



2022 SPRING EDUCATIONAL FORUM
APRIL 3-6 • MIRAMAR BEACH, FLORIDA
 ADVOCATES FOR RURAL BROADBAND

2022 WTA SPRING EDUCATIONAL FORUM SPEAKERS

Tuesday Keynote Speaker Sponsored by CALIX and COBANK

TIME Magazine has named **Traci Brown** one of the Nation's Top Detection Detection Expert. NBC, CBS, and FOX have asked this Fraud-Busting body language expert to reveal the secrets your clients are keeping from you. Secrets that are impacting your bottom line.

Traci is trained in the body language of deception detection right alongside our country's top law enforcement. And in her fast paced, interactive keynotes that are sure to entertain, Traci teaches the lie, fraud, and identity theft detection skills she's used to get to the truth in billion-dollar business deals, crimes, and politics.

You'll be able to immediately use the same tools to tell whose pants are on fire, stop fraud and create more success in your own organization and personal life...so you see more zeroes (before the decimal) in your bank account.

Traci is a Three Time US Collegiate Cycling Champion and former member of Team USA. Yea, she's fast on 2 wheels and looks pretty good in spandex. She is a past president of the National Speaker's Association Colorado Chapter and the author of four books including her latest, *How to Detect Lies, Fraud and Identity Theft*. Traci holds a degree in business from the University of Colorado and is a certified master practitioner of Neuro Linguistics, Hypnosis, and Hawaiian Huna.

Lennie Blakeslee is Sector Vice President in **CoBank's Communications Division**, Lennie Blakeslee leads CoBank's Western Team and manages a significant loan portfolio supporting CoBank's commitment to rural telecommunications service providers.

Lennie joined CoBank in 2001 supporting the bank's agribusiness portfolio in Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas before moving to the Communications Division in 2004. A veteran of the Farm Credit System, he previously served as assistant branch manager for Farm Credit of Southern Colorado.

Lennie holds a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Colorado Boulder and an MBA from Regis University in Denver.

Jeff Brown is Director of Product & Growth Segment Marketing for **Calix**. Jeff joined Calix in 2018, and is responsible for driving go-to-market strategy for targeted broadband growth segments including greenfield, cable, wireless ISP and international. Previous to Calix, he spent his entire career working for broadband service providers. He has extensive

experience building broadband businesses for network operators, having spent over 25 years leading Business Development, Product and Marketing organizations for companies including Windstream, Zayo, Covad, Suddenlink, Sprint and MCI. He has a BS in Advertising from the University of Texas at Austin and an MS in MIS from the University of Texas at Dallas. He resides in the greater Chicago area in Naperville, Illinois.

Camille Christiansen, CPA, PMP – Partner, Moss Adams, has provided audit and consulting services since 2001 to all sizes of rural telecommunications companies through the country – from some of the smallest to some of the largest. She manages financial audits of wireline ILEC and CLEC commercial and cooperative enterprises, wireless and international carriers, cable television companies, and fiber transport companies. She is a frequently sought-after speaker on telecommunications issues and has presented at numerous industry meetings.

Dustin Durden is Chief Executive Officer of **Pineland Telephone Cooperative**. Pineland is based in Metter, GA covering 1,300 square miles in eight southeast Georgia counties offering traditional landline telephone, high speed internet, IPTV, fire and burglar, home monitoring, tech support, and key system/PBX sales. Dustin began his career at the cooperative in 2009 previously serving as Customer Service Manager, Subsidiary Manager, and Chief Operating Officer. Prior to joining Pineland, Durden spent seven years in the rural electric industry as a Member Services Representative at Excelsior EMC also based in Metter. He has a BBA in Finance and an MBA from Georgia Southern University. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his wife of 19 years, Sherrie, and their three children; Daniel aged 18, Abigail aged 16, and Samuel aged 9.

Gerard J. Duffy has been a **Blooston, Mordkofsky, Dickens, Duffy & Prendergast** partner since January 1, 1992. His areas of practice have focused upon rural telephone, commercial mobile radio, Internet, and cable television issues.

