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Revitalizing Communities With Broadband

Communities see broadband as a linchpin for a multitude of opportunities – creating jobs, working remotely and attracting and retaining businesses.

When broadband becomes available in a community, it is transformational, creating opportunities for consumers and businesses alike. This issue features several communities demonstrating the promise and potential of broadband: Fort Pierce, Florida (p. 22); three Northern Kentucky counties (p. 30); and Billings, Montana (p. 26).

TDS Telecom partnered with Billings, and the three Northern Kentucky counties banded together with Cincinnati Bell for fiber to the home (FTTH). In Fort Pierce, Fort Pierce Utility Authority's FPUAnet division will build an FTTH network.

DRIVING DIGITAL LITERACY, ATTRACTING BUSINESSES

Communities pursuing broadband want three things: affordability, digital literacy and the ability to attract businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic shed light on how the digital divide continues to separate the haves from the have-nots. Digital skills enable people to apply for jobs online, fill out college applications, and avoid the risk of having their roles replaced by automation. A lack of digital skills, which some have called a pandemic of its own, is tied to the lack of affordable broadband services.

In Fort Pierce's Lincoln Park neighborhood, broadband adoption rates are low. Jason Mittler, FPUAnet manager, says broadband prices are a

barrier, so the goal of that project is to bring high-speed, reliable, affordable internet to the neighborhood. Next year, FPUAnet will expand its reach to target small businesses in other areas of the city.

Seeing an opportunity to bring competition to the business sector, TDS Telecom will advance the broadband ranking of Billings as its population continues to grow. Likewise, Cincinnati Bell will address broadband availability to unserved and underserved Kentucky towns and cities.

FOCUS ON FIBER

The common thread between these communities is fiber, a medium that offers unlimited bandwidth.

Consider the fact that the XGS-PON standard allows providers to deliver 10 Gbps symmetrical services. Though most consumers don't need a 10 Gbps connection immediately, businesses already are adopting 2 and 5 Gbps services.

Steve Pendery, judge/executive of Campbell County, Kentucky, puts it best: "We haven't had anyone suggest fiber is a technology that's going to be eclipsed anytime soon."

Fiber-based broadband offers communities a chance to revitalize with networks that will grow to meet current and future needs. ❖

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