

Cable Views

Ohio Cable Telecommunications Association

Issue Four 2012

OCTA Member Profile Massillon Cable TV: A Forward Looking Legacy

At a national cable technology show this October, Massillon Cable TV was honored as System of the Year by the industry publication *Communications Technology*. The award was presented in Orlando during the national Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers' 2012 Cable-Tec Expo. This industry event recognized outstanding broadband-technology products and services used by voice, video and data providers.

"Massillon Cable has proved over and over that it is an innovator in the cable industry and that it also is willing to share its expertise with other operators," said Debra Baker, editor of the magazine.

Announcing the award, *Communications Technology* cited the Massillon, Ohio, company's ability to adapt to and implement technology while providing excellent customer service. The publication noted Massillon Cable's recent participation in launching the *Watch TV Everywhere* initiative, which allows cable subscribers to watch programs across multiple platforms including smart phones and tablets.

For small and medium-sized cable operators, the challenge in offering customers this service was development of an 'authentication platform' through which cable subscribers could be verified as eligible to use it. Massillon, which had already worked on the *Watch TV Everywhere* product and launched *HBOGO* on its own system, partnered with Adobe to create an authentication platform ahead of the 2012 Summer Olympics. The Massillon platform was distributed to 90 small and medium-sized cable companies, allowing their customers to share in the *Watch TV Everywhere* initiative in time for the Olympics last summer.

A relatively small player in the giant field of telecommunications, Massillon Cable is frequently at the forefront of such innovations. From early adoption of transistorized amplifiers, to converting its system to all-digital/no-analog (for which Massillon helped develop a new set-top converter and low-cost, on-screen program guide), the Ohio cable company has often adopted new technologies even before much larger operations are able to.

Robert Gessner, president of the Ohio cable company, credits Massillon's size as being favorable to experimentation. "We're 'tweeners', the largest of the small op-



Bob Gessner, left, and Richard Gessner prepare to turn off the last analog signal in 2009

erators, the smallest of the large," says Gessner, adding he believes that gives Massillon an advantage when it comes to implementing new technologies and new services. "We can say, 'Let's try that.' If it doesn't work, we try something else." Gessner explains that the company's relatively small footprint, serving 47,000 households in three Ohio counties, allows for innovation with a smaller initial investment than larger companies would incur.

Gessner also credits the company's network engineers, computer programmers and technicians for doing the kind of work that warrants national recognition. In a statement to the publication, he noted, "It's really an award for our technical folks. Everybody here has the right attitude," he noted, adding "we don't use technology because it's cool or neat or is something new. We find ways to make it better for customers."

Massillon Cable's proactive maintenance system also caught the attention of *Communications Technology* editors. The system, which has been developed during the last four or five years, has enabled the company to achieve a double-digit reduction in inbound phone calls and a more than 30% reduction in truck rolls. Massillon no longer runs multiple service calls to the same neighborhood to replace drops, fittings, splitter or swap boxes. Instead, the maintenance system locates the real source of the problem so it can be fixed more efficiently.

A Family Affair

Bob Gessner is second-generation president of Massillon Cable TV; his father Richard Gessner acquired the franchise for Massillon and built the area cable system in the

Face **to** Face

with State Auditor Dave Yost

Dave Yost, Ohio's 32nd Auditor of State, brings to the office a depth of experience in public service and private practice of law. A graduate of The Ohio State University with a degree in journalism, Auditor Yost began his career as a reporter with the former Columbus Citizen-Journal. He then served in senior positions with the administrations of Columbus Mayor Buck Rinehart and Ohio Governor George Voinovich. After earning his law degree at Capital University Law School, Auditor Yost became an attorney in private practice. In 1999, he was appointed to the Office of Delaware County Auditor and subsequently elected to that office. Becoming Delaware County's Prosecuting Attorney in 2003, Auditor Yost held that office through 2010. In November 2010, he won statewide election as Ohio's Auditor of State.

FAST FACTS:

Favorite Cable Show: *The Daily Show*

Political Hero: *Ronald Reagan*

Reading: *Jonah Goldberg's "The Tyranny of Cliches"*

Roots For: *The Browns; The Reds in summer.*



Jonathon McGee: How did you go from being a journalist to a practicing attorney to a county prosecutor to the state auditor?

