



2023 SPRING EDUCATIONAL FORUM  
APRIL 23-26, 2023 ♦ NAPA, CA



## 2023 WTA SPRING EDUCATIONAL FORUM SPEAKERS

### **Monday Keynote Speaker Sponsored by COBANK and CALIX**

**Daron K. Roberts** is a former NFL coach, founding director of the Center for Sports Leadership and Innovation (CSLI) at the University of Texas and author of *A Kids Book About Empathy* and *Call an Audible*. A former venture capital partner, Daron is an active investor and private equity advisor.

*Call an Audible* was tabbed as a #1 New Release and Best Seller by Amazon, and *Sports Illustrated* selected the book as one of its "Best Sports Business Books." *A Kids Book About Empathy* was named to "Oprah's Favorite Things" list.

An active writer on issues ranging from corporate culture to leadership, Roberts was honored as LinkedIn's #1 Top Voice in Sports. Daron is a graduate of the University of Texas, the Harvard Kennedy School, and Harvard Law School.

**Andrew Berke, Administrator, Rural Utilities Service, USDA** has nearly three decades of experience as a political leader and elected official. He was the Mayor of Chattanooga, Tennessee from 2013 to 2021 where he served more than 180,000 residents and improved the efficiency and day-to-day operations of local government. Under Andy's leadership, Chattanooga operated its own wastewater system and received national recognition for improving access to high-speed internet for underserved communities. Andy was also a member of the Tennessee State Senate from 2007 to 2012. In that role, he worked with electric cooperatives and was a member of the Transportation and Education Senate Committees. Before joining USDA, Andy was a Special Representative for Broadband at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) at the U.S. Department of Commerce. He holds a Juris Doctorate from the University of Chicago Law School and a Bachelor of Science from Stanford University.

Andy was named Municipal Leader of the Year by American City and County magazine in 2015 and City Executive of the Year by State Scoop in 2020. He was also named Digital Inclusion Trailblazer by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance in 2020.

**Gerard J. Duffy** has been Regulatory Counsel for **WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband** since its formation and was counsel to WTA's Western Alliance predecessor. He has long focused on rural telecommunications issues, and also has experience with commercial mobile radio, Internet, and cable television matters.

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 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.

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

Mark is active in a number of telecom industry associations. He served as President of WTA from 2014-2016 and currently serves on the Board of Directors and is Co-Chair of the Public Policy Committee. He is serving and has served in various leadership positions with NTCA, US Telecom, the Kansas Telecommunications Industry Association, Kansas Rural Independent Telecommunications Association, the Oklahoma Telephone Association, and OPASTCO.

Total Telephone Company was started in 1954. Mark's father, Jess, was President and General Manager from 1966 to 1998. His mother, Marilyn, also worked in the front office of the company 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 also involved in various committees and social activities in and around his hometown of Ochelata, Oklahoma. 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, Missions Committee, Youth Committee, Church Council and the Long-Range Planning Committee.

**Michael Howe** is an Account Director with **Nokia's** Regional Sales team. In this position, Michael works with wireline and wireless communication providers to develop optimal

solutions based on their technical and business requirements using Nokia's vast innovative portfolio.

Michael has a strong engineering background with expertise in wireless, fiber optics transport and fixed access. Before becoming an Account Director, he joined Nokia as Sales Engineer where he learned the Nokia end-to-end portfolio. Prior to joining Nokia, Michael was the General Manager of Big River Broadband, a Wireless ISP out of southeast Missouri.

**Sebastian Ivanisky** is the CTO for **VTX1 Companies**, an ILEC/CLEC based in Raymondville, Texas, covering 42,000 square miles of deep south Texas. Sebastian started with the fixed wireless arm of VTX1 back in 2001 and spent half of his almost 20 years of service exclusively in this area of technology. As times evolved and VTX1 made a heavier investment in both fixed wireless and fiber technologies, it allowed VTX1 to grow a hybrid network model where it leverages the best of both worlds. Having witnessed how very remote areas of south Texas (an average of less than a customer per square mile) can benefit from access to broadband through cost effective fixed wireless, Sebastian is now a staunch advocate of using not one tool but the right tool for the right job.

