Windstream reports third-quarter results

Completed acquisition of Broadview Networks
Launched proprietary SD-WAN Concierge and OfficeSuite® products across footprint
Expanded enterprise contribution margins
Improved broadband subscriber trends sequentially
Grew ILEC Consumer ARPU for 11th consecutive quarter

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – Windstream Holdings, Inc. (NASDAQ: WIN), a leading provider of advanced network communications and technology solutions, today reported third-quarter results.

"Our overall strategy continues to deliver solid results," said Tony Thomas, president and chief executive officer of Windstream. "We continue to see growing demand for our SD-WAN service, which represented 19 percent of total enterprise sales in the quarter. Strategic enterprise sales, which include SD-WAN, Unified Communications as a Service and on-net sales, accounted for 36 percent of total enterprise sales in the quarter. We also continue to deliver faster broadband speeds to more consumers and small businesses, which led to improved broadband subscriber trends sequentially."

During the quarter, Windstream completed its acquisition of Broadview Networks Holdings, Inc. The company now offers Broadview's innovative and award-winning unified communications solution, OfficeSuite, along with Windstream's proprietary SD-WAN Concierge service across its entire footprint.

Windstream also announced it is adopting a new business unit structure and combining its operations into two distinct units: Cloud & Connectivity and Consumer & SMB. The company is consolidating the Enterprise, CLEC C/SMB and Wholesale segments into the Cloud & Connectivity business unit.

"This change will enable us to accelerate our path to revenue growth, improve the customer experience and simplify our company," Thomas said. "These changes are based on the basic tenet that organizational structure should be nimble and follow the vision and strategy. The anchor of our vision is based on the customer experience – that is not changing.

"The Cloud & Connectivity business unit will enable us to leverage disruptive technologies in our product solutions, such as SD-WAN and OfficeSuite, as well as broader SDN-based products, to differentiate ourselves in the marketplace. Having three different organizations doing that was no longer optimal. These solutions combined with a best-inclass customer experience will accelerate our transformation from a telecom reseller to a cloud application and connectivity provider.

"Additionally, as a result of our significant network investment over the past three years, we are transforming our ILEC Consumer & SMB business unit from a phone and internet provider to a premium broadband and entertainment provider," Thomas continued. "Our suite of premium internet and business solutions, which we are rebranding under the name Kinetic by Windstream, now are available to more than 50 percent of the households and small businesses across our 18-state local footprint."

The Cloud & Connectivity business unit will be led by Layne Levine. The Consumer & SMB business unit will be led by Jeff Small.

Results under GAAP

Total revenues and sales were $1.50 billion and total service revenues were $1.47 billion in the third quarter, an increase of 11 percent and 12 percent respectively year-over-year. Operating income was $43 million compared to $129 million in the same period a year ago. The company reported a net loss of $102 million, or a loss of 55 cents per share, compared to a net loss of $66 million, or a loss of 72 cents per share, a year ago.

Windstream incurred during the quarter approximately $3 million in expenses related to damages to certain of its property and restoration of communications services as a result of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

ILEC consumer and small business service revenues were $381 million, a decrease of 4 percent from the same period a year ago, and contribution margin was $201 million compared to $205 million year-over-year.

Wholesale service revenues were $173 million, an increase of 11 percent year-over-year, and contribution margin was $114 million essentially unchanged from the same period a year ago.

Enterprise service revenues were $554 million, a 12 percent increase from the same period a year ago, and contribution margin was $106 million compared to $90 million year-over-year.

CLEC consumer and small business service revenues were $225 million, a 90 percent increase year-over-year, and contribution margin was $77 million compared to $37 million in the same period a year ago.

Note: 2016 results exclude EarthLink and Broadview operations. 2017 results include EarthLink operations from Feb. 27, 2017, to Sept. 30, 2017, and Broadview operations from July 28, 2017, to Sept. 30, 2017.

Adjusted Results of Operations

Adjusted revenues and sales were $1.50 billion and adjusted service revenues were $1.47 billion compared to $1.59 billion and $1.56 billion respectively year-over-year.

Adjusted OIBDAR was $490 million, a decrease of 5 percent from the same period a year ago.

Adjusted capital expenditures were $205 million in the quarter, a decrease of 4 percent year-over-year.

ILEC consumer and small business service revenues were $381 million, a decrease of 4 percent from the same period a year ago, and contribution margin was $201 million or 53 percent for the quarter. ILEC consumer service revenues were $303 million, a decrease of 3 percent year-over-year. ILEC consumer average revenue per household increased for the 11th quarter in a row. Consumer broadband units decreased by approximately 8,400 during the quarter, a strong improvement from a loss of approximately 22,000 customers during the second quarter.

