



Next Move Group

We Are Jobs Podcast

with Special Guest: Brad Hall

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Chad Chancellor: Welcome to this episode of Next Move Group's We Are Jobs podcast. This is Chad Chancellor, co-founder of Next Move Group and I'm pleased to have Brad Hall here with us today with Appalachian Power, which is a subsidiary of AEP. So, Brad, thank you for being with us. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Brad Hall: Well, great to be here, Chad. Thanks for inviting us to participate in the program today. We find a lot of importance in economic development and so you'll see AEP involved in a lot of different things, but myself I'm vice president, external affairs for Appalachian Power Company.

I'm based in Roanoke, Virginia, but we have service territory in West Virginia, Virginia, and Kingsport, Tennessee. And so we have a robust economic development team that works that entire service area and we get a lot of programming and things that we do to try to help to be a catalyst and a stimulant for growth and investment throughout our territory and we do a pretty good job of it and so we're kind of proud of that and we work really hard to be a resource for our communities.

Chad Chancellor: Well, you know our passion is really helping small to mid-sized companies and communities and so you guys are kind of on the cutting edge of broadband rural access and trying to get broadband to all your areas. So, talk a little bit about what you all are doing with that.

Brad Hall: We launched an interesting concept. We had this thought process that we can probably build middle mile fiber faster and cheaper than anyone else. And you look at me and say well, how is that? Well, because when you go to deploy fiber, you got to talk about pole attachments and when you talk about pole attachments, you talk about make ready work; engineering, relocating lines on a pole. You need to replace poles. There's a whole lot of things that go into that. It gets pretty cumbersome pretty fast.

We can deploy fiber in the power zone, which means we don't have to do all that extra work, but it would have to be our folks or our certified contractors to deploy the fiber and so we thought if there is a way for us to deploy excess capacity, lease that capacity to ISPs because we don't want to be a service provider, then we could help solve the challenge of rural access to broadband and territories because we serve some of the most challenged areas in the United States and guys in Central Appalachia.

So, if we could eliminate the cost of deploying middle mile fiber for the internet service providers then maybe that helps them go deploy that service in areas where they wouldn't have before because it doesn't make economic sense for them to invest because there is not enough population there. But without their access, we can't bring industry.

Chad Chancellor: Right. Talk about the labor force there. We all have heard all the stories and as the political season heats up, we'll be hearing about coal miners again and the war on coal. Obviously, you've got a lot of hard-working folks there who-- some have been laid off, a lot of them have repositioned themselves to get back in the workforce, but in many parts of the country, it's really hard to find workers, but you've got folks that are hardworking and they want to work. So, talk a little bit about that if you will.

Brad Hall: Yes, that's great. Thanks for bringing that up because we're pretty proud of some work that we're doing around workforce and that is exactly what you say. We've got-- we're in the heart of coal and steel country when you look at the territory we serve at Appalachian Power Company and that includes most of West Virginia and western Virginia.

So, you've got a lot of coal workers, steel workers, and you think about the folks in that industry and the talent and skills that they have and the loyalty that our workforce brings that you can't really put pen to paper, but when you look at your rates for retention for employees they are through the roof because you are retaining all those employees because they are loyal.

When you put all that together, we think you got a unique mix to solve the workforce challenge because we know that challenge is all across industries and we're sitting on a hotbed of welders, advanced manufacturers because when you think about coal and steel, that's what they are.

So, we've hired a group to come in and help us really evaluate that workforce and then look at their skill set for each of the positions in the coal industry or in the steel industry and then say what are the skill sets and how do they transition to other industries? Well, the number one skill set that comes out of that research is trim metal manufacturers or we have eight times the national average of metal fabricators because of this and that's pretty phenomenal.

I don't think there's anywhere else in the U.S. that you could find that level of eight times the national average. I think three times was the other number that was closest to us.

Chad Chancellor: Right and I know there's been recent announcements up there. So, people are paying attention and you all have built momentum.

Brad Hall: That's right.

Chad Chancellor: If you mind talking about a couple of the recent announcements.

Brad Hall: Yes. So, prior to my current role at Appalachian Power I was over at Kentucky Power which is also a subsidiary of American Electric Power and we were pretty successful in doing exactly what we just talked about which was this workforce.

We just located the first Greenfield aluminum rolling mill in the U.S. and they will tell you the number one reason that they located was because of this workforce study, because we could prove that we have the skill set that they need to be successful.

Chad Chancellor: And I can't interview somebody from a power company that has really low rates like you do without highlighting it. So, you got labor and you got good rates. So, you might talk a little bit about that.

Brad Hall: Well, you know we do. We have pretty good rates when you compare us to the rest of the U.S. Our rates are very competitive. We find ourselves-- I think we're 13th in industrial rates in West Virginia and we're somewhere around I think 11 or 12 in Virginia.

Believe it or not, we actually have cheaper rates than TVA in Tennessee in Kingsport area. So, we do have competitive rates and we do have things like economic development riders and special contracts that we can specifically work with unique prospects that have high power usage to help them realize the reason they want to locate in our territory.

Chad Chancellor: Right, right and I always like to ask people how they got into economic development. I find very few people when they're in school who just wake up one day and go I want to be an economic developer. What was your story? How did you end up doing this?

Brad Hall: It was an accident. So, believe it or not, my background is accounting and computer science and how that gets you to economic development I'm not really sure, but I've spent my entire career in utilities. I was in the water industry, sewer industry, phone and data, and now power.

So, when you think about site location, what are you talking about? You're talking about all these different utilities and so I got involved in the Chamber of Commerce and then Regional Economic Development organizations and those skill sets were always pretty beneficial because you got to

know your dirt and if you don't know your capacities and your utilities and know how to get those there and have those on site, you're not going to win projects.

So, it was just kind of a natural progression and it really piqued my interest. So, I ended up going to work for the Chamber of Commerce that we then turned into an economic development and a regional economic development authority and you just start loving it and the next thing you know you end up in a power company building an economic development program.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I know APE keeps your own billing and sites database. So, some of the people who listen to this podcast will be manufacturers. So, if someone wants to look for property in your area, how will they go about doing it?

Brad Hall: So, we've got some really great resources. Being part of American Electric Power, we're part of a vast network. We provide service in 11 states and we've got 50 featured sites on our website right now and those have either been certified or thoroughly reviewed by an engineering company. So, we have 15 certified sites that were certified by McCallum Sweeney. I know they are not around any longer and we did go through that process with them and we do have those sites.

If you do want to find those, you go to www.aeped.com and you can select the state that you are looking in, you can see all of our sites. We've got a great map resource. We've got a GIS team that builds maps around our sites and shows where the infrastructure is and all that, labor shed. We put all that information out there. We try to be your resource for our communities so that we can help bring prospects to them because we have a prospecting team as well. So, we really provide a lot of resources for our communities.

Chad Chancellor: All right. Well, Brad, thank you so much for being with us today.

Brad Hall: Sure thing. Thanks, Chad.

Chad Chancellor: Thanks.

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Chad Chancellor: A special thank you to Younger Associates for recording, editing, and publishing this podcast for us. I encourage you to visit their website at younger-associates.com.