**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-Chair of WTA'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.

**Jeff Johnston** is a lead communications economist in **CoBank's Knowledge Exchange research division**, where he focuses on the communications industry. His work revolves around identifying emerging technologies, business models, risks and opportunities within the industry, and providing strategic analyses to both internal and external stakeholders.

Prior to joining CoBank in 2018, Jeff was an equity analyst covering the tech, media and telecom sectors. Jeff has also held various senior management positions in the telecommunications industry. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from York University and he is also CFA charterholder.

**Eric Keber** is Vice President of Government Affairs at **WTA - Advocates for Rural Broadband**. He works in WTA's Washington, DC 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.

**Lynn Merrill** is President and Chief Executive Officer of **Monte R. Lee and Company**. He is a Professional Engineer with a degree in Engineering from the University of Oklahoma. Lynn has worked for Monte R. Lee and Company since 1981, serving in many capacities providing engineering, design and project management to wireline, wireless, and Internet clientele.

Lynn acts as the rural voice while serving as the NTCA representative on the FCC's Technological Advisory Council for the Spectrum and 5G/6G Working Groups. Lynn also serves on the Board of Directors of the Association of Communication Engineers (ACE) and Oklahoma Telephone Association. Lynn was recognized as the WTA Outstanding Associate Member for 2015. Lynn is married to his beautiful wife Nancy and has 11 grandchildren.

**Mark Monroe** was appointed Deputy Director for the **California Department of Technologies' Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative** in October 2021. Prior to his appointment, he worked at the California Department of Finance since 2000. With a strong interest in public policy, Monroe has extensive experience in policy related to utilities, transportation, business, housing, labor, local government, and tax policy.

**Dave Nieuwstraten** is the founder and CEO of **Pivot Group**. Pivot is the largest marketing and CX agency focused on helping community-based broadband providers grow and thrive. Dave has almost 30 years of marketing experience in the telecommunications industry. He got his start in the industry in the early 90s working as the director of marketing for an Oregon-based telecom provider. Pivot helps clients acquire and retain customers through marketing, advertising, branding, customer experience, web design and employee training services.

**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 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 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.

**Brett Stains** is the founder of **Block CXO, LLC**, a recently launched advisory firm formed to create strategic value for owners and management teams by providing elite level advisors in 'blocks', with a platform designed to scale up (or down) to meet the challenges faced by the C-suite. The firm is focused on creating quick wins and tangible value, by combining strategic finance expertise with a hands-on/systematic approach to tactical transformation initiatives. Strategic finance engagements include financial modeling, financing support, and fractional and/or interim CFO services, while tactical transformation engagements include process redesign/automation, system eval/implementation, and growth management services aimed at accelerating the strategic plan.

A telecom executive with more than a decade of experience in the industry, Mr. Stains most recently served as Corporate Controller/SVP Finance at American Broadband, where he was responsible for building a consolidated finance and accounting function, which included financial reporting, tax and audit compliance, FP&A, systems & integration, and procurement. Prior to joining American Broadband, Brett served in various finance, accounting, and technical leadership roles at Global Industries (a publicly traded offshore construction company later acquired by Technip USA), where he was responsible for implementing and managing standard accounting systems, processes and reporting standards worldwide. Brett previously worked in the telecom industry as a Financial Analyst at US Unwired (a Sprint PCS affiliate), where he focused on subscriber reporting, financial reporting, and customer level profitability analytics.

He has Bachelor of Science degrees in accounting and finance from McNeese State University and an MBA from the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas and is a Certified Public Accountant.