Wholesale service revenues were $173 million, a decrease of 8 percent year-over-year, and contribution margin was $114 million or 66 percent for the quarter.

Enterprise service revenues were $554 million, a decrease of 7 percent from the same period a year ago, and contribution margin was $106 million or 19 percent for the quarter.

CLEC consumer and small business service revenues were $225 million, an increase of 2 percent year-over-year, and contribution margin was $77 million, or 34 percent for the quarter.

Note: Adjusted results of operations are based on the combined historical financial information of Windstream and EarthLink and assume the merger was completed on Jan. 1, 2016. Operating results for Broadview are included beginning on July 28, 2017, the date of acquisition. A reconciliation of adjusted results to the comparable GAAP measures is included in the financial information presented below. Additional supplemental quarterly financial information is available on the company's Web site at www.windstream.com/investors.

Debt and Share Repurchases

Windstream repurchased both debt and equity in the open markets during the quarter. The company repurchased approximately $49 million of face value of its 2020 notes for approximately $45 million. The company also repurchased 9.1 million shares of common stock for approximately $19 million, which represented 4.8 percent of shares outstanding as of June 30.

Financial Outlook for 2017

Windstream reaffirmed its previously provided full-year financial guidance. The company expects service revenue trends similar to 2016 trends and adjusted OIBDAR between $2.02 billion and $2.04 billion. The company expects adjusted capital expenditures between $790 million and $840 million.

About Windstream

Windstream Holdings, Inc. (NASDAQ: WIN), a FORTUNE 500 company, is a leading provider of advanced network communications and technology solutions for consumers, businesses, enterprise organizations and wholesale customers across the U.S. Windstream offers bundled services, including broadband, security solutions, voice and digital TV to consumers. The company also provides data, cloud solutions, unified communications and managed services to small business and enterprise clients. The company supplies core transport solutions on a local and long-haul fiber network spanning approximately 150,000 miles. Additional information is available at windstream.com. Please visit our newsroom at news.windstream.com or follow us on Twitter at @Windstream.

Adjusted OIBDA is operating income before depreciation and amortization, excluding merger, integration and certain other costs, restructuring charges, pension costs and share-based compensation.

Adjusted OIBDAR is Adjusted OIBDA before the annual cash rent payment due under the master lease agreement with Uniti Group, Inc., formerly Communications Sales & Leasing (CS&L).

Adjusted free cash flow is defined as Adjusted OIBDA, less adjusted capital expenditures, cash taxes and cash interest on long-term debt.

Cautionary Statement Regarding Forward Looking Statements

Windstream Holdings, Inc. claims the protection of the safe-harbor for forward-looking statements contained in the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. Forward-looking statements are typically identified by words or phrases such as “will,” “anticipate,” “estimate,” “expect,” “project,” “intend,” “plan,” “believe,” “target,” “forecast” and other words and terms of similar meaning. Forward-looking statements are subject to risks and uncertainties that could cause actual future events and results to differ materially from those expressed in the forward-looking statements.

Forward-looking statements include, but are not limited to, 2017 guidance for service revenue, adjusted OIBDAR and adjusted capital expenditures, along with statements regarding adjusted free cash flow, cash interest, cash taxes and adjusted OIBDAR growth; directional outlook for our business units in 2017; our revised capital allocation strategy, including our share repurchase program and efforts to reduce debt; the benefits of the mergers with EarthLink Holdings Corp. and Broadview Network Holdings, Inc. including projected synergies in operating and capital expenditures and the timing of the synergies, reduction in net leverage, and improvement in our ability to compete; expectations regarding our updated business unit structure, expectations regarding revenue trends, sales opportunities, market share growth and improving margins in the business units; expanding our capabilities to utilize next generation technology in our products and services, cost reduction and expense management activities and the timing and benefit of such activities; the availability of higher internet speeds; our ability to accelerate the improvement of our debt profile and reduce interest costs; and any other statements regarding plans, objectives, expectations and intentions and other statements that are not historical facts. These statements, along with other forward-looking statements regarding Windstream's overall business outlook, are based on estimates, projections, beliefs, and assumptions that Windstream believes are reasonable but are not guarantees of future events, performance or results. Actual future events and results may differ materially from those expressed in these forward-looking statements as a result of a number of important factors.

