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## Marketing Fiber Networks

Forward-thinking economic development officials help communities leverage their fiber networks.

For more than a decade, **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** has published a special section on broadband and economic development in its year-end issue. Every year, new research and new success stories confirm that good broadband can be a powerful, cost-effective tool for economic development.

Good broadband enables businesses to become more productive and reach new markets. It facilitates workforce training. It promotes the development of new industries. It makes communities more attractive places to live. It makes home-based businesses and telecommuting possible. And that's far from a complete list.

For years, it seemed the only people who weren't getting this message were economic development professionals. Not all, certainly – we've written about outstanding agencies that promote broadband as a key economic driver. But, at the same time, we published reports on surveys showing that many economic development professionals had no idea what broadband was available in their communities or what residents and businesses needed.

Now, the tide has turned. Even though the big economic development news of recent weeks was the bribing of a manufacturer to keep a few hundred jobs in Indiana (an approach proven ineffective long before I started writing about economic development in the 1970s), you can read in this magazine about economic development agencies whose job strategies are far more nuanced.

In Rio Blanco County, Colorado, economic development director

Katelin Cook (p. 16) sees the county's fiber network as a "negotiating tool" to attract and keep businesses. In addition to thinking about what types of businesses might relocate to Rio Blanco County and marketing the fiber network to them, her office helps existing companies leverage the network to enhance their businesses.

At the **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** 2016 economic development conference (p. 38), attendees heard three Midwestern agency directors describe how they help communities obtain broadband and use fiber networks to galvanize growth. Scottie Sandstrom of the Bayfield County (Wisconsin) Economic Development Corporation helped communities get to the front of the queue for CAF-funded deployments. He makes sure fiber gets to new business parks, and he markets the local gigabit network to vacationers who might become telecommuters.

Charlie Walker of the Chippewa County (Minnesota) Economic Development Corporation helped the county obtain a grant to extend fiber to a new business park and made sure gigabit service was available there. And in Red Wing, Minnesota, Neela Mollgaard of Red Wing Ignite promotes technical education and internships, hackathons, business accelerators and gigabit application testing. "Our ultimate goal is to make Red Wing an innovative place to work and live," she says.

That's the spirit! ❖

*Masha Zager*

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