Dave Yost: My paper went out of business. If the *Citizen-Journal* was still around, I'd probably still be an ink-stained wretch covering state government and politics.

JM: How is your past experience helping you in your current job? Particularly, how did being a journalist help you as state auditor?

DY: Well, I understand how foreign the government is to most people. My background in journalism helps me explain some of the more arcane qualities of government, to help people understand why we do some of the seemingly strange things that are done in government.

JM: And your background as a county prosecutor – how has that helped you in your role as county auditor and now as state auditor?

DY: Obviously, as a prosecutor you do special investigations. Knowing how to put the case together is of great benefit. Maybe more than that, though, the civil side of a prosecutor's job is helpful background, because so much of the work in the auditor's office goes to questions of legal compliance. In Ohio, local governments – except for home rule communities – only have the authority that is granted to them by statutes or necessarily implied. Having done that work for eight years, I have an understanding of how government is set up, what the controls are, and the policies that are behind these seemingly technical, arcane statutes.

JM: You've been auditor now for two years. What do you find are some of the job's special challenges?

DY: How multi-faceted everything is. You know, the role of a prosecutor is pretty clear cut. You've got the bad guys

over at the other table who you're trying to put away, and you're wearing the white hat and trying to represent the public. In the state auditor's office, I still have the ability to be wearing the white hat; the challenge is that there are multiple interests affected by every decision. Things that seem to make perfect sense, to solve a particular problem, have unintended consequences. As prosecutor, I could read the file, talk to the investigative officer, and make a decision. In state government, it seems like there are 20 people you have to talk to before you make the decision because of all the different angles and all the different things that are implicated.

JM: Tell us about the auditor's office and its functions.

DY: We do three basic things. One is financial audits. We have 5,700 local governments across the state; we're responsible for auditing their financial statements. Second is special audits – that's when money has been misspent,

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Cable Views

Capital Update

LEGISLATIVE

The Ohio Legislature has been on summer recess, except for a short session in September to address state pension reform legislation, so there has not been any formal action on any legislation that the OCTA has been tracking. We expect both chambers of the Ohio General Assembly to reconvene the week following the fall election for what will undoubtedly be a busy lame duck session.

Bills of interest to the cable industry that the OCTA will be following include:

Telecom Deregulation – Senate Bill 271 was passed by the Senate in mid-February after several changes were made at the behest of the cable industry. However, those changes did not resolve all of our issues, and the OCTA remains opposed. The OCTA will continue to work to assure that our concerns are addressed before it is acted upon.

Underground Utility Protection Legislation – Companion pieces of legislation to revise Ohio's underground utility protection statutes were introduced this year. Senate Bill 354 was introduced by Sen. Bill Coley and House Bill 458 was introduced by Rep. Robert Cole Sprague. It is anticipated that one of these bills will have hearings during the lame duck session and become law before the end of the year. At this point, the OCTA is monitoring the legislation as an interested party.

REGULATORY

Carrier-to-Carrier Rule Review – Under Ohio law, all administrative rules must be reviewed by the promulgating agency at least once every five years, and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio is now reviewing the Carrier-to-Carrier rules that are set to expire in November. The OCTA filed comments in this docket, and we await further action from the PUCO in relation to comments it has received from interested parties.

Interested in receiving monthly updates on legislative and regulatory matters in Ohio? OCTA members can sign up to receive the OCTA's monthly *Capital Update* broadcast email. Contact mkafer@octa.org to join the distribution list.

Cable-PAC/PAT Participation

(January 1 – October 16, 2012)

Company	Amount Raised	Goal	Company	Amount Raised	Goal
Armstrong Cable	\$50	\$2,496	G.L.W. Broadband	\$550	\$400
Buckeye CableSystem	\$5,882	\$10,972	Insight	\$50	\$5,252
Clear Picture	\$200	\$520	Massillon Cable TV	\$15,579	\$2,750
Comcast	\$2,820	\$1,430	Suddenlink	\$0	\$1,400
Cox Communications	\$744	\$3,068	TOTAL	\$25,875	\$28,288

Cable PAC/PAT Individual Contributions

Buckeye CableSystem

Mike Bilik
Laurie Cichy
Patrick DeVille
John Ducat
Bonita Ehrhardt
Lorrie Grup
Pamela Koontz
Daniel Penny
Jessica Pitzen
Sarah Riedeman
Charles Riley
James Wolsiffer

Cox Communications

David Butas
Gloria DeMarco
Steve Heuser
Dan Jakubowski
Alex Petrofski
Mark Pigman
Mark Preston
Rajesh Rauniyar
Stacie Schafer
Allan Shockey
Craig Smith

G. L. W. Broadband

Kevin Flanigan

Massillon Cable TV, Inc.

