

# Fosters lead in technology and service

The mid-summer retreat of Southwestern College's board of trustees was fairly informal, so most of his colleagues probably didn't notice Mike Foster '71 quietly leaving the room to answer cell phone calls. And even if they had noticed, they probably wouldn't have realized the importance of what was taking place.

Foster was finalizing details for a deal with Sprint to triple the size of the company he heads. With the addition of 13 Sprint exchanges to the six that Twin Valley Telephone currently serves, the company will continue to lead a technological revolution for its customers, a revolution most people don't realize is taking place.

Soon, subscribers in the 2,400 square miles and 35 communities in north central Kansas that TVT will serve will have access to cutting-edge technology available to only about one percent of the homes in the United States.

With the help of other family members, including his wife, Jackie '72, Mike is guiding Twin Valley in an ambitious plan to put fiber-optic technology in the homes of 100 percent of Twin Valley's customers. This means subscribers of the Miltonvale-based company will have advanced telecommunications, plus high-speed data and digital video services in every home, even those miles from their nearest neighbors.

The transition won't be easy for Twin Valley (more than 2,000 miles of fiber optic cable will be buried) but Foster is enthusiastic about the eventual outcome.

"This will provide an economic development opportunity for these communities and these counties that virtually no one in the country enjoys," he points out. "There are so

many jobs out there in the world today that you can do from anywhere if you have really good communications. With the kind of bandwidth we'll be able to provide, we'll have people moving back to these communities who want to enjoy a quality of life cities just can't provide."



This kind of enthusiastic backing of rural regions is not new in the Foster family—Mike is the third generation of his family to lead Twin Valley since his grandfather bought the company in 1947. At that time customers cranked magneto telephones and shared their party lines with as many as 15 or 16 neighbors. Almost immediately after the Fosters took over, improvements began: rebuilding of lines, addition of more exchanges, installation of direct dialing identification (even before Southwestern Bell had this capability).

By the time he graduated from Southwestern, Mike couldn't wait to get back home to a job at Twin Valley. He had been learning the business and preparing to lead Twin Valley for most his life (he began going out on

service calls when he was six years old) but he admits even he wasn't prepared for what happened in the 1990s: the internet.

"It snuck up on us," he admits. "I had no idea what the internet was going to do to people. We found out that people craved information."

People craved information so much, in fact, that when Twin Valley began offering dial-up 'net access to its customers, users figured out how to keep their modems active 24 hours a day, hogging the company's line capacity. A switch to IDSL (ISDN digital subscriber line, a high-speed connection that uses the same wires as a regular telephone line) proved to be so popular that Mike decided Twin Valley should make another technological leap.

"Businesses loved IDSL, and that, along with the growth in our area, made us look at our network. We could foresee problems in a lot of areas with new housing developments, because ISDL (the next step in technology) didn't go over the same wire as voice," Foster says. "We knew our internet customers were going to want faster speeds so we needed to move to an infrastructure that would support ADSL, which is much faster."

Rather than burying new copper lines, the company committed to fiber optics.

Now all of Twin Valley's home telecommunications can be delivered through the fiber optic line—telephone and long distance, high-speed internet, and more than 160 channels of television.

Moving his company forward has been second nature for Mike Foster as long as he can remember, and in the past few years, he's re-committed

to help move Southwestern College forward. A trustee of the college for the past two years, he is playing an increasing role in both leadership and financial support.

"My best friends at SC were part of my (Beta Rho Mu) fraternity," he recalls. "I've said in trustee meetings before that not a lot of good things happened to some of us in Christy! That, along with some administrative decisions that were made after we graduated, made us a little unhappy with our college and we were that way for quite a while. What is happening now, though, is that we have changed, and Southwestern has changed dramatically. SC is very likely in the strongest leadership position it has been in for the last several decades and we're recognizing that. And, it is influencing our involvement, too, both from a giving standpoint and a participation standpoint."

Just in the past few years the fraternity brothers have united to underwrite one of the new 77 Steps, have initiated an endowed scholarship in memory of Dennis Cavalier, and are close to completing endowment of a Beta Rho scholarship.

"I'm really proud of the guys who have stepped up and I don't think we're going to stop there," Mike adds. "There are still some guys we need to hear from and with their help, we're going to continue to try to come up with ways to help the college. If we don't, people won't remember we were even there."

Helping his college, like helping his customers, is in Mike's nature.



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### From Alumni Programs

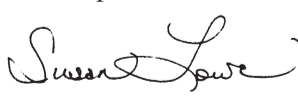


As the planning for Homecoming is put into place, excitement continues to build! We've had great response to the Homecoming layout in the last Southwesterner, featuring the Class Hosts of reunion classes. (I think even the hosts got a chuckle out of some of their college pictures.) If you were in a class ending in "5" or "0," or if you had good friends in those classes, we encourage you

to make plans to come for the fun, Oct. 21, 22, and 23. Meanwhile, check out the Homecoming schedule in this *Southwesterner* or refer to the more detailed schedule located on the SC Web site at [www.sckans.edu/homecoming](http://www.sckans.edu/homecoming).

Other excitement underway is the planning for 100 Years of Basketball at Southwestern. If you played basketball or enjoyed watching Builder basketball, you'll want to plan to attend as many of the celebration events as possible. Watch *The Southwesterner* for more details.

If you have questions, contact me at (800) 846-1543 ext. 6334, or e-mail at [slowe@sckans.edu](mailto:slowe@sckans.edu). And for news and calendar information, don't forget to check the alumni Web site at [www.sckans.edu/alumni2/](http://www.sckans.edu/alumni2/). We look forward to seeing you on campus soon!



Susan Lowe '95  
Director of Alumni Programs

### UPCOMING SC ALUMNI EVENTS

Oct. 15 | 2:30 p.m. | Informal dedication of Fran Broadhurst memorial step, gather at the base of the 77 Steps.

Oct. 21 | 12-2 p.m. | Career Fair, at the SC Memorial Library.

Oct. 21, 22, 23 | Homecoming weekend! Refer to the schedule on page 12 or online for details.

Nov. 12 | Natural Science Hall of Fame. Inductees are: **E. Keith Hege '56**, **Verlin L. Hoberecht '51**, and **Ray A. Waller '59**. Activities include:

- 4:30 p.m. | unveiling of plaques, Beech Science Center.
- 5 p.m. | dinner and induction ceremony, Roy L. Smith dining hall.

Nov. 12 | 7 p.m. | 1930s and 1940s Basketball Reunion, SC vs. Dallas Christian College, Stewart Field House.

Nov. 19 | 7 p.m. | 1990s and 2000s Basketball Reunion, SC vs. Union College, Stewart Field House.

Dec. 10 | 7 p.m. | 1950s Basketball Reunion, SC vs. Friends University, Stewart Field House.

Jan. 21 | 7 p.m. | 1960s Basketball Reunion, SC vs. Ottawa University, Stewart Field House.

Feb. 4 | Southwestern College Athletic Hall of Fame, main campus.

Feb. 4 | 7 p.m. | 1970s Basketball Reunion, SC vs. Kansas Wesleyan University, Stewart Field House.

Feb. 18 | 7 p.m. | 1980s Basketball Reunion, SC vs. Sterling College, Stewart Field House.

*Remember, you do not need to live in the area where an event is being held to attend. All alumni and friends of the college are welcome to attend any of our events, regardless of location. Check the alumni Web site at [www.sckans.edu/alumni2/](http://www.sckans.edu/alumni2/) or for more information contact alumni programs (800) 846-1543, ext. 6334, or [slowe@sckans.edu](mailto:slowe@sckans.edu).*