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January 28, 2011

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2001 OPASTCO CHAIRMAN JAMES FORCIER RECOGNIZED WITH OPASTCO CHAIRMAN'S AWARD

*Forcier Honored as Early Champion of Rural Broadband
and Assisting Rural Community Impacted by Terrorist Act on 9/11*

WASHINGTON – At the 48th Annual Winter Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) Convention in Miami, James Forcier, president and CEO of Chazy & Westport Telecom in Westport, N.Y., and Westelcom Communications in Plattsburgh and Watertown, N.Y., was recognized with OPASTCO's Chairman's Award. The Chairman's Award is OPASTCO's highest honor, recognizing an individual's national achievements in rural telecommunications, on behalf of the industry and the rural customers it serves.

OPASTCO Chairman's Award winner James Forcier was recognized for his rural telecom leadership, which has benefited not only his own customers, but has touched rural telecommunications consumers throughout the country.

Forcier's telecommunications career began during his high school and college years when he worked as a lineman, installation repair technician and central office operator at Chazy & Westport Telecom. In 1973, he began his managerial career at the company. He rose steadily through the ranks to become president of the company in 1995 and CEO in 2007.

Under Forcier's leadership, the once small, local company doubled in size and strength. He was at the cutting edge of telecommunications services when he launched high-tech phone and broadband services and the telephone company was the first in the North Country to offer DSL high-speed Internet access.

Part of Forcier's formula for success has been staying on top of industry technical and policy

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Chairman's Award Winner James Forcier/2-2-2

developments. He has done this, in part, through his involvement with OPASTCO. After years of participation in committees and at conventions, he joined the OPASTCO board in 1994 and in 2001 he served as OPASTCO's chairman.

Under his leadership, OPASTCO made significant strides as a national association, and those strides bring benefits to our industry today. Always pragmatic, it was 10 years ago that Forcier ramped up OPASTCO's focus on broadband and cable television. Forcier directed OPASTCO to dedicate staff and resources to Internet, broadband and media issues. The fruits of those labors can still be seen today as the rural telecommunications industry transitions to all-broadband networks and rural consumers demand high-quality broadband services comparable to those found in more urban areas.

Forcier also amplified OPASTCO's lobbying efforts. With a full-time lobbyist hired for the first time the month before he took over the OPASTCO chairmanship, under his leadership, OPASTCO came out of the gate running full-speed up Capitol Hill and made real accomplishments molding broadband legislation and making estate tax repeal a reality.

When our nation collectively grieved from the tragedy of September 11, Forcier used his role as chairman of OPASTCO to assist those in need. OPASTCO's Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED) Board of Directors wanted to raise relief funds to help those affected by the acts of terrorism. Forcier focused OPASTCO's resources to support FRED's fundraising effort. Calling on rural companies and the customers they serve, FRED and OPASTCO raised more than \$68,000. The funds went to a rural community in Pennsylvania that had been changed forever by the events of September 11th. United Flight #93 crashed just outside Shanksville, Pa., after passengers wrestled the plane's controls away from the terrorists. Shanksville's volunteer fire department was unable to get its old fire engine to the location of the crash site and had to use small backpack tanks to fight the blaze. The rural community had been trying for years to replace its aging firefighting equipment. The \$68,000 raised by FRED and OPASTCO went to help buy the volunteer fire department a new fire engine.

Since his time with OPASTCO, Forcier has remained very active in the telecom industry, serving on the New York State Telephone Association board and as its Chairman in 2007. He has also been active in local economic and social groups. He has served as Chairman of the Westport

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Chairman's Award Winner James Forcier/3-3-3

School Board; President of the Westport Chamber of Commerce; board member of a variety of groups, including the WCFE Public Television Station, Red Cross of Clinton County, SUNY Foundation, Champlain Valley Physicians Hospital, and Essex County Business Council; and is currently serving on the Elizabethtown Community Hospital board. He has been a faithful member of the North Country Chamber of Commerce, the St Philip Neri Church Council, and the Westport volunteer fire department's Initial Attack Team.

Attached Photo: OPASTCO Award Committee Chair Robert Williams, Chazy & Westport Telecom President and CEO James Forcier and his wife, Alana Forcier.

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Note to Editors: The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) represents more than 470 small, local telecommunications companies serving primarily rural areas of the United States and Canada. OPASTCO membership includes both commercial companies and cooperatives, which range in size from fewer than 100 to 100,000 access lines, and collectively serve more than 3 million customers. OPASTCO represents rural telecommunications interests before federal regulatory bodies and Congress, provides publications, and holds two conventions annually in January and July of each year, addressing the needs of the small telecommunications industry. The association has an affiliate 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED). Visit the OPASTCO website at www.opastco.org.