One of the great Mississippi success stories is C Spire, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

What a great ride it has been. They've come a long way since the one rural telephone exchange in Calhoun City.

Wade Creekmore Sr. had worked as an attorney for the Public Service Commission and gained some understanding of the operations of rural telephone exchanges. With two sons fresh out of Ole Miss, Mr. Creekmore expanded, sending son Wade to Franklin and Jimmy to the Delta. They did everything from sales to billing to repairing the phones.

By the early 1960s the Creekmore family was running telephone exchanges in Louise, Holly Bluff, Calhoun City, Franklin and 12 other small Mississippi towns. They still run those small telephone systems today. But instead of a dozen employees, they now employ 1,200.

When the Federal Communications Commission authorized cellular telephone service in the 1980s, the Creekmores were in the right place at the right time. The licensing process required that every cellular license have a telephone operator as one of the two parties. Opportunity met ability and vision. The huge expansion was on. Today C Spire has nearly a million subscribers, making them the largest independent cell phone company in the United States.

"They saw it coming and were all over it," C Spire CEO Hu Meena told me. "You remember what it was like. People were asking, 'Why would you need a telephone in your car?' Many people in the telephone business thought it would be a fad, but not the Creekmores."

The Creekmores are a big Northside clan of 21 and are part of the fabric of our community. It is a blessing that we are able to have a locally owned and operated company at the forefront of technology. C Spire creates jobs and capital that stay in Mississippi. They support numerous charitable endeavors.

Meena has been a big part of the success, running the company during most of its rapid growth. The Creekmores realized the importance of investing in the latest and best technology. Hu Meena has kept that strategy going with nearly a billion dollars invested in thousands of cell tower sites. This is not a business for the faint of heart.

Over the last 25 years, there have been many critical moments when the family had to make huge bets on new technology. One wrong move would have sunk the company and led to a sale. But they made all the right moves and stand today as perhaps the most successful privately owned company in the state today.

Mississippi cell phone penetration is greater than 100 percent because many people have more than one phone. Now the battle is turning more toward the software aspect of smart phones. C

Spire doesn’t plan to rest on their laurels.
Meena has added chief operating officer Kevin Hankins to the team, investing heavily in software systems designed to customize their service to the unique requirements of each individual customer. C Spire was recently designated as one of the cutting edge technology companies in the country.
Listening to Meena and Hankins talk made me thankful I work in a simple business like newspapers. C Spire is taking it to a whole new level. It’s a brave new world out there and the competition from the Googles and the Facebooks of the world is intense. But they did it before. I bet they’ll do it again