Important factors that could cause actual results to differ materially from those indicated by such forward-looking statements include risks and uncertainties that the cost savings and expected synergies from the mergers with EarthLink Holdings Corp. and Broadview Networks Holdings, Inc. may not be fully realized or may take longer to realize than expected; that the businesses will not be integrated successfully; that disruption from the mergers may make it more difficult to maintain relationships with customers, employees or suppliers; that the attention of management and key personnel may be diverted by integration matters related to the mergers; that the litigation involving an activist bondholder may be resolved unfavorably; that the expected benefits of our cost reduction activities are not realized or adversely affect our sales and operational activities or are otherwise disruptive to our business and personnel; our current capital allocation practices may be changed at any time at the discretion of our Board of Directors; our new business units and anticipated benefits of the revised structure; further adverse changes in economic conditions in markets served by the combined company; the impact of new, emerging, or competing technologies and our ability to utilize these technologies to provide services to our customers; general worldwide economic conditions and related uncertainties; and the effect of any changes in governmental regulations or statutes. For other risk factors that could cause actual results and events to differ materially from those expressed, please refer to our filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Windstream does not undertake any obligation to publicly update any forward-looking statement, whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise.

Factors that could cause actual results to differ materially from those contemplated in our forward-looking statements include, among others:

- the cost savings and expected synergies from the mergers with EarthLink and Broadview may not be fully realized or may take longer to realize than expected;

- the integration of Windstream and EarthLink and Broadview may not be successful, may cause disruption in relationships with customers, vendors and suppliers and may divert attention of management and key personnel;

- our capital allocation practices, including our previously announced stock repurchase program and debt reduction initiatives, may be changed at any time at the discretion of the board of directors;

- the benefits of our capital allocation strategy and cost reduction activities may not be fully realized or may take longer to realize than expected, or the implementation of these initiatives may adversely affect our sales and operational activities or otherwise disrupt our business and personnel;

- the alleged ability of one or more purported noteholders to establish that transactions related to the spin-off of certain assets in 2015 into a publicly traded real estate investment trust allegedly violated certain covenants in existing indentures governing certain outstanding senior notes;

- the impact of the Federal Communications Commission's comprehensive business data services reforms that may result in greater capital investments and customer and revenue churn because of possible price increases by our ILEC suppliers for certain services we use to serve customer locations where we do not have facilities;

- further adverse changes in economic conditions in the markets served by us;

- the extent, timing and overall effects of competition in the communications business;

- our election to accept state-wide offers under the FCC's Connect America Fund, Phase II, and the impact of such election on our future receipt of federal universal service funds and capital expenditures, and any return of support received pursuant to the program;

- the potential for incumbent carriers to impose monetary penalties for failure to meet specific volume and term commitments under their special access pricing and tariff plans, which Windstream uses to lease last-mile connections to serve its retail business data service customers, without FCC action;

- the impact of new, emerging or competing technologies and our ability to utilize these technologies to provide services to our customers;

- for certain operations where we lease facilities from other carriers, adverse effects on the availability, quality of service, price of facilities and services provided by other carriers on which our services depend;

- unfavorable rulings by state public service commissions in current and further proceedings regarding universal service funds, inter-carrier compensation or other matters that could reduce revenues or increase expenses;

- material changes in the communications industry that could adversely affect vendor relationships with equipment and network suppliers and customer relationships with wholesale customers;

- our ability to make rent payments under the master lease to Uniti, which may be affected by results of operations, changes in our cash requirements, cash tax payment obligations, or overall financial position;

- unanticipated increases or other changes in our future cash requirements, whether caused by unanticipated increases in capital expenditures, increases in pension funding requirements, or otherwise;

- the availability and cost of financing in the corporate debt markets;

- the impact of recent adverse changes in the ratings given to our debt securities by nationally accredited ratings organizations and the potential for additional adverse claims in the future;

- earnings on pension plan investments significantly below our expected long-term rate of return for plan assets or a significant change in the discount rate or other actuarial assumptions;

- unfavorable results of litigation or intellectual property infringement claims asserted against us;

- the risks associated with non-compliance by us with regulations or statutes applicable to government programs under which we receive material amounts of end-user revenue and government subsidies, or non-compliance by us, our partners, or our subcontractors with any terms of our government contracts;

- the effects of federal and state legislation, and rules and regulations, and changes thereto, governing the communications industry;

- continued loss of consumer households served and consumer high-speed internet customers;

- the impact of equipment failure, natural disasters or terrorist acts;

- the effects of work stoppages by our employees or employees of other communications companies on whom we rely for service; and

- those additional factors under "Risk Factors" in Item 1A of Part I of our Annual Report on Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2016, and in subsequent filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission at www.sec.gov.

In addition to these factors, actual future performance, outcomes and results may differ materially because of more general factors including, among others, general industry and market conditions and growth rates, economic conditions, and governmental and public policy changes.

Windstream undertakes no obligation to update or revise any forward-looking statements, whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise. The foregoing review of factors that could cause Windstream's actual results to differ materially from those contemplated in the forward-looking statements should be considered in connection with information regarding risks and uncertainties that may affect Windstream's future results included in other filings by Windstream with the Securities and Exchange Commission at www.sec.gov.

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