



Erwin Utilities has been providing essential utility services to residents and businesses within Erwin, Tennessee for over 70 years. From humble beginnings as an electric power provider in 1945 with only eight employees, Erwin Utilities has grown to employ 47 full-time employees who work diligently each day to live out the organization's mission: *"To deliver safe, reliable, and efficient services to our community and every customer every day"*. The history of Erwin Utilities' growth from 1,973 customers in 1945 with total assets just over \$441,000 to 8,944 electric customers, 5,191 water customers, 3,613 wastewater customers within Unicoi County, and total assets of more than \$56 million today has been made possible through superior leadership, innovative thinking, and highly skilled employees.

Erwin Utilities' vision is to enhance modern life and help drive local economic growth within Erwin and Unicoi County, and the organization strives to accomplish this through the improvement of existing services as well as the creation of new service offerings. In 2011, the electric, water, and wastewater GIS mapping system was converted to ESRI to allow sharing of data with local agencies in Erwin and Unicoi County. The GIS upgrade and the installation of a new SCADA system improved operation and efficiency for all departments, including reductions in outage times, water loss, and infiltration and inflow into the sewer system.

In October 2012, construction of a fiber optic backbone was completed, which allows for ongoing communications between existing electric, water, and wastewater facilities. This investment also created the opportunity to connect all Unicoi County Schools, which enhanced the school system's connectivity, communications, and Internet reliability.

In October 2014, a feasibility study was conducted around building a Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) infrastructure that would allow Erwin Utilities to provide Internet and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone service to customers within the organization's electric footprint. Erwin Utilities' engineers designed the system completely in-house, resulting in a significant cost-savings for the utility. This technical expertise within the organization coupled with Erwin Utilities'



tremendously accurate GIS system put project estimates at \$9 million, as opposed to the estimated \$23 million based on a previous study conducted only four years prior.

With a conservative approach, Erwin Utilities' Board approved a pilot project in 2014 to build out to the small area of approximately 1,200 customers in and around downtown Erwin. Construction was completed in early 2015, and the first Erwin Fiber customers were connected in March.

Erwin Fiber was built on visionary thinking and centered on three guiding principles; keep every aspect of the service fast, simple, and local. This strategy included superior customer service, simplistic design, and a "future-proof" infrastructure. In addition to the lightning fast speeds, customer satisfaction was kept at the forefront with the decision to provide free Wi-Fi through each customers' ONT device, along with no data caps, contracts, or additional fees. This decision has lead Erwin Fiber to obtain and sustain over 97% customer satisfaction.

Today, just 15 months since Erwin Fiber's inception, 470 customers are connected and completion of phase three of the buildout is expected in November 2016. Once complete, Erwin Fiber will be available to over 50% of Erwin Utilities' electric customers. All phases have been constructed on time and under budget with no additional long-term debt requirements. The complete buildout is scheduled to be complete within three years, a total of just five years since the creation of Erwin Fiber.

Erwin Fiber completed its first Gigabit connection to all Unicoi County elementary schools this summer and a 2-Gigabit connection to the county's high school. "We have achieved a take rate of 25% in Phase 1 and are on track to be cash flow positive in less than five years. Our statistics show that over 50% of new customers moving into an area where Erwin Fiber is available opt in for our service," said General Manager Lee Brown. "I feel proud to be part of such a forward-thinking organization that is dedicated to improving life for those who work, live, and play in Unicoi County. I can't think of anywhere I would rather be."