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**Securing the Future and Providing an Excellent Customer Experience –
Pineland Telephone holds 71st Annual Meeting**

“It is truly an honor and a privilege to update you on the accomplishments your cooperative has achieved as well as the challenges we have faced”, began Chief Executive Officer, Dustin Durden as he took his place at the podium for the tenth year. “As I looked back at that first speech I delivered in 2014, I found that some of the issues we were facing back then are still apparent today.” Pineland Telephone Cooperative, Inc.’s 71st Annual Meeting was held on June 8th at the Metter PreK-8 Complex, with nearly 240 members in attendance.

“Since 2018, one of my top priorities has been to convince the FCC to update the funding mechanism that companies like Pineland utilize to make the business case for broadband networks in rural areas a reality,” stated Durden. “We’ve done that to ensure that Pineland and the services we offer remain viable for years to come. While we look forward to the day this work is finally complete, and in our favor, we have been operating as if the worst would take place. Plan for the worst, hope for the best.”

In preparation for the possibility that additional FCC funding would not be available, Pineland expanded its fiber footprint with six additional markets over the last decade. Earlier this year, Pineland’s fiber buildout project in Emanuel County was completed, enabling all homes and businesses with the ability to receive gigabit-enabled broadband services. Additionally, two large projects in Jenkins and Sumter counties, funded by Governor Kemp’s broadband initiative, are currently underway. When complete, they will provide quality broadband access to over 8,000 homes and businesses currently lacking connectivity, and in turn will help keep Pineland on stable footing for years to come.

Durden reassured members that the cooperative’s primary focus of providing excellent service to its members had not changed. Within the past year, broadband offerings were upgraded to match the FCC’s minimum standards and provide symmetrical high-speed connections, annual television increases were absorbed and not passed on to subscribers, and an alternate residential phone service was introduced providing a lower price voice option. These initiatives resulted in a reduction in several subscribers’ monthly charges and presented options to offset costs for many receiving an increase.

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In addition to revising its service offerings, Pineland will be assessing its customer journey to ensure subscribers experience a streamlined, efficient, and enjoyable process. “Later this year, we will embark on a continuous improvement project that will take a fresh look at how the customer journeys through every process here at Pineland. We firmly believe that we provide the best service possible to you. However, we don’t want to just say it, we want to guarantee it,” said Durden. Concentration will also turn to cybersecurity, with a re-evaluation of Pineland’s networks to assess vulnerabilities and secure its infrastructure as much as possible.

In his President’s Report, Mark Bland commended Pineland’s initiatives and the team that makes them possible. “Fortunately, your employees, management team, and your board of directors recognize opportunities when they arise. Even though opportunities don’t come with their values stamped upon them.” Bland continued, “Each individual no matter their department or job, is a vital link in the chain that composes a business. Here at Pineland, we are fortunate to have loyal, conscientious employees who form the diamond hard links in the chain that keeps our cooperative thriving and strong.”

During the meeting, three directors were re-elected, unopposed, to serve Pineland Telephone Cooperative, Inc. for another three-year term. Wiley “Chip” Evans, IV (Bartow & Davisboro) will represent District 2, Ralph Clifton (Southwest Metter & Southwest Cobbtown) will represent District 5, and Mark Bland (Northwest Metter) will represent District 8.

Prior to the meeting’s commencement, singer/songwriter Cole Goodwin, joined by Pineland’s own Casey Yarbrough on the Cajon, took the stage as this year’s entertainment. The two performed a combination of classic covers and original works.

Twelve employees with a combined total of 250 years of service were recognized for their career milestones: Jim Sherrod (35 years), Wayne Foskey (35 years), Ken Scott (30 years), Michael Cardell (25), John Lawrence (25 years), Scott Steele (25 years), Donnie Salter (20 years), Denise Lee (20 years), James Owens (15 years), Andy Cook (10 years), Steven Snell (5 years), and Isaac Holton (5 years).

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L to R: Wayne Foskey (35), Jim Sherrod (35), Ken Scott (30), Michael Cardell (25), John Lawrence (25), Scott Steele (25), Donnie Salter (20), Denise Lee (20), James Owens (15), Andy Cook (10), and Steven Snell (5). Not pictured: Isaac Holton (5).

Pineland serves over 1,300 square miles with its traditional Phone and Internet services in all or parts of ten counties in South Georgia. In its 72nd year, 100% of Pineland's Phone and Internet customers receive their services via a dedicated Fiber-to-the-Home network offering Gigabit enabled broadband connections. Pineland's mission is to offer an outstanding customer experience through the efficient delivery of progressive technology solutions in the markets served. We will achieve this mission by applying our Core Values of Excellence, Integrity, Innovation, and a Servant's Heart in everything we do.

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