Richard Gessner
Susan Gessner

OCTA

Jonathon McGee

Thank You!

mid-'60's. Previously, the senior Gessner had done the same in several New York communities, developing the system start-ups that would become Harron Cable. From the start, it was a family operation, with Bob's mother, Susan, the second person on the Massillon payroll. As the company grew, so did its reputation in the community, as a company that cared about its customers and respected its team of employees.

"Keeping employees happy" is key to Massillon's success, says Bob Gessner. Initiatives such as the company's college tuition reimbursement plan go a long way to achieving that goal. The benefit kicks in after an employee has been on board for five years and repays 80% of tuition costs.

In an interview conducted for The Cable Center, the industry repository of oral history, Richard Gessner told the story of one employee, Betty Ann, one of the company's first hires. When offered the job, Betty Ann warned the elder Gessner that she planned to work there just for the summer. As Gessner recalls, when Betty Ann retired 42 years later she gave him a card in which she'd written, "It's been a long, long summer."

Asked about 'legacy', Bob responded: "Our legacy in our little corner of the world is 150 families with good jobs and well-educated children who will move forward in the world. We're a family business, and we make our corner of the world a better place."

No Resting on Laurels

Industry journalist Leslie Ellis, reporting on the October SCTE Cable-Tec Expo, described a session featuring engineers from mid-sized operators. She wrote: "Massillon Cable general manager and technical operations manager Kelly Rehm made this understated but momentous declaration: 'One of the projects we're working on next year is to go to 85 Megahertz, to improve the return path.' In the hall, an audible murmur: "Did he say what I think he said?"

"Trust me," wrote Ellis: "If ever you want to raise the energy level in a room full of cable engineers, ask them when they're going to widen the upstream. Answers like, "Hopefully not in my lifetime" tend to follow. It's nearly a religious debate. Why? Widening the upstream is a big deal, operationally and technically. The common refrain is, it's not for the faint of heart."

Ellis went on to explain, in technical detail, why experimenting with widening "the upper boundary of the reverse path ... is a big deal" and ended by cheering, "Go Massillon."

A big deal? Sure, but for the folks at Massillon Cable TV, it's just another challenge they're happy to tackle. And, as Bob Gessner will tell you, "The most memorable thing in your career is probably the next thing."



Betty Ann Humphreys (fourth from left), with other Massillon Cable retirees and Susan and Richard Gessner (center)

Massillon Picks Up "Best Skunkworks" Award

Along with *Communications Technology's* "System of the Year" award, Massillon Cable was given the "Best Skunkworks" award at the Cable-Expo. A skunkworks, according to Wikipedia, "is a small group of people who work on a project in an unconventional way. The group's purpose is to develop something quickly with minimal management constraints. Skunkworks are often used to initially roll out a product or service that thereafter will be developed according to usual business processes." Below, a look at some of the recent milestones in Massillon's tradition of innovation:

2012

Development of WatchTVEverywhere for the Olympics; shared with 90 small- and mid-sized operators.

2010

Utilization of PSIP data to enable customers to use digital TV sets without a converter.

2009/10

Creation of proactive maintenance system that has reduced monthly truck rolls by more than 30%.

2008-09

Conversion to all-digital/no-analog service using new type of Digital-To-Analog converters. This required a special waiver from the FCC.

2005

Development of SubscriberWise, a system to make accurate, non-biased decisions about risk of non-payment by prospective customers. This system is now used by more than two dozen companies around the nation.

misappropriated or outright stolen. Finally, we do performance audits, which is the newest function of the office. That's really focused on trying to skinny government down – make it more efficient, shorten the processes and make it more responsive.

JM: Speaking of skinning down government, can you tell us more about your efforts in that realm?

