

Smart City expands into Brevard to serve businesses, building fiber network

By Ken Datzman

Smart City, a telecommunications provider headquartered in Central Florida, is making a big push into Brevard County as the company grows its service area and expands its fiber-optic network.

The firm looks to provide custom fiber solutions and voice services, creating more choices for the communication needs of businesses on the Space Coast.

Smart City is also stretching its footprint in Orange, Seminole, and Osceola counties as part of its Central Florida growth plans.

The company provides an alternative to traditional internet services. Smart City's fiber network is built from the ground up.

Smart City has a proven history of building and maintaining custom telecommunications services for businesses in Central Florida, and is now using its successful model to grow in Brevard.

"This is our first year serving Brevard County, and it's great to be in this market," said engineer Carlos Palenzuela, vice president, technology services, for Smart City, a privately held company.

"We are just starting to build about 200 miles of fiber-optic network in Brevard, which will benefit the high-tech industry, hospitals and the health-care segment in general, and other entities in the region."

He added, "We have a work center in Brevard for our technicians and for our equipment. And we are connected to the data centers here, which connect us back to our core network in Central Florida. Our presence here is going to increase as we build out our network. We are uniquely positioned in the market to serve businesses."

Smart City provides data and high-speed internet services to thousands of companies, big and small, over its advanced facilities-based internet protocol network.

"We have the flexibility to quickly change a company's services to meet their evolving needs and deliver solutions that help them thrive," he said.

One of the company's subsidiaries is Smart City Metro. It owns an Orange County-wide fiber-optic network that runs a 24/7 Network Operations Center and offers one of the "most advanced telecommunications platforms in the country."

Gregory "Greg" Leslie is director of sales for Smart City Metro. He spent much of his telecommunications career working in Brevard before joining Smart City Metro three-and-a-half years ago.

"The Space Coast is near and dear to me," said Leslie, a business and economics graduate of Western Carolina University. "I worked here for years in the telecom industry. When we were looking at growing the Smart City fiber network, Brevard County really stood out. There has been tremendous growth in this county."

Leslie said there are "many companies on the Space Coast that need our voice services, that need our data services, and that need our security services. With the high-tech environment here, it's the perfect market for Smart City. I have always seen the Space Coast as a unique place to do business and in which to live. It's a tight-knit community. One of the things I learned working here for over 23 years, is that you better do things the right



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Central Florida-based Smart City is building 200 miles of fiber-optic network in Brevard as the privately held company sees expansion opportunity providing a range of services, from voice to data, to businesses. Greg Leslie, left, is director of sales for Smart City Metro, a subsidiary. Engineer Carlos Palenzuela is vice president, technology services, for Smart City, which operates one of the most advanced telecommunications platforms available. Smart City is the exclusive telecommunications company for Walt Disney World. It also has provided telecom services for the Orange County Convention Center for 10 years.

way. If you don't, word spreads fast."

The 2023 U.S. News & World Report's "Best Places to Live" ranks Melbourne 15th, largely because of factors contributing to its overall "desirability" score. To determine the Best Places to Live rankings, U.S. News & World Report looked at a range of data, including the cost of living, job market, and quality of education.

The local team also includes Ricky Aw, senior account executive for Smart City Metro. He serves customers in the Brevard market. Aw has 25 years' experience in telecommunications, with 17 of those years in Brevard County.

"My goal is simple — to serve my clients in a truly consultative way," said Aw, an accounting graduate of the City University of New York, College of Staten Island.

"I listen carefully to what my clients are currently doing in their business and what they are looking to accomplish in the future. A deep understanding of my clients' business and technological needs allows me to bring solutions to the table and enable them to operate in a much more efficient and cost-effective manner."

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Aw's expertise includes Voice Over Internet Protocol, fiber buildouts, high-speed bandwidth internet, data center connectivity, virtual local area network, and business continuity and recovery.

Hurricane season is underway and many business challenges come along with it. From power outages to property damage, hurricanes can wreak havoc on companies, resulting in financial losses, reputation damage, and even closure.

Companies can prepare by having a business continuity plan, and now is the time to create one.

