11 counties, according to Carter.

Local residents were invited to join Cellular One at store celebrations on January 20. The events featured refreshments, door prizes and special offers.

Carter said the company will continue to celebrate its 20 Year Anniversary with other events and activities.

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