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FOCUS Broadband Completes Work on NCDIT GREAT Grant Project in Bladen County

Bladen County, NC – FOCUS Broadband has announced the completion of its Faster Bladen broadband project, making high-speed internet service available for over 700 residents and businesses living near Tar Heel and along portions of NC Highway 701 between Clarkton and Elizabethtown.

This project was made possible using \$2.9 million in funds awarded to FOCUS Broadband in 2022 from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's (NCDIT) Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant program. FOCUS Broadband contributed \$307,989 towards the project, with Bladen County also contributing \$216,225 in matching funds. FOCUS Broadband completed the project one year ahead of schedule.

"We're excited to complete this GREAT Grant in Bladen County and to connect residents in these areas with reliable, fiber optic internet," said Keith Holden, FOCUS Broadband CEO. "I want to thank the NCDIT and Governor Cooper for their continued investment in rural broadband with the GREAT Grant program, which has helped us in our efforts to bring high-speed internet service to rural communities throughout southeastern North Carolina. I also want to recognize the critical role the Bladen County government and the Board of Commissioners played in partnering with us on this project and for their ongoing support."

Charles Ray Peterson, Chairman of the Bladen County Board of Commissioners, added, "The Board and I are pleased to have been able to partner with the NCDIT and FOCUS Broadband to bring this much-needed service to the people of Tar Heel and along Highway 701 in Clarkton. This type of partnership underscores our commitment to enhancing connectivity and improving access to high-speed internet for the people of Bladen County."

FOCUS Broadband has been serving rural North Carolinians for more than 65 years and has a strong history of effectively utilizing grant funds to bring high-speed internet to rural areas. Since 2019, FOCUS Broadband has secured more than \$100 million from four federal grants through the USDA's ReConnect Broadband and Community Connect Programs and 18 state grants through the NCDIT's GREAT Grant program. With these grants, FOCUS Broadband is building a fiber optic network capable of providing multi-gigabit

broadband internet to more than 35,000 homes and businesses in Brunswick, Columbus, Duplin, Robeson, Pender, Hoke, Scotland, Bladen, Chowan, and Perquimans counties.

To see where service is currently available in Bladen County, please visit www.FasterBladen.com or call 888-367-2862 to speak with a FOCUS Broadband representative.

About FOCUS Broadband

FOCUS Broadband is a member-owned cooperative providing a multitude of communications services, including telephone, business services, wireless, broadband internet, television, and home security, in southeastern North Carolina. FOCUS Broadband is the largest communications cooperative in North Carolina and one of the largest in the country. For more information on products and services from FOCUS Broadband, visit www.FOCUSBroadband.com.

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