Gerry was born and raised in Rochester, New York. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Villanova University and a Juris Doctor (with honors) degree from the George Washington University Law School. He also holds graduate degrees in economics from the University of Illinois, and in accounting from Virginia Tech.

Gerry is Regulatory Counsel for WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband. He and his wife Janette reside in not-so-rural Bethesda, Maryland, and are the proud parents of Maureen, Christopher, Daniel and Katie, and the even prouder grandparents of Colin, Julia, Chelsea, Hunter and Emma.

Tim Fitzpatrick (CHR Solutions) is an old guy, who's been around the block more than once. Don't talk to him until he has his coffee in the morning.

Mark Gailey is President and General Manager of **Totah Communications, Inc.** headquartered in Ochelata, Oklahoma. He has been employed with Totah since 1996.

Total Telephone Company was started in 1954. His Father Jess was President and General Manager from 1966 to 1998. His Mother Marilyn also worked in the front office of Total while Mark was growing up. Mark grew up in the telephone business starting at the ground level in yard maintenance. He progressed into Install and Repair, Construction, Cable splicing and minor Switching work. He was employed by Contel of Arkansas later GTE Arkansas from 1987 until 1996. He graduated from Oklahoma State University 1987 with a BS in Business Administration. Majoring in Marketing and Management.

Mark is active in a number of associations. He serves on the Board of Directors of WTA, is a Past President. Currently serves as the PPC Co-Chair. He served on the board of Directors of OPASTCO and as Chairman in 2009., has also served on the Board of Directors of Kansas Telecommunications Industry Association, Kansas Rural Independent Telecommunications Association, and Oklahoma Telephone Association. He is past chairman of KTIA and KRITC, and past president and treasurer of OTA. He currently serves as Secretary of the Oklahoma Telephone Association. He has served on the Board of NTCA, Serves on the Industry Committee. He is on the Leadership committee of US Telecom.

He is also involved in various Committees and social activities in and around his hometown of Ochelata, OK. He serves on the Convention Visitor's Bureau of Bartlesville. He has served as Vice Chairman of the Board of the Bartlesville Development Corporation and the Chairman of Washington County Industrial Trust Authority. He has also served on the local advisory board of BancFirst Bartlesville Branch. He has supported local youth in sports as a coach and referee. He and wife Angie actively support Caney Valley Schools. Mark served recently on the advisory group to get the School bond passed for upgrades at the Caney Valley School's campus and Athletic facilities in Ochelata and Ramona Oklahoma. He and Angie also support the CV Band, CV Cheer, CV Yearbook, and various sports.

Mark and Angie were married June 1987. They have 5 Children. He and Angie are active Church members of New Harmony Baptist Church. Mark currently serves as Chairman of Deacons, Sunday School Director, on the Stewardship/Finance Committee, the Missions Committee, Youth Committee, Church Council and the Long Range Planning Committee.

Bob Gnapp began his telecommunications career with **NECA** in 1989. He held several management positions with varied areas of responsibility. Bob currently heads a department that provides member training on telecommunications technology, service pricing, cost recovery and regulatory change. This department is also responsible for providing resolution to complex issues involving access tariffs, cost recovery, universal service funding, demand changes, next generation technology deployments, changing network designs and/or evolving regulations.

Dustin Heath is the Director of Operations, Technology, and Contractor Resourcing at **CHR Solutions**. He joined CHR Solutions in 2016 as a CAD Manager and has extensive GIS, Construction and Engineering experience with rural and urban OSP network deployments. In his current role, Dustin is responsible for new technology acquisition and deployment, training and contractor resourcing. Dustin has a Design Drafting degree from Montana State University-Northern.

