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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SkyLine Among 15 Companies Named

**Department of Defense announces 2006 Secretary of Defense
Employer Support Freedom Award Recipients**

WEST JEFFERSON, N.C.--The National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), an agency of the Department of Defense (DoD), has announced the 2006 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award recipients, and SkyLine Membership Corporation was the only N.C. company among the 15 named July 5 to receive this prestigious award. The 2006 recipients are:

AgCountry Farm Credit Services – Fargo, ND

Allianz Life Insurance Company of North America – Minneapolis, MN

- more -

Baptist Health – Little Rock, AR
BNSF Railway Company – Ft. Worth, TX
Cardi's Furniture Superstores – Swansea, MA
Commonwealth of Massachusetts – Boston, MA
Computer Sciences Corporation – El Segundo, CA
DuPont—Wilmington, DE
Fred Fletemeyer Company – Colorado Springs, CO
MGM Mirage – Las Vegas, NV
Skyline Membership Corporation – West Jefferson, NC
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks – Pierre, SD
Starbucks Corporation – Seattle, WA
State of Vermont – Montpelier, VT
Sun Valley General Improvement District – Sun Valley, NV

“On behalf of the men and women serving in the National Guard and Reserve, I would like to congratulate these firms and thank them for their outstanding support,” said Bob Hollingsworth, Executive Director of ESGR. “By going above and beyond what is required by law, these firms set a high standard for all of America’s private and public employers.”

ESGR will present the Freedom Awards at a ceremony on Thursday, Sept. 21, at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, D.C. SkyLine Chief Executive Officer (CEO) John Dixon, Field Services Technician Joe Taylor (who originally nominated SkyLine for the state-level “Above and Beyond Award” that qualified SkyLine for the national Freedom Award), and Human Resource Manager Angie Miller are scheduled to attend the award ceremony in Washington.

The Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve is an agency within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs. The committee was established by Presidential Executive Order in 1972 to promote cooperation and understanding between Reserve component members and their civilian employers and to assist in resolution of conflicts arising from an

employee's military commitment. Today ESGR operates through a network of more than 4,500 volunteers in 55 committees located in each state, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Europe.

“It was a tremendous honor to receive the official word that SkyLine had been named to receive this national award,” said SkyLine CEO John Dixon. “We are proud of our employees who serve in the military and we don't want them to worry about their financial obligations while they are away. It has been especially moving to witness the degree of support expressed to these men and their units by our company and its employee group,” Dixon said.

Secretary of Defense William Perry instituted the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award in 1996 under the auspices of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. The award publicly recognizes employers, who were nominated by their employees who voluntarily serve in the National Guard and Reserve, for exceptional support above the requirements of federal law. This prestigious award is the highest in a series of DoD employer awards that include the Patriot Award, the ESGR Above and Beyond Award, and the Pro Patria Award.

Previous Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award recipients include Adolph Coors Company, American Express, Bank One Corporation, Colt Safety Fire & Rescue, General Electric, Harley-Davidson, The Home Depot, The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, The State of Minnesota, Northrop Grumman Corporation, One Source Building Technologies, Saints Memorial Medical Center, Strategic Solutions Incorporated, Sprint Corporation, and Wal-Mart.

Earlier this year, SkyLine was among 64 North Carolina employers to receive the “Above and Beyond” award from the North Carolina ESGR. The “Above and Beyond” award is presented to the top 10 percent of employers who hire Guardsmen and Reservists in North Carolina. Selection is based on information supplied by Guardsmen or Reservists who work for selected companies. The North Carolina ESGR Committee is tasked to promote understanding of the National Guard and Reserve with both Public and Private Sector employers.

SkyLine's "Above and Beyond" award was based on a nomination by Field Services Technician Joe Taylor. He and Staking Engineer Tim Stamper served in the 2nd Platoon of the 1450th Transportation Company in the N.C. National Guard, which was deployed to Iraq from January 2004 to May 2005. SkyLine was noted for its support of the two employees, whose positions and benefits were held for them while in service.

"When we were given orders to be deployed, the support from our employer and fellow employees was tremendous," said employee Joe Taylor. "Our management team made sure we understood that we had nothing to worry about while we were gone. Our jobs were secure, plus our package of benefits would be taken care of. Also, we were assured that if our families needed anything while we were gone, SkyLine would be the first ones there to help."

The company and its employee-funded crisis relief program—Project Teamwork—purchased needed cabin cots for members of the 2nd Platoon. Project Teamwork also sponsored a benefit motorcycle run to raise money for the Family Support Group of the 1450th Transportation Company. At that event, employees, family and friends had the opportunity to videotape messages to the soldiers of the 1450th. SkyLine maintained close communication with the Family Support Group during this period, and employees sent numerous letters of support and care packages to the two servicemen while they were in Iraq. The cooperative also was part of the county-wide effort in organizing a homecoming parade for the 1450th upon its return to the area in April 2005.

As the 1.2 million members of the National Guard and Reserve continue to perform an increasing number of unique missions that require extraordinary actions on the part of everyday citizens, ESGR continues to be the informational agency for the employers of America's Patriots.

SkyLine is a member-owned cooperative, providing a variety of telecommunications services to its members in Alleghany, Ashe, Avery and Watauga counties in North Carolina, and Johnson County in east Tennessee. Along with its current focus of building a fiber-to-the-premise (FTTP) network, SkyLine is committed to enhancing the quality of life across the region through various charitable,

educational and economic development programs and initiatives. Its wholly-owned subsidiary, SkyBest Communications, offers de-regulated products and services, including local calling services, business systems solutions, broadband Internet services and long distance.