**Jeanette Santana-Gonzales** oversees the Beneficiary and Contributor Audit Program (BCAP) team within the **Universal Service Administrative Company's Audit and Assurance Division**. She has 19 years of combined regulatory compliance auditing, financial auditing, and other review experience. Prior to joining USAC, Mrs. Santana-Gonzalez worked as an Audit Manager at KPMG, specializing in financial statement audits of federal agencies. In her current role, Mrs. Santana-Gonzalez oversees performance/compliance audits conducted over the Universal Service Fund (USF) programs and contributions and works as a trusted partner with the FCC, USAC leadership, and other key stakeholders to improve program integrity related to the USF. Mrs. Santana-Gonzalez received her Bachelor's Degree in business administration, concentration in accounting from the University of Puerto Rico, and is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM), and Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE).

**Richard “Dick” Tenney** is Senior Advisor, Public Safety Cybersecurity to the Executive Assistant Director, **CISA Emergency Communications Division**. Since 2009, he has managed technical assistance and strategic planning for emergency communications for 56 states and territories. In collaboration with other CISA elements, he has led technical assistance efforts to support awareness and education of Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) and 9-1-1 functions about cyber threats to their operations, especially ransomware. He has presented at numerous national conferences including IWCE and APCO on cybersecurity and public safety communications. Prior to joining DHS, Tenney was an executive for IT and telecommunications consulting in northern Virginia supporting clients like the FBI. He also served in the USAF as a special agent/counterintelligence officer. He holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Georgetown University, University of Maryland, and Troy University including a BS in management information systems and programming. He is an ISACA Certified Information Systems Manager.

**Joelle Tessler** oversees stakeholder engagement and outreach for the Universal Service High Cost Program and Connect America Fund as a senior manager with the **Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC)**. In this role, she serves as liaison to carriers, industry associations, state and local government officials, civil society representatives and other stakeholders that rely on the High Cost program and Connect America Fund to bring telephone service and broadband access to rural America. Before joining USAC, Joelle spent nearly five years as manager of stakeholder engagement for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. While at NTIA, Joelle helped lead stakeholder outreach activities for a \$4 billion broadband grant program. Before her move to public service, Joelle spent nearly 20 years as a reporter covering the technology and telecom industries, as well as tech and telecom policy. Among other publications, Joelle worked as a staff reporter for the Associated Press (Washington Bureau), the Dow Jones News Service (New York) and the San Jose Mercury News (Silicon Valley). She holds a Bachelor’s Degree from Cornell University and a Master’s Degree from Columbia University.

**Chad Thies’** Nebraskan roots taught him good ole’ fashioned values of hard work, sacrifice, and determination. This – paired with his first-class HR expertise – has led him to champion organizations to achieve first-class cultures and reach their business goals. As Founder and President of **Zelle**, Chad oversees all divisions. Zelle’s unique business model is devoted to building impactful relationships with clients to ensure healthy organizational growth and development – an area Chad and his team are proud to implement every day.

Chad has Bachelor’s Degrees 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, NE and is originally from Rushville, NE.

**Larry Thompson** is the CEO of **Vantage Point Solutions**, a national engineering and consulting firm focused on broadband providers. Larry is a licensed Professional Engineer and has been designing satellite, wireless, and fiber-based broadband networks for more

than 35 years. Larry received his Bachelor's Degree in physics from William Jewel College and Bachelor's and Master's degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Kansas.

Prior to founding Vantage Point Solutions in 2002, Larry held several engineering and management positions with TRW's Space and Defense Sector, Cyberlink Corporation, and Martin Group. Over the years he has helped many broadband providers successfully navigate many technical, regulatory, and financial challenges when deploying wireless and fiber networks.

Larry is a frequent speaker at state and national conferences and a frequent expert witness in matters related to telecommunications technology and regulation and a two-term member of the FCC's Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee (BDAC).

