

BUILDING TRACTION

By Jens Laipenieks CEO/General Manager



We are approaching our first anniversary of when we moved to our **own** satellite service in Kaktovik, Anaktuvuk Pass, Atkasuk, and Point Lay. Although we have greatly improved the network reliability and almost tripled the capacity, we face the reality that demand will continue to outpace the bandwidth that can be delivered over satellite. The high cost of satellite capacity is the main prohibitive factor, but the high latency (delay) and environmental factors like the recent solar interference all contribute to the need for change.

For years we have been searching for the best solution to not only improve but to future-proof our connectivity to our final four markets. Traditional overland trenching of fiber optic cable is very costly and potentially damaging to the tundra. The sheer quantity of water, lakes, and rivers across the North Slope drives the construction costs even further out of reach. Another key cost factor is also the lack of roads. Traditionally, fiber optic cables would be installed in easements along the edge of the road, or in the roadbed itself. Roads are what makes power and broadband expansion affordable across the rest of Alaska and in the lower 48. Road access greatly reduces not only the initial construction costs, but the ongoing operation and maintenance of the network. Imagine the cost difference to fuel and maintain a remote microwave site; with a truck, or with a helicopter.

Another major consideration in the evaluation is future-proofing. We need to build solutions that will deliver enough low latency capacity to meet the demands of 2030 and beyond. The lifespan of fiber optics is around 40 years or more, and the capacity expandability is constantly improving as the technology advances. Microwave solutions have some benefits, like lower construction cost per mile, but also has limitations, specifically to the amount of capacity that can be transferred. Microwave solutions also have a much higher cost of operation over time and can be interrupted by environmental factors.

As with most things in the Arctic, these types of projects are very expensive and the economics, even for a member-owned cooperative like ASTAC, is very hard to justify. We are fortunate that the federal government has recognized the importance of broadband access for all Americans, including those in the most remote parts of our country. The USDA has a series of programs that if awarded, can make the business case more sustainable. Specifically, the Community Connect and ReConnect programs have directed funding to expand broadband to even the most remote parts of America, including remote Alaska.

continued on page 2

Building Traction continued from page 1

ASTAC has been successful in our efforts to garner some of these funds to expand our network. Over the past few years, we have applied for both programs. Earlier this spring we were awarded a \$3M Community Connect Grant to build an overland ground-layed fiber-optic extension from Utqiagvik to Atqasuk as well as new fiber to the home network there. This fiber will not be trenched like traditional builds, but rather nested into the vegetation at a fraction of the cost. Additionally, just last month we were informed that our application to the USDA's ReConnect (round two) was selected for a \$5.3M grant award. These funds, along with a ~\$2M ASTAC investment, will allow us to fulfill our vision to extend our microwave network from the eastern oilfields to Kaktovik and complete the Fiber to The Home (FTTH) network there as well. We are making progress and building traction, but both are multi-year projects and require a tremendous amount of engineering, planning, and resources to complete. Beginning this winter we will start construction of the Atqasuk fiber project with a goal to have the link in service by spring of 2022 and next summer we will kick off the Kaktovik build. Look for updates on our progress in future Messenger issues.

Please stay safe and wear a mask.

Jens

REFERRAL PROGRAM

Earn ASTAC cash telling friends and family about your great ASTAC service! Once your referral has signed up for new service and your eligibility has been verified, ASTAC will add a \$50 bill credit to your account for every new customer you refer.

VIRTUAL 2020 ANNUAL MEETINGS

In an effort to prioritize the safety of our members and staff, we will be holding our annual meetings virtually the week of December 7-11 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Members are required to pre-register at: <https://www.astac.net/company/member-info/annual-meetings/> no less than 24 hours prior to their community's annual meeting. Once your request is received, an email will be sent with a link to your community's meeting.