John Hold is Vice President of Sales and Marketing with **Auxiant** since 2013. John's focus is on marketing nationally Auxiant's services as well as developing agency partnerships with Auxiant. John is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, with a degree in sales and marketing. John's focus is on working with employer groups of all sizes to manage health care costs and design best in class health benefit plans. John has significant expertise in the world of self-funding and has obtained the Certified Self-Funding Specialist (CSFS) and Corporate Wellness Designations. John has experience working with employer groups across many different industries – leading Auxiant clients to a -4% claims trend over the last 4 years. John is currently licensed for accident and health insurance.

Evelyn Jerden is the Senior VP-Regulatory Dynamics of the **LICT Corporation** which owns 15 small, rural ILECs ranging from 600 to 6,000 access lines. Evelyn is a CPA who has worked on Rural Local Exchange Carrier issues since 1979. Evelyn began her telecommunications career with Ernst & Young's Telecommunications Group prior to joining Western New Mexico Telephone Company, a subsidiary of LICT, in 1992 as the Director of Revenue Requirements. She is a Subset 2 representative of the NECA Board of Directors and Co-Chair of the NECA Board Common Line/Traffic Sensitive Committee. She is a member of NECA's Cost Issues Task Group and Co-Chairperson of the Western Telecommunications Alliance's Public Policy Committee. She was a member of the Rural Task Force appointed by the Federal/State Joint Board on Universal Service to review the universal service support mechanisms for RLECs. Evelyn has participated on various RLEC industry associations' USF, separations, and intercarrier compensation committees. She has taught seminars and spoken at numerous conferences on these topics and has testified in front of state commissions.

Ryan Johnson (Aldrich CPA's + Utilities) specializes in the taxation of communications and power companies. He has significant experience consulting on the structure of entities and transactions, including mergers and acquisitions. Ryan is passionate about keeping his telecommunications and utility clients informed about taxation matters relevant to their industries to help them and their businesses achieve their goals.

Ryan is active in multiple state industry associations presenting on various tax and business planning topics. He also provides a number of local nonprofit organizations with various tax and accounting services. Ryan graduated from Corban University in Salem, Oregon with a degree in business administration with an accounting emphasis.

Rob Johnstone has been with **Range** for the past 16 years, with much of that time spent as Chief Marketing Officer and Chief Executive Officer. Rob's strengths are in leadership and building solid relationships with partnerships, business colleagues, team members, and customers. He is community and industry minded with a focus on teamwork and collaboration. Rob has an extensive network of professionals within the telecommunications industry and is currently a member of NTCA's SMC Board of Directors, NTCA's Marketing Committee, and Montana Telecommunication Association's Board of Directors. He obtained his education in marketing, management, and finance at the

University of Montana in Missoula, MT. Rob has twin sons currently obtaining their MBA at the University of Montana while competing on the Griz Track and Field Team.

Eric Keber is Vice President of Government Affairs at **WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband**. He works in WTA's Washington, D.C. office representing WTA's member companies' interests on Capitol Hill and at various federal agencies. Before beginning his work for WTA in 2007, Eric spent seven years working on Capitol Hill for two members of Congress.

Eric is a graduate of Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA. He grew up in New Jersey and currently resides in Alexandria, Virginia with his wife and two daughters.

Roslyn Layton, PhD is a policy researcher in the economics, security, and geopolitics of broadband. She is Senior Vice President of **Strand Consult** and Visiting Researcher at Aalborg University Copenhagen where she earned a [doctorate in internet economics](#). Her recent paper on rural broadband describes the empirical case for [fair cost recovery](#) for rural broadband. She is a Senior Contributor to [Forbes](#).

Derrick B. Owens is Senior Vice President of Government & Industry Affairs at **WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband**. He manages WTA's Washington, DC office and is responsible for working with Congress, Executive Branch agencies, and the Federal Communications Commission. He also serves as the association's lead spokesperson on policy matters and is responsible for WTA's industry outreach efforts. Derrick also serves as staff director for WTA's public policy committee where he works directly with the membership to develop policy positions on legislation and regulations affecting rural telecommunications companies.

