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Local Broadband Keeps Community Dollars Flowing

Broadband gives communities an opportunity to stay relevant.

When I think about how broadband can drive community economic development and job creation, I recall my job interview with Sean Griffey, former CEO of Fierce Markets. When I asked why most staff in the telecom group worked remotely, his response was simple: “I want to attract the best people.”

Griffey was ahead of his time in understanding that work does not have to be tied to one location. Flash forward to 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic drove a sharp increase in the number of remote workers who now depend on bandwidth-hungry videoconferencing applications, such as Zoom.

A recent Statista survey revealed that only 17 percent of respondents worked remotely five days a week before the pandemic, but that figure has since jumped to 44 percent.

In this issue of **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** – my first as editor-in-chief – we look at communities using broadband to keep themselves relevant in an increasingly online world.

For example, after it could not strike a deal with its two incumbent providers, Bristol, New Hampshire, launched an initiative to deliver symmetrical fiber internet to residents and connect businesses, municipal buildings and educational facilities in the town and nearby university.

Other towns, such as the tourist destination New Shoreham, Rhode Island, committed to build an \$8 million fiber-to-the-premises network to replace slow DSL and satellite with

gigabit internet and phone service to every home and business on the island.

The networks in these small towns and others like them across the country have the potential to improve local business productivity, enable telecommuting, drive job creation, and entice younger people to stay. They also can draw new residents, encourage tourism, and strengthen real estate markets.

FOCUS ON LOCAL BROADBAND

For all the possibilities broadband brings to smaller communities, the key challenge is that Tier-1 service providers don't often address communities' unique needs.

The Broadband Equity Partnership found in its national survey of community leaders that although large ISPs received a large portion of federal funding from programs such as the Connect America Fund and now the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, respondents favored local, smaller ISPs as potential partners.

Dr. Christopher Ali, associate professor in the department of media studies at the University of Virginia, summed it up best during the recent Senate Commerce Committee broadband hearing: “Local broadband is the best broadband.” Indeed. By keeping broadband local, communities can reinvest savings to keep community dollars flowing in their local economies. ❖

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