

Getting Internet access to the next level



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When the technical types talk about providing residential users with new Internet services, they talk about the challenges of wiring that "last mile" separating your home from the main network. But beyond those last miles now being wired in central New Hampshire's larger communities, there are still miles and miles in rural areas to go.

Throughout this area there are homes and businesses which continue to wait for high-speed service. For some, many miles separate them from all the Internet has to offer. For others the state-of-the-art technology is tantalizingly close. Either way these are the people who live in the land of dial-up Internet access.

Thankfully there are to developments which are at work simultaneously to improve this situation.

One is the commitment of FairPoint Communications, the state's new major phone company, acting on a mandate from the state Public Utilities Commission, which is working to provide broadband Internet top 85 percent of its subscribers statewide by the end of next year.

The other is the undertaking by the Lakes Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee to inventory the computer communications needs through the 30-community area in central New Hampshire. The local effort is striving to gauge what is needed and then work with local providers to get that service to potential users.

The ultimate success of this process depends as much on businesses and individuals giving the group a rundown of their needs as it does on the CEDS group.

There is a great deal riding on these process. Having high-speed Internet service is crucial to retaining existing jobs and attraction new ones to the area.

The need to get high-speed access to rural areas is analogous to the rural electrification project that began to transform America in the late 1930s. One of the most critical issues facing this country is the increasing economic and cultural isolation of rural communities — the abandonment and the ultimate re-democratization of the landscape. No business would settle in a town that lacked electricity, and we are now at the point where no business will settle in a town that lacks broadband access.

Talk to those farmers who were there when the lights first went on in the house and the barn back in the 1930s, and you'll have some idea of just what rural broadband might mean.

It is the initiative and inventiveness of local efforts like the CEDS group, partnering planning agencies, government and small tech companies that will get the job done.