Prior to joining the WTA's staff, Derrick worked at the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) where he served in a number of senior-level advisory positions. Prior to NTIA, Derrick worked for his hometown Congressman in Washington, DC serving as an advisor on telecommunications and other legislative matters.

Derrick has a master's degree in Public Policy from the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy. He received his bachelor's degree in Political Science from Allegheny College in Pennsylvania. Derrick serves on several boards of directors and is a member of both his college and high school athletic halls of fame.

Tom Preston is CEO of **Duo Broadband** in Jamestown, KY since 2011 offering broadband, Cable, and telecommunications services to 13K customers in Southern, KY over fiber, HFC, and copper. President of Cumberland Cellular LLC which owns part of Bluegrass Networks LLC (Regional ISP and fiber network in South Central KY), and previous owner in Bluegrass Cellular until sold in 2021 to Verizon. Past Chairman and current board member of NECA. Chairman, NTCA's \$5+Billion Retirement and Savings Trust. Board member, Telcom Insurance Group and RTIC. Past Chairman and current member of KTA. Secretary/Treasurer Russell County Industrial Development Authority. Previous CEO of

Foothills Communications from 1999 to 2011 and founding member of East KY Networks LLC which owns Appalachian Wireless.

Mike Reed joined UNICO in 2009 as a Benefits Advisor for the Employee Benefits division. In 2011, Mike's role transitioned to Risk Advisor for the Property and Casualty, joining the **UNITEL** division.

Mike's primary expertise is in managing risk for telecommunication companies. Helping his clients manage their risk to protect their assets is Mike's number one priority. His client focus approach prioritizes identifying coverage gaps, emerging risks and finding the best carrier partner for placement for his clients. Mike offers his clients a full perspective of their risk management program and aims to teach them along the way.

UNITEL, a division of UNICO Group, is dedicated to providing risk solutions for the communications industry. When you partner with UNITEL, you are connected with insurance and risk management experts that are committed to helping you protect your world.

Randall René is an Industry Solutions Specialist for the Telecommunications industry at **Esri**. He brings a love of mapping, efficient process design, change management, and over twenty years of experience in the telecommunications and cable industry. Randall has worked in a wide variety of positions throughout his career. He's worked as a field tech, built and supervised central offices, led infrastructure planning and design teams, and helped lead HQ enterprise GIS innovation and operations teams. When he's not working, you can find him volunteering in the community or enjoying outdoor activities.

Steve Riat is a vibrant, yet approachable visionary whose globe-trotting quests over time have garnered great experience and insight; all of which is resolutely perched on the strong and very-much technology-focused foundation of just three jobs. First, came grocery store bag boy. Second was Radio Shack to support college which led to managing stores, and third, **Nex-Tech** as an inside sales representative. Over time, he worked every sales position in the company, firmly paving the path to becoming the director of sales where, with a dedicated and tenured sales team in place, he brought the managed service provider (MSP) and broadband business-to-business service expansions to profitability.

So how did the grocery store lead to building a multi-million dollar a year B2B enterprise? From first byte, Steve embraced technology, including efficiencies and integration into everyday life. He's a technology aficionado. He's a geek. He likes gadgets, techno-wizardry and the reality of going from writing on paper to painting in the cloud. He also appreciates structure, which may have, in the early days, started in parking lots.

He went to work at the grocery store because registers could talk. It could say out loud for the world to hear, "Your total is, one hundred thirty-four dollars and twenty-five cents.

That was 1980s techno-awesome. Next, Radio Shack which just happened to be right across the parking lot. Radio Shack was all about technology, which was Steve perfect, AND he was introduced to commissions. The last venture across the lot was to Nex-Tech because retail sales was not conducive to his newly formed family, i.e., evenings and weekends and Nex-Tech had been in the technology innovating connectivity providing business since 1951.

Fast forward to 2021. This self-professed geek and fanatic of all things techie, Steve has pushed the parking lot boundaries to traveling the world, where his devotion to people combined with his passion of technology ultimately geekifies as many people as humanly possible. And yes, Steve knows that geekifies, or the singular geekify, is not a real word.

