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The Broadband Lifeline

For the economy to function at all in 2020, broadband is a must.

This month, **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** holds its first-ever virtual Summit – a safer alternative to an in-person conference but with the same insightful speakers, cutting-edge content, industry-leading exhibitors and networking opportunities. We're excited to offer a show on a virtual platform, and we think you'll enjoy it. Still, there's no denying that it's different. And challenging.

The same can be said of distance learning, virtual doctor visits, telework, and livestreamed weddings, not to mention online political party conventions. None are easy to get used to. Would-be travelers find "staycations" disappointing. "Zoom fatigue" and similar phrases entered the vocabulary for the first time this summer. Teachers scramble to keep students engaged while they study from home. Parents are whipsawed between concerns for their children's physical safety and their mental health. Athletes and their fans, including the president, are distraught about the cancellation of sports seasons.

As disorienting as the shift to a virtual world is, and as hard as adapting to new realities may be, those who have the option to do so are fortunate. People without adequate – or any – broadband are less able to keep themselves safe and less likely to remain employed (see the article on p. 48). If they lose their jobs, they have a harder time applying for unemployment benefits and new jobs. If they lose their housing, they have a harder time finding new housing. Staying in touch with friends and family, especially for the at-risk population,

becomes difficult. And visiting a library, once a reliable backup for those without computers or internet access, is no longer easy: Libraries in many places have been closed or have curtailed hours.

THE KEY TO ECONOMIC VITALITY

One of **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES'** enduring themes – and the theme of this issue in particular – is that robust broadband is key to economic growth and vitality. In this issue, we feature a case study (p. 44) of a business that enhanced its performance, even during the pandemic, by upgrading to fiber connectivity. There's a story (p. 42) about a network that supports businesses and government offices in rural Indiana, enabling small towns to participate in the global high-tech economy, and another about gigabit communities implementing smart-city applications (p. 38). Broadband economist Michael Curri introduces a model (p. 22) to attract private capital to community networks by allowing them to proactively drive – and benefit from – economic development. And editor-at-large Steve Ross presents evidence (p. 28) suggesting that better broadband could put a dent in child poverty.

This year, however, broadband is doing more than boosting the economy. It's keeping us all alive and functioning. See you at the virtual Summit! ❖

Masha Zager

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