

Building Broadband in Rural Indiana: Marshall County REMC & RTC Communications

Modern businesses require telecommunication capabilities to succeed, and telephone lines require electricity. While certainly no secret, the combination is more difficult to come by for businesses in rural communities. RTC Communications and Marshall County Rural Electric Membership Corporation (REMC) were founded independently to bring telecommunications and electricity to a handful of rural Indiana counties.

The next wave of innovation for rural communities is connecting businesses and homes with high-speed fiber broadband. Just as phone lines connected businesses and electricity revolutionized rural life, internet is steadily becoming more vital for everyday life, whether you live in a city or a small town. The question is, though, **how do you get internet to underserved rural communities?**

The answer: Rural communications and electric membership corporations working together.

Marshall County REMC knew they needed to do something to bring fiber to their customers. "We have board members with kids and grandkids who need internet access to be relevant," said **Mark Batman**, President & CEO of Marshall County REMC. "We brought electricity to rural Indiana when no one else would. That's our makeup. It's what we do. Why not use this expertise to do the same with internet?"

But Marshall County REMC's expertise is in connecting remote locations, not the logistics of laying fiberlines. Rather than attempt to hire new people and bridge the learning gap from electric to internet, Marshall County REMC partnered with IFN member/owner RTC Communications — who already provided fiber internet services. "It was an easy conversation to partner with RTC because they saw the need to give access we wouldn't have on our own," said Batman. "They've been a godsend being able to step right in and bridge the gap."

"We take the local aspect of our work very seriously," said Joe McCarter, President at RTC Communications. "We may be a fiber-based internet company provider, but one of our main pillars for 120 years has been our local work. As we look at underserved areas, our partnership with Marshall County REMC provides an even deeper local focus with customers in Marshall County."

RTC and Marshall County REMC's partnership, now known as Marshall County Fiber, began in 2018 with a pilot project to provide 220 homes north of the REMC's office on US 31 with residential fiber. As fiberlines were being connected to these homes, the companies began working on a construction plan, as well as began communications with local utilities to build a smart grid for the area.

Marshall County receives its power from the Wabash Valley Power, who has been working closely with IFN to bring fiber into the Marshall County REMC office. They're beginning to explore the engineering and development processes to build additional fiber from the area's existing broadband backbone into new subdivisions and industrial parks. This will continue to extend from the original pilot project of 220 homes.

With IFN, Marshall County Fiber does not have to worry about bandwidth or the ability to increase it at a moment's notice as need and demand accelerates. "RTC leads the way on broadband buildout, and we're delighted that the Wabash Valley Power was able to partner with IFN on the electric side," said Batman. "It's a win-win for us – and the residents and businesses in Marshall County."

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