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The Community Broadband Issue

Communities are vying to become “gigabit cities.” Building their own fiber networks is only one way to do it.

Each year, this magazine devotes a spring issue to community broadband efforts – which, I’m happy to report, continue to bloom nationwide. Many communities have recently made the decision to build their own fiber-to-the-premises networks; still more are actively exploring the possibility.

That’s not the only sign of progress. Public-private broadband partnerships, which in the past were often talked about but rarely executed, are becoming increasingly common. Spurred by the Gig.U initiative and the excitement about gigabit communities, cities – even large cities such as Seattle and Chicago – are devising creative arrangements with private network builders. Even cities that, for legal, financial or political reasons, choose not to invest in networks are trying to leverage existing assets to improve broadband connectivity.

Be sure to read the 2013 Summit coverage, which, though outside the Community Broadband section of the magazine, provides a wealth of information about what communities can do – often at little cost – to encourage broadband and make sure their communities benefit from broadband networks once they are built. Google’s Milo Medin (whose keynote address is reprinted here), Kansas City leaders and representatives of many other communities all offered insight on this subject at the Summit.

Success stories are the most enjoyable to write about (and to read), and this issue presents two studies of stimulus-funded community broadband projects that anticipate successful completion this fall.

To avoid repeating mistakes, however, understanding the challenges community broadband faces is also important. Two other articles address those: An interview with the mayor of Provo, Utah, explains why he expects the sale of the iProvo network to provide a happy ending to a less-than-happy tale. Second, an article about the ongoing saga of Palo Alto, Calif., explains why that city never proceeded beyond a pilot program for FTTH – and thus either avoided a costly mistake or missed a great opportunity (or both), depending on one’s point of view.

THE PERSONAL ANGLE

This focus on communities shouldn’t obscure how transformative broadband can be for individuals. This issue introduces a new column, The Last Page, which offers first-person accounts of broadband’s effects on people’s lives. The first installment, “Broadband, Bucko and the B-29,” was recounted to the **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** team at the Summit by a South Dakota state official who happens to be in the business of broadband planning. It’s a loving reminiscence of his late father-in-law, a World War II veteran who, despite having no interest in broadband, was surprised to find it helped enrich the final months of his long life.

Do you have a personal broadband story you would like to share with **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** readers? Write and let me know about it. ❖

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