



Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr., NTUA, Low Mountain Chapter celebrate cell on wheels unit going on air

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PHOTO: A cell on wheels (COW) unit operated on the Choice NTUA Wireless network was turned 'on-air' Friday, Jun. 26, at the Low Mountain Chapter House in Low Mountain, Arizona. A ribbon cutting ceremony was held to commemorate the first-ever cellular access for the surrounding area.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) has been a consistent advocate on the floor of the Navajo Nation Council Chamber for immediate improvements to the Navajo Nation's broadband and wireless cellular service coverage.

"I'm glad, on behalf of the community of Low Mountain," said Delegate Begay, for the cell on wheels (COW) unit that was turned on for community members Friday morning. He thanked all the community members, chapter officials, NTUA, Choice Wireless, the Office of the President and Vice President, the 24th Navajo Nation Council, the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NNTRC) the Navajo Land Department and others for giving their support for the needed assistance in getting cellular service to the area.

Choice NTUA Wireless, NTUA, Delegate Begay and Low Mountain Chapter Senior Center staff took part in a ceremonial ribbon cutting for the COW unit Friday morning that included a prayer carried out by Larry Jackson, Jr., consumer relations specialist for NTUA. The network went live for cellular users at 10 a.m. and Legislative Branch staff were able to live-stream on-location immediately.

With the assistance and coordination of NNTRC Executive Director Christopher Becenti, the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority and Choice NTUA Wireless, a mobile COW unit was deployed on Friday to enable cellular and fixed broadband service for the first time to the Navajo community of Low Mountain, Arizona.

Valena Tsosie, deputy general manager of Choice NTUA Wireless, said, “This day has been in the making for 5-plus years. Our goal has always been to bring service to the Low Mountain community.” She noted the challenges in getting cellular service to the area was complicated by land issues and other technical challenges.

The Low Mountain Chapter community is situated within several valleys and mesas along the eastern Navajo-Hopi border. Any development in the region has been impacted by the remoteness of the community, terrain, land access issues and an abundance of culturally-significant sites. As a result, residents have been required to leave the community to access reliable cellular signal to make voice calls.

The COW is capable of delivering line-of-sight service to a surrounding area of up to 15 miles. The unit is one of two that Choice NTUA Wireless owns and is providing at its own expense for community members. Cell users on Choice’s own network, as well as other major carriers, will now have service in the vicinity.

The temporary unit is intended to remain in place until two other permanent cell towers in the area receive the necessary construction funding. Notably, these shovel ready projects were presented to the Navajo Nation Council’s Naabik’iyáti’ Committee as part of the proposal put forward by the NNTRC at its May 28 work session. That proposal also includes area-wide solutions for improving cellular and broadband coverage across all five Navajo Nation agencies.

Friday’s COW going live was made possible by the recent build-out of fiber by the NTUA to the nearby Low Mountain school and the Low Mountain Chapter House. With the chapter’s fiber and electricity lines in place, the COW was placed in the most feasible location until permanent locations could be identified for fixed cell towers.

That fiber build-out was one of many projects awarded to NTUA as part of a larger build-out of high speed data circuits and internet access across the Navajo Nation. The group, called the Navajo Nation Tribal Consortium, is enabling internet and related access for Head Start facilities and libraries/chapter houses through external funding programs. In total, projects for more than 100 locations across the Navajo Nation were bid out for completion by the consortium.

Since the start of the pandemic, Navajo leaders have stressed the need to rapidly expand broadband access across the Navajo Nation as a means to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Navajo leaders have continuously stressed the importance of reducing travel, staying home and other CDC guidelines for combating COVID-19.

Solutions, like the COW provided by Choice NTUA Wireless, enable access to distance learning and online courses, tele-medicine services, public safety and emergency response services, communication with elders and more.

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