Before joining your community's meeting, consider these tips:

- Do not share the meeting link with anyone, it is specific to your member account.
- Disable other streaming devices during the meeting to ensure optimal video and audio quality.
- The meeting can be accessed from a smartphone, tablet or laptop.
- If you experience connectivity issues, switch to audio only. We have posted a PDF of the meeting slides on our web site at: <https://www.astac.net/company/member-info/annual-meetings/>

DATE	WEEKDAY	COMMUNITY	TIME
December 7, 2020	Monday	Point Hope	12:00pm
December 7, 2020	Monday	Point Lay	6:00pm
December 8, 2020	Tuesday	Atqasuk	12:00pm
December 8, 2020	Tuesday	Wainwright	6:00pm
December 9, 2020	Wednesday	Nuiqsut	12:00pm
December 9, 2020	Wednesday	Utqiagvik	6:00pm
December 10, 2020	Thursday	Kaktovik	12:00pm
December 10, 2020	Thursday	Deadhorse	6:00pm
December 11, 2020	Friday	Anaktuvuk Pass	12:00pm

SWOOSH PHOTO CONTEST



ASTAC has been hosting a Swoosh free-throw contest in each of the eight residential communities it serves since 2009. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ASTAC changed its annual contest from an in-person free-throw competition to a photo contest. All North Slope residents were eligible to participate in the two-month long contest.

Three winners will be randomly selected from the entries to be awarded the following prizes:

- Second place: Trickster Basketball
- First place: Dribble Up (Smart) Basketball
- Grand Prize: trip for two to see the NCAA Men's Final Four tournament in Indianapolis, Indiana in April 2021.



Additionally, up to 50 participants will receive goodie bags of Swoosh Swag. At the time of printing this newsletter the contest was still ongoing. Tune into our web site and social media channels to see who the lucky winners are!

UTQIAGVIK CENTRAL OFFICE



ASTAC completed construction of its new Central Office pad in Utqiagvik in July 2019. The new space will allow ASTAC to consolidate operations at a single location and provide a more secure climate-controlled space for our business and enterprise customer's equipment.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Internet service ASTAC provides is both shared across the community members live in, as well as within members' homes.

FREE SHIPPING

Did you know ASTAC offers free shipping ALL YEAR long? Call our Customer Experience Department at 1-800-478-6409 to place an order today!

ELECTIONS

Director elections in Anaktuvuk Pass, Kaktovik and Wainwright were held last month, as well as a Bylaw amendment on board compensation. Results will be shared on our web site, social media channels and at our Virtual Annual Meetings December 7-11.

NEW PAYMENT OPTION



In October ASTAC began offering the option for members to pay directly through their bank account/routing number through SmartHub (and Pay Now).

FOLLOW US ON
INSTAGRAM AND FACEBOOK
@GoASTAC

Have you checked out ASTAC's Facebook page lately? We share lots of great information including local events, product overviews, troubleshooting tips, jobs, network outages and more. Like our page and stay up to date: www.facebook.com/GoASTAC/



SATELLITE DISH WORK IN POINT LAY



ASTAC recently performed maintenance on its satellite dish in Point Lay to not only raise the dish by 2 feet to reduce snow accumulation, but also in an effort to improve the quality and strength of the satellite signal for both wireless and Internet service into Point Lay.

NATIONAL MAGAZINE INTERVIEW

Jens Laipenieks, ASTAC's CEO/General Manager was featured in Executive Insights of ISE (ICT Solutions & Education) Magazine in September. He shared his thoughts on a variety of topics including ASTAC's priorities in the near term, company impacts as a result of COVID-19, challenges the co-op faces and more. View the video interview and read the interview at: <https://buff.ly/35Y5ftP>



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Marietta Aiken
PRESIDENT, UTQIAĠVIK

Carla SimsKayotuk
VICE PRESIDENT, KAKTOVIK

Trish McFarlin
SECRETARY/TREASURER, DEADHORSE

Pearl Burris
ASSISTANT SECRETARY/TREASURER,
ANAKTUVUK PASS

Isabel Nashookpuk
DIRECTOR, WAINWRIGHT

Marlene Bolt
DIRECTOR, NUIQSUT

Sophie Tracey
DIRECTOR, POINT LAY

Della Segevan
DIRECTOR, ATQASUK

John Long Jr.
DIRECTOR, POINT HOPE

ASTAC OFFICE

4300 B St. Suite 501,
Anchorage, AK 99503
907-563-3989 Anchorage
907-852-7100 Utqiaġvik
800-478-6409 Toll-free
E-mail: info@ASTAC.net

