

Sibley County Spreads The Word About FTTH

A countywide fiber initiative in Minnesota is using the FTTH Council's fiber-to-the-home primer to educate residents about the benefits of fiber.

This 32-page primer helps enlist communitywide support for fiber.

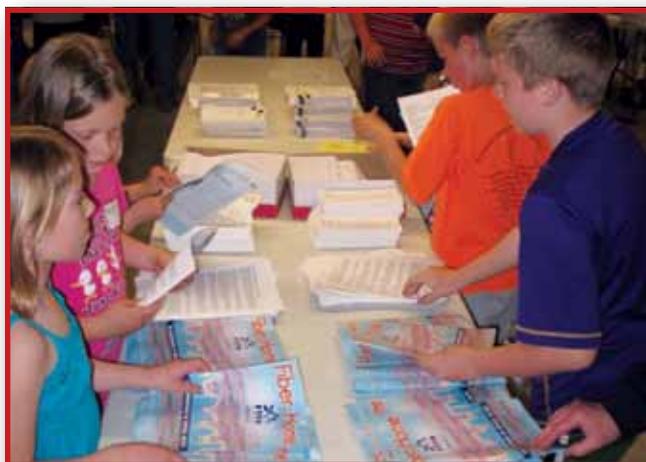
Rural residents in the area southwest of Minneapolis have talked for several years about improving broadband in their communities. Some of them need faster, more reliable broadband; others have no broadband at all. Last year, a group of localities in the region received a grant from the Blandin Foundation, a Grand Rapids organization dedicated to strengthening rural Minnesota, to perform a feasibility study for an FTTH network.

Now the localities are considering building fiber throughout an area that includes all of Sibley County and a small part of Renville County. The proposed RS Fiber project, which would likely be financed by revenue bonds or a capital lease, would connect every home, farm and business in the area – a total of about 8,000 premises.

To determine whether the network can be self-sustaining, the group asked residents about their interest in subscribing to fiber-based services. Residents weren't required to preregister for services, but they were invited to complete a form indicating which services they might subscribe to.

In May, the RS Fiber Marketing Committee mailed the form, along with a reply envelope, to more than 7,300 households. To help residents understand the proposal, and to generate excitement about it, the mailing also included a brochure about potential services, a schedule of 26 public meetings planned for June, a Q&A about the project, and the fiber-to-the-home primer, "Advantages of Optical Access," which appeared as a supplement to the March/April 2011 issue of this magazine. The primer was sponsored by the Fiber-to-the-Home Council and written by **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES'** editors.

Mark Erickson, the city administrator and economic development director of Winthrop, one of the cities represented in the RS Fiber project, says, "We launched the marketing campaign for our countywide FTTH project last week with a mailer to every household and business in the project area. The



Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and 4-H Club members helped stuff envelopes for the RS Fiber project mailing.

central piece in that mailer was the 2011 FTTH Primer published by **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES**. The primer is an excellent way to not only educate people about the basics of FTTH but also inform them of its many benefits."

To stuff the 7,300 envelopes, the committee recruited about 50 volunteers – 20 adults and 30 children, including Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and 4-H Club members. The volunteers worked as long as eight hours to get the job done. Erickson comments, "By the seventh hour, the whole process was getting a little stale, but spirits remained high until the end. There is something about working together with people on a project whose goal is to bring benefit to everyone."

The committee is aiming for a 55 percent response rate to the mailing, and the initial response has been positive, Erickson says. To continue educating residents about the benefits of fiber, RS Fiber Marketing Committee members will distribute the primer and other materials at the scheduled public meetings and at city celebrations and county fairs throughout the summer. ♦

Learn more about the RS Fiber project at www.rsfiber.com