Fiber investment — like Smart City is making here — improves communities' economic performance and improves quality of life. There is also growing research that fiber helps businesses grow and become more productive.

A fiber-optic cable contains thousands of thin strands of glass, less than the diameter of a human hair. Each single strand of fiber is capable of carrying vast amounts of data from one location to another. Fiber is the fastest, greenest, and most widely deployed broadband technology.

Fiber networks give businesses greater reliability and scalability. Businesses can quickly upload and download large files simultaneously, with fewer delays in accessing cloud-based tools and platforms. Fiber networks create jobs, improve health care and education, and help communities thrive in the digital economy.

"We are looking forward to growing in Brevard County and supporting the community," said Palenzuela. "Our president and CEO (Marty Rubin) really embraces being a good corporate citizen — caring and giving back in the communities in which we work. He is very active in Central Florida and we are going to be doing the same in Brevard County."

Smart City has several subsidiaries and affiliates with deep roots and origins in telephony, broadband data, and cable television, with a significant presence in the convention, hospitality, theme park, business, and master-planned community markets.

The company's long history includes delivering the "first fiber-optic network in the nation" and the "first 911 service in Florida." Smart City has been a trusted partner of the Walt Disney World Co. and the neighboring hotels, restaurants, homes, condominiums, retail stores, and other businesses since 1971, and the Orange County Convention Center since 2003.

"We have an awesome pedigree," said Palenzuela, an electrical engineering graduate of Florida State University who has more than 35 years' experience in telecommunications. "Early on as a company we focused on theme parks, and have evolved over the years."

For example, Smart City Networks, a subsidiary, is all about "using our expertise in supporting convention centers. Our pedigree is strong in the reliability of the network. Our customers count on us to deliver, and we do. If a business is showcasing their product or service at an Orange County Convention Center event, network reliability is paramount," he said.

His company operates three primary telecommunications and technology subsidiaries: Smart City Metro, Smart City Telecom, and Smart City Networks.

"Smart City is one of only 10 incumbent local exchange carriers, or ILECs, in Florida, traditionally known as a phone company," he said. "We deliver data and voice services throughout Central Florida. We are not only an ILEC, but we are also a competitive local exchange carrier, or CLEC, which means we extend outside of our traditional franchise area."

An ILEC is a type of U.S. telephone company that provided local service when the Telecommunications Act of

1996 was enacted. ILECs include the former Bell Operating Companies. ILECs operate side-by-side with CLECs to provide local telephony access, as well as advanced and value-added services to subscribers.

Operating under Smart City Metro, the company delivers enterprise-class network and business communications services, including Fiber Internet Access, Ethernet Access, Hosted Voice and Unified Communications, Managed Services, SD-WAN, and colocation.

"A software-defined wide-area network is a virtual WAN solution that allows customers to use any combination of transport services to securely connect users to applications," said Palenzuela, who holds the Professional Engineer designation through the National Society of Professional Engineers.

"SD-WAN connects all of your branch and remote sites through a reliable, scalable, and secure network that allows more flexibility and control."

Palenzuela started working in the telecommunications industry in 1986. The innovative 1980s heralded mobile telephony, the first standard for email, and an accelerating convergence between computing and communication technologies.

"Over the last four decades, the telecommunications sector has undergone a series of technological transformations," he said. "It's been incredible the advances we have seen in technology."

And Palenzuela has worked through the changes in technology. He joined the Smart City team in 2007, after working 21 years for a large telecommunications company in Central Florida.

"Smart City is a great company to work for," he said. "I had worked for another telecom company for years so it was a big decision for me to make. It took me a whole bottle of Tums to make that decision. But I made the right decision. I have loved it ever since. Being a small company, we have an open-door policy and we really take care of each other and our customers."

An open-door policy allows employees to consult managers at any level to voice their concerns, ideas, and thoughts. Smart City has 110 team members and is growing its employment base.

Palenzuela added that Smart City's focus on the business market played a part in his recruitment.

"Residential is important too. But new industries are coming to the Space Coast and to Central Florida and they are demanding the next generation of technology. So, I wanted to be closer to the edge of the knife."

Leslie said the company's leadership was what brought him aboard the organization.