DY: One of the very interesting things, to me at least, is that we have brought in from the private sector a series of techniques generally called Six Sigma. It was originally developed as an approach to manufacturing to reduce variability, but in addition to that, it has the effect of reducing time and identifying ways to cut costs and become more efficient. So often when we have lean times, the cuts are across the board. Or we take one or two things and say we're not going to cut those, but we're going to cut everything else. And everyone comes back with X percent cuts in the budget. That's not the way you do it in the private sector, or you'll cripple your business. What these tools enable us to do is focus on what's most important and fund those things, while being as efficient as we can with dollars. Hopefully, the ultimate outcome will be to repurpose tax dollars, because there aren't any new taxes coming in. The political reality, whether you are at city hall or the county courthouse or in one of the legislative chambers in the statehouse, is that nobody wants a tax increase. But society doesn't stop, the problems that government is supposed to address don't suddenly dry up and blow away. If you're going to address those things with no new taxes, then you have to be able to get more efficient so you have dollars to repurpose.

JM: How have the various state entities responded to your efforts?

DY: That's a loaded question; it's all over the board. At ODOT you've got Jerry Wray. This is his second time at ODOT, and his interest is to leave behind a world-class organization. That's what he came back to this administration to do. So even though he's not terribly excited about having our people crawling all over his organization, he gets our reports and welcomes us helping his organization get better and meet its goals. So he's been very supportive. There have been other places in state government where it's the old game – you know, I'm going to wait three days before returning the phone call and I'm going to do it at lunch. When you call back at 1:30, I'm going to be gone again. I'm going to make you spend three weeks to get through to me so you can get the one report that you're looking for. Unfortunately, we've had some bureaucratic turf defense like that. I will say that the governor has been very supportive in breaking logjams. I remember the first time I talked to him about some results we were bringing in. I was kind of nervous, not sure of the pushback we might get – generally, chief executives don't like auditors looking at their stuff. He said, "David, this is great. Don't you worry about anything. If we've got something that we're doing that's not right, we're just going to fix it, ok? If we have to spend a little money to fix it, we're going to do that. So don't worry about it, you just do your job."

JM: Have you been surprised at the level of dollars that you have found that may have been misspent or inappropriately used?

DY: I'm surprised any time anybody takes dollars, because I just don't get that. But there isn't as much fraud and waste as you'd expect looking at the headlines. For the billions of dollars the state spends, relatively small amounts are actually misappropriated or misspent. I'm more amazed at the way things are done, the way people can be callous and the number of people who can override their conscience – or have no conscience – to do some of these things.



JM: One of the things you've campaigned for is greater transparency in government. What are some of your efforts toward that and how's it going?

DY: We work with the Attorney General's office to educate local government offices about their obligations under the Public Records Act. We do some compliance work as part of our annual audit; that's something I've added since I've been in. I regularly engage with policymakers on different ideas for how to open up the process, open up public meetings, open up public records, and offer ideas and mechanisms.

JM: Speaking of transparency, one of the first agencies that you audited is your own. How did that go?

DY: Yes, we underwent a performance audit. It was the first time there had ever been a performance audit on the auditor's office, and we got some good news that we're doing a lot of things very well. We also got some recommendations for improvement, and we've already begun implementing those. We've saved some money, we have cut out some unnecessary functions and are re-engineering others. So it was a valuable experience, and by the end of my first term, I hope to have all of it reviewed and implemented. We have an internal executive committee that is charged with moving that process forward.



Cable Calendar

NARUC 124th Annual Meeting

www.narucmeetings.org

When: November 11-14, 2012

Where: Baltimore Hilton
Baltimore, Maryland

NCTA 2012 State Leadership Conference

www.NCTA.com

When: December 4-5, 2012

Where: Gaylord National
National Harbor, Maryland

NCSL Fall Forum

www.ncsl.org

When: December 5-7, 2012

Where: Hilton Washington
Washington, DC

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
OCTA ANNUAL MEETING
March 20, 2013**

**Renaissance Columbus
Downtown Hotel**

**Help plan the 2013 Annual Meeting –
Contact Maryann at mkafer@octa.org
to join the Planning Committee!**

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50 West Broad Street, Suite 1118
Columbus, Ohio 43215