**Thomas Tyler** has experience in technology strategy, cybersecurity affairs, economic development, and public policy disciplines. As the Deputy Director for **Louisiana's Office of Broadband Development and Connectivity**, he has served an instrumental role in standing up key initiatives and lead numerous functions ranging from policy and government relations to strategic planning and grant program administration. He has received national recognition from a variety of stakeholders, a direct result of the thought-leadership of the office and stewardship of some of the most impactful investments the state has made in its diverse communities over the past several years.

Previously, Thomas served both in the public and private sectors, leading Louisiana Economic Development's Digital Interactive Media and Software Development Incentive Program, administering and growing one the nation's strongest and most comprehensive incentive programs for this industry. He assisted companies and startups of all sizes to facilitate statewide investments into workforce development opportunities, leveraging key incentives and public policy instruments to facilitate significant private and public sector investments in Louisiana communities.

Additionally, he has served as a consultant and advisor for one of the nation's leading cybersecurity and technology advisory practices. He provided information security and technology strategy, consulting, and training services to a variety of clients crossing numerous sectors, sizes, and complexities.

Thomas is recognized for his invaluable contributions to stakeholders, speaking and providing advisory services to organizations such as the U.S. Department of Commerce, Pew Charitable Trusts, National Governors Association, Fiber Broadband Association, National Digital Inclusion Alliance, Telecommunications Industry Association, Smart Cities Council, Mountain Connect, Collision Conference, Business Resource Network, Society of Louisiana CPAs and the Louisiana Bankers Association.

Thomas is a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and a graduate of Louisiana State University, where he earned his Bachelor of Arts in political science. He is an active member of the Sunrise Rotary Club of Baton Rouge and in 2022 was named to the Greater Baton Rouge

Business Report's "Forty Under 40" list. He resides in Baton Rouge with his wife and three children.

**Susan E. Walters** joined **National Telecommunications and Information Administration** (NTIA) in July 2022 as a Regional Director for western states. In this role, Susan oversees staff responsible for coordinating federal support of the state's broadband and digital equity work. This includes outreach and engagement to all stakeholders such as: state and local governments, community groups, education and healthcare organizations, the covered populations named in the NTIA grant programs and other entities with a vested interest in high-speed internet policy issues and grants.

Susan previously served as the Senior Vice President of the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) where she managed \$70 million in grants over 15 years where her leadership enabled more than 500,000 low-income households to subscribe to the internet and more than a million people to complete digital skills training. In addition, she led the innovative GetConnected! California program promoting the Affordable Connectivity Program. Susan was instrumental in CETF securing legislative support to add \$330 million to increase broadband deployment and digital inclusion work on the Internet For All Now Act of 2017. Susan brings extensive experience to the job as a strategic thinker and a catalyst for equity and technology ranging across many sectors including: agriculture, community development, and disability. Susan served a senior consultant to Willie L Brown Jr. during the emergence of AIDS/HIV.

Susan holds a Master of Public Policy Analysis degree from the Claremont Graduate University and a Bachelor of Science degree Business Administration from University of California at Berkeley. In addition, Susan has a post graduate Certificate in International Communications Policy from the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

**Tim Weith** the Director of Product Management for the High Cost division at the **Universal Service Administrative Company**. He is responsible for the overall management of the product and project portfolio for the High Cost division, which consists of managing technology solutions to meet the division's business needs. Tim has been with USAC since April 2017 after spending over 25 years in the telecommunications industry in various product and project management roles. Tim holds a BS in Business Administration from Ohio State University.

**Mike Wilson** is Vice President of Professional Services at **CostQuest Associates**. Mike oversees Broadband Mapping, Broadband Planning and related initiatives for the firm. Mike's background is in federal and state Universal Service Funding and telecommunications data and business intelligence. Mike has been working within the broadband telecommunications industry for 20+ years. He's based in CostQuest's Seattle office and enjoys spending time with his family (and dog) around the mountains and trails of the Pacific Northwest.