

DZS and Irby Utilities Work Together to Help 4-County Electric Power Association Bring Gigabit+ Broadband and Smart Grid Connectivity to Rural Mississippi

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Electric cooperative leverages CARES and RDOF programs and DZS/Irby Utilities expertise to aggressively build out world-class broadband network to over 40,000 homes and businesses

PLANO, Texas, Jan. 05, 2022 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- **DZS** (NASDAQ: DZSI), a global leader in broadband connectivity platforms and communications software solutions, today announced the continued successful expansion of a major rural broadband transformation project being deployed by electric cooperative **4-County Electric Power Association (4-County)** in East Central Mississippi in conjunction with DZS strategic partner **Irby Utilities (Irby)**, a subsidiary of Sonepar USA who provides full scope fiber network solutions through its Technology and Communications business group. Now in its second year of buildout, 4-County has moved beyond its successful pilot of DZS technology and Irby Utilities broadband network planning and deployment expertise to the aggressive expansion of its **FASTnet Fiber program** to its membership across nine counties. This program will be transformational to the region when it comes to fruition over the next few years, as 4-County lays over 3,700 miles of fiber to bring world-class gigabit+ services capabilities to over 40,000 homes and businesses.

Made possible by over \$35 million in **Rural Digital Opportunity Funds (RDOF)** and millions more in **CARES funding** and committed investment by 4-County, the FASTnet Fiber program will also enable the cooperative to connect its critical electric infrastructure to a smart grid communications network.

“This groundbreaking FASTnet Fiber project is more than just bridging the digital divide – It is obliterating it by bringing multi-gigabit capable hyper-broadband services via GPON and XGS-PON access technologies to areas with extremely limited broadband access,” said Brian Clark, CEO and general manager, 4-County Electrical Power Association. “As this network comes to fruition, it will catapult 4-County’s membership straight to the forefront of

the digital age and provide transformational opportunity to our region. The rapid and successful pilot build out and our whole FASTnet Fiber project would not have been possible without Irby's expertise. We are thrilled with the progress that we've made already and believe in the transformational power that unleashing hyper-fast broadband will have in our member communities in East Central Mississippi."

With approximately 40,000 members and 50,000 meters along 5,500 miles of power lines, 4-County is already one of Mississippi's largest electrical cooperatives, serving a variety of residential, commercial and government customers, including a U.S. Air Force base, a large truck engine plant, a drone manufacturing facility and a steel mill that is the largest TVA power consumer in the Southeast. All of these members are potential beneficiaries of the new FASTnet Fiber broadband network, enabling symmetrical speed residential packages of 200/500/1000 Mbps today and having the potential to deliver 10 Gbps services on demand tomorrow – all over the same fiber infrastructure and DZS Velocity and Helix systems. Irby Utilities is now helping 4-County plan for and rapidly deploying a range of DZS technologies that include:

- **DZS Velocity** Broadband Access solutions: The DZS Velocity V14 multi-terabit FTTx OLTs with GPON, XGS-PON, and Combo line cards form the foundation of FASTnet's multi-gigabit capable services deployment. DZS V14 OLTs offer an ultra-high capacity, fiber-optimized aggregation platform suitable for deployment in even the most demanding physical environments.
- **DZS Helix** Edge Access solutions: DZS zNID ONTs provide wired connectivity in the home, while DZS Mesh-2100 dual band AC2100 wave 2 Wi-Fi repeaters are enabling a carrier-class Wi-Fi network for home and small office use.

"4-County and Irby Utilities have done an incredible job bringing cutting-edge technology and services to one of the most underserved markets in the U.S. in a very short period of time, and DZS is proud to be a critical partner in the efforts of electric cooperatives to rapidly transform these markets into hyper-connected showcases," said Jay Hilbert, chief revenue officer, DZS. "This project is already making a huge difference in the quality of life for the families and communities of East Mississippi and has laid a strong foundation for ongoing economic development in the area. We believe 4-County is a powerful example to other electric cooperatives of how they too can find success in deploying gigabit+ broadband to their members by leveraging available government stimulus funds and grants as well as unparalleled expertise of DZS and Irby Utilities."

The partnership with DZS, Irby Utilities and 4-County is one of many similar efforts taking place now with rural electric co-operatives across the US. The RDOF program has already allocated over \$1 billion to electric co-operative projects, with DZS and Irby Utilities involved with over \$100 million in awarded and approved funding. Billions more are still available. In Mississippi alone, the state has allocated over \$1 billion to electric cooperative buildouts, leveraging funds from multiple federal, state, and regional sources. The availability of diverse funding is a testament to 4-County, Irby Utilities and DZS' ability to work together seamlessly to deliver life-changing broadband services to

some of the most underserved communities in the US on time and on budget.

For more information on DZS solutions, visit www.DZSi.com.

About 4-County Electric Power Association

4-County Electric Power Association is a member-owned electric power distributor, supplying power from the Tennessee Valley Authority across all or parts of nine counties in East Central Mississippi. Committed to improving the quality of life for all those we touch, 4-County has spent more than 80 years building and maintaining a strong and reliable electric system to bring affordable power to our members. Running FASTnet Fiber alongside our electric system now lets us offer the fastest, most reliable internet speeds to our members at affordable prices. FASTnet will also support “smart grid” technology to make sure our system always operates at peak performance.

About Irby Utilities

Irby was founded in 1926 and is based in Jackson, Mississippi. The company has evolved into two distinct operations, of which Irby Utilities is an industry leader with 57 locations supporting activity in 47 states. The employees of Irby Utilities serve customers with innovative products and services through its diverse portfolio in four major business channels: electric, broadband, gas and capital project services. To find out more, visit www.irbyutilities.com.

About Sonepar USA

Sonepar USA is an independent, family-owned company with global market leadership in the B-to-B distribution of electrical, industrial and safety products, services and solutions. We are a proud member of the Sonepar Group, the world's largest privately held electrical distributor. Sonepar entered the US in 1998 and has continued to grow due to strategic acquisitions and organic growth. Today, Sonepar USA is represented by 14 locally managed operating companies with over 700 locations nationwide. For more information, visit soneparusa.com.

About DZS

DZS Inc. (NASDAQ: DZSI) is a global leader in broadband connectivity platforms and communications software solutions with more than 20 million products in service with customers and alliance partners spanning more than 100 countries.

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This press release contains forward-looking statements regarding future events and our future results that are subject to the safe harbors created under the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. These statements reflect the beliefs and assumptions of the Company's management as of the date hereof. Words such as

“anticipate,” “believe,” “continue,” “could,” “estimate,” “expect,” “forecast,” “goal,” “intend,” “may,” “plan,” “project,” “seek,” “should,” “target,” “will,” “would,” variations of such words, and similar expressions are intended to identify forward-looking statements. Readers are cautioned that these forward-looking statements are only predictions and are subject to risks, uncertainties and assumptions that are difficult to predict. The Company’s actual results could differ materially and adversely from those expressed in or contemplated by the forward-looking statements. Factors that could cause actual results to differ include, but are not limited to, those risk factors contained in the Company’s SEC filings available at www.sec.gov, including without limitation, the Company’s annual report on Form 10-K, quarterly reports on Form 10-Q and subsequent filings. In addition, additional or unforeseen affects from the COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic climate may give rise to or amplify many of these risks. Readers are cautioned not to place undue reliance on any forward-looking statements, which speak only as of the date on which they are made. DZS undertakes no obligation to update or revise any forward-looking statements for any reason.

For further information see: www.DZSi.com.

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