"Smart City has fantastic leadership and a lot of corporate history going back more than 50 years," he said. "Right now, we have something special. We are a small but growing privately owned company. We are not tied to Wall Street. We are not driven by Wall Street metrics. We need revenue to grow, but it's about providing a personal level of service and treating the customers with respect and being there for them when they need support. To me, customer service should be at the core of everything one does in a business or organization. If a company provides good service, it will be rewarded with growth."

Leslie added, "Being a regional operator, it's that personal touch we provide. We have the ability to stay connected with the community and stay connected with our customer base."

Over the years, much has changed at Smart City. "We have continuously adapted our products and services to stay ahead of the ever-increasing sophistication of our customers," said Palenzuela.

He said what hasn't changed is the company's core values upon which the organization was founded.

Smart City's "Top 10 Business Principles" guide the company's business and its relationships. Palenzuela reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a small card.

"The day you start with Smart City you are given one of these cards with the Top 10 Business Principles clearly spelled out. Every morning we have what is called the 'Lineup.' We talk about our service standards, which include safety, courtesy, accuracy, and responsiveness. There are different subcategories within each. We want to make sure we think fast and move fast."

Because great service requires an "exceptional commitment" from employees, all Smart City team members meet every day in their department for a 15-minute session as part of the Lineup.

Smart City's Top 10 Business Principles include:

- Integrity without Compromise. This principle means "that we are completely forthright in all our dealings. We say what needs to be said, not simply what people want to hear," said Palenzuela.

- Do Right by All Our Customers. "Doing right means acting with the best interest of the other party in mind. We treat each other, our business partners, and our vendors with the same care and respect with which we treat our customers."

- It's the People. Great people flourish in an environment that liberates and amplifies their energy.

- Seek the Best. The company seeks the best in two ways: It cast wide nets to find the best people to hire and the best ideas to adopt, and it acknowledges, appreciates, and capitalizes on a diverse workforce.

- Continually Improve Processes. "We can always get better," said Palenzuela. "We strive continually to improve our processes, help people do their jobs better, and produce higher quality at lower cost."

- Speak, Listen and Respond. Managers at Smart City have a responsibility to create an environment that encourages people to speak openly, "knowing that they will be listened to when they do." Listening, however, "is only a first step. We also need to respond, if not through direct action, then through acknowledgement and feedback."

- Teams Work. Teamwork means focusing on the team's success, "realizing that ultimately the team's success is your success." It also means that team members succeed by helping other members of the team succeed.

- Customers Define Quality. Part of adapting to changing customer needs and desires is "knowing what our customers want. Smart City Telecom has succeeded, in part, because we actively solicit input from our customers."

- Think Fast, Move Fast. "Customers want the benefit from our great ideas sooner, not later," said Palenzuela. "Moving fast enables us to learn and to make better decisions over time — because the best learning comes from trying out more things in the real world."

- We Care and Give Back. "We believe that with our success comes the responsibility to give back to our communities." Smart City seeks to contribute to "our communities in ways that reflect broadly held values, have meaningful impact, draw on our unique strengths as a company, and whenever possible reinforce our business objectives."

Experts say one of the most important things any company leader can do for their business longevity, is to establish the principles by which their venture will operate.

Business principles are often established, posted on a company's website, and forgotten. But not at Smart City.

"All 10 principles really play an important role in opening up conversations with our team members," said Palenzuela. "And over the long term, these conversations tend to produce positive results on many fronts. These principles are our guiding light at Smart City."

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Personally, as a long-time resident of Brevard County, I know and understand the business communication needs of our community.



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Get to know a different kind of provider with local folks behind it. Smart City Metro understands the unique issues local companies face and always maintains an open line of communication with those we work with. We take the time to actually understand your company's needs and build up a true partnership you can rely upon.



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At Smart City Metro, we believe every successful business partnership is built upon effective, two-way communication. You need a local company that is willing to listen, who can understand your company's unique challenges and tailor their services to fit you, not the other way around. We offer:

- **Symmetrical Fiber Internet Solutions**
- **Cloud Solutions**
- **Fiber Network Services**
- **Cloud-based SD-WAN and Security Services**
- **Hosted Voice and Unified Communications**



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