Aaron Sedler is a Partner at **Moss Adams** and leads the firm's Communication & Media cost consulting practice. He dedicates his time primarily to regulatory cost consulting and compliance for telecommunication companies with a focus on small- to mid-size rural telecommunications and broadband carriers. Aaron is a frequent speaker at industry events and association meetings and is also a lead instructor for several of the Moss Adams telecom education programs.

Chad Thies is a human resources leader known for rapidly helping companies achieve their goals. Chad started his career in higher education and served as a Director of Admissions and Recruitment. Thies has served as a Consultant of Human Resources for an international corporation where he managed the internal selection process for the company. He also created an executive recruitment division and oversaw the company's wellness, youth, and community relations initiatives. Thies has also served as the CHRO for a multi-billion-dollar company. During that time, Thies oversaw the organization's payroll, benefits, wellness, training and development, compensation, and recruiting efforts.

As the President of **Zelle Human Resource Solutions**, Thies provides human resources consulting for companies who want to make their human resource initiatives more dynamic and make a bigger impact on the overall direction of the company.

Chad has led groups in athletics, fundraising, and recruiting and was awarded the Outstanding Young Nebraskan award by the Nebraska Jaycees. Thies serves on many boards and is active in his church. He recently received the alumni of the year award from his alma mater.

Chad has a bachelor's degree in exercise science and sports management and a master's degree in human services with an emphasis in multicultural studies. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his wife and children, exercising, reading, and watching movies. He lives in Lincoln, Nebraska with his wife Laura, son Oliver, and daughter Olivia.

Michelle Tish is a Regional -Business Solutions with the **Principal Financial Group® (The Principal®)**. She is a financial services professional with over 30 years of senior sales management experience and the proven ability to meet sales objectives.

Michelle has great experience in working with offices and their producers to increase sales and productivity. Michelle has worked in a variety of capacities with The Principal throughout the years including managing the Alliance Management Group for Independent Life Distribution and product and business solution marketing. These roles have given Michelle expertise in managing distribution relationships, supporting business concepts, developing effective sales ideas and leveraging product strengths.

A native of Iowa, Michelle received her degree from the University of Northern Iowa in Financial Management. Michelle has earned the Chartered Life Underwriter and Chartered Financial Consultant designations through The American College. She is a Registered Representative and holds her Series 6, 7, 63 and Life and Health licenses and is a Registered Principal. She and her husband are empty nesters as their 2 daughters are on their own.

Nathan Weber the Vice President of Engineering at **Vantage Point Solutions**. He has been active in the telecommunications industry since 2000, and his primary focus is on the technical and regulatory aspects of Independent Local Exchange Carriers (ILECs).

Nathan has expertise in the design and implementation of voice, data, and video networks. During the course of his career, Nathan has been directly involved with aspects of the telecommunications industry ranging from the development of feasibility studies based on site-specific cost estimates to the coordination of engineering staff for the deployment of state-wide telecommunications networks.

He has specifically been responsible for implementations of wireless networks including mobile wireless and fixed wireless networks. In addition, he has performed the engineering for a variety of networks including mobile wireless, fixed wireless, optical transport networks (DWDM, SONET, Packet Optical, and MPLS), Fiber to the Premises (Active and GPON), IP Video implementations, and ISP network implementations.

He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from South Dakota State University. Nathan is a registered Professional Engineer in the States of Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Tennessee.

Kristi Westbrook is the Chief Executive Officer/General Manager at **Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC)** and has been with the Cooperative since 2007. She has over 22 years of experience in the telecommunications industry and has a strong background in Human Resources, Sales and Marketing and Business Operations, Strategic Planning and Product Development. Kristi has a passion for organizational management, effective communication and creating unique work environments/experiences while driving business revenues.

Kristi is mother to 11-year old Emily and spouse to Mike for 15 years. In her free time she loves to adventure to new locations, volunteer for the Smiles for Jake Movement and have cooking parties with friends.