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Water Main Break puts Communications on Hold

Jamestown BPU & DFT Communications work together to minimize impact on business communications customers

Jamestown -- When thousands of gallons of water stream out of an underground broken water main, the reaction by utility workers has to be swift. Such a situation occurred this week on Institute Street in Jamestown and the massive sink hole left behind is proof of the devastation. Electrical service, water and sewer services were impacted in this neighborhood but fiber optic cabling that provides voice and data services for some business customers in Jamestown and parts of Falconer was also at risk.

The fiber cabling, in an underground concrete conduit, was part of the Jamestown Board of Public Utilities distribution network, designed to connect their various substations, monitoring devices and buildings. Excess fiber strands, leased to DFT Communications, were assigned to services for more than 40 business customers.

Hours after the water main break was reported, BPU and DFT officials collaborated on how best to deal with the challenging and dangerous situation. In order to proceed with the road clean-up and general infrastructure work, the fiber cable needed to be cut and re-routed. Thanks to engineers and managers from both BPU and DFT, a decision was made to move quickly on the fiber re-routing, providing minimal impact to customers.

“The collapse of a portion of Institute Street on Sunday morning due to a water main break necessitated the removal and cutover of communications-related fiber optic cable from the damaged area,” explained Jamestown Board of Public Utilities General Manager David Leathers. “DFT and BPU employees worked together throughout the day on Sunday and also on Monday morning to identify customer impacts and to plan the most productive way to execute the necessary fiber cutover. The result of this cooperative planning shortened the time needed to do the job, minimized risk of damage to the fiber,

and allowed adequate notice to be provided to impacted customers; all of this was performed to avoid a more lengthy and reactive process.”

“The BPU commends DFT Communications in the tremendous assistance provided to replace the fiber in a safe and relatively swift manner,” said Leathers. “The movement of the fiber now allows BPU employees to continue in the repair of other utilities.”

Mark R. Maytum, president and chief operating officer of DFT Communications, expressed appreciation to the BPU for the high level of cooperation and customer focus displayed during this situation. “Utility companies are often called upon to react quickly to difficult situations. In this case, both the BPU and DFT were able to bring their best resources to the site, engineer and implement a solution that minimized what could have been a devastating impact on voice and data communications for high-level customers, including the city of Jamestown government and some major businesses.” He continued, “I can’t thank my staff enough for all that they did over the two-day period. DFT is a company with a true sense of community and we were glad to offer a helping hand in this very unfortunate incident.”

DFT Vice President of Operations David Pihl, who was on-site Sunday and acted as the official management liaison for the company, said, “DFT Communications has been leasing fiber optic service from the BPU for over 10 years in the city of Jamestown and this was the first time we've experienced something like this. It was nice to know that the BPU shares the same philosophy as DFT and put the needs of the customer first. I can't thank the leadership at the BPU enough for their patience and professionalism and for allowing our company to help with the restoration.”

DFT’s Network Operations Manager Wade B. Levan indicated that the fiber cabling on Institute Street was part of a network ring that services hundreds of customers.

“We designed our network based on ring technology. We had three separate rings for voice, data, DSL, cellular, Internet, Transparent LAN service, Point to Point services, and fiber-based passive optical networking gear. The fiber services hundreds of businesses in the City of Jamestown, but only a handful of those customers lost voice and data services for a period of from two to four hours. Repair of this type of major fiber cut within the city could have taken days, if not weeks to restore.”

Levan continued, “DFT technicians, working hand in hand with BPU engineers and linemen, reduced this impact to hours. I would like to thank David Leathers, Chris Rodgers and the crew of Jamestown BPU along with the staff of DFT for their hard work to reduce the impact to our customers.” Levan said, “Some of our customers opted to take advantage of DFT’s Priority One Answering Service, which answered calls that could not be routed directly to their company or office.”

DFT’s Outside Plant Manager Scott Washington surveyed the situation early Sunday. “The street was collapsed around the concrete conduit holding the fiber cable. Because of the urgency to restore electric, water and sewer as quickly as possible, I conferred with

DFT Vice President of Operations David Pihl and Chris Rodgers from the BPU to minimize the outages that would occur for fiber-based customers.”

Washington continued, “On Monday, DFT provided two fiber splicing technicians and we worked in tandem with a BPU splicing team to cut and re-splice 72 fibers. The work took over nine hours but only four of those hours were customer-impacting. This was a task that required a team effort. Thanks to the hard work of these people, the impact to our business customers was measured in hours and not days.”

Work continued through the week on the street repair and the other utility connections. It is expected that the fiber will need to be routed back through its original path when the area is re-stabilized. DFT will notify customers of any additional expected impact on voice and data services.