

# Fiber Connectivity Advances Nonprofit Organization's Mission, Community Diversity: 716 Ministries in Buffalo, New York

The nonprofit organization 716 Ministries becomes the first FTTH community partner of Greenlight Networks in Buffalo's changing West Side.

By Sean Buckley / *Broadband Communities*

**W**hen emerging fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) provider Greenlight Networks was looking for a new community partner in Buffalo, New York, it sought one that would host network equipment in exchange for complimentary fiber broadband service.

Greenlight found that partner in 716 Ministries, a faith-based nonprofit organization that provides a host of services, including job training, building construction and commercial and residential property management. Located on the former Our Lady of Loretto Church campus, 716 Ministries empowers individuals with workforce skills and improves facilities in underserved neighborhoods, boosting community development efforts.

Mark Murphy, president and CEO of Greenlight Networks, said in a release that "partnering with 716 Ministries was a perfect fit as it provides an opportunity for Greenlight to support 716 Ministries in furthering its mission to train, build and serve the communities of Western New York."

Stephanie Smith, a nonprofit consultant and member of the Buffalo Urban Mission

Partnership (BUMP) Leadership Team, aided Greenlight's partnership with 716 Ministries. BUMP, also located on the property, helps establish summer and full-year paid ministry and service opportunities for students and recent college graduates. The BUMP program provides a stepping stone for young adults transitioning from a college campus into the real world – they go on to apply what they learned in the classroom in a nonprofit or a local ministry context.

Smith says driving community collaboration is one of her passions. "I love making connections," she says. "When a mutual colleague put me in touch with Greenlight, one of the places I immediately thought of was a building I managed for BUMP."

The repurposed rectory where Greenlight will provide service includes suites for housing up to 20 young adults doing a summer or a year of service through BUMP, AmeriCorps or City Year, or continuing their college or graduate school studies. The building includes a shared kitchen, courtyard, lounge and other shared spaces.

Smith says that the presence of Greenlight



The nonprofit organization 716 Ministries, located on the former Our Lady of Loretto Church campus, empowers individuals with workforce skills and improves facilities in underserved neighborhoods.

will benefit not only the 716 Ministries building but also other area nonprofit organizations. “Having internet in this building helps by extension benefit and serve a network of nonprofit organizations and ministries in the city,” she says. “If a BUMP member or an AmeriCorps member is living here and working remotely, teaching classes remotely, or streaming grad school classes, being able to provide internet here has a ripple effect to a lot of organizations that benefit.”

### **A BUILDING’S NEW CHAPTER**

More than 10 years ago, 716 Ministries bought the entire church campus, starting a new chapter for the property. It now houses a preschool, which includes a gymnasium and kitchen; a 400-seat church; the rectory that houses 20 people; and the organizations 716 Ministries, BUMP and a local community health center’s Parent-Child Home Program.

Smith says 716 Ministries wanted to see the church space used seven days a week, not just on weekends. Various communities use the shared congregation space at various times. “716 Ministries took a property at risk of being vacant and wanted to fill it with life as well as collaborative programs and projects,” she says. “[The organization] wanted to see it used as much as possible.”

Smith saw that the idea of getting free high-speed internet was appealing

not just for the rectory but also for the church and the school, which she communicated to Greenlight.

“When Greenlight’s technicians came to install service, they decided the school building was the best location to house equipment,” Smith says, noting that Greenlight provides service for the whole property.

“On this campus, six nonprofit organizations benefit from being Greenlight’s first community partner in Buffalo,” Smith says. That includes

### **PROPERTY OF THE MONTH HIGHLIGHTS**

~ 716 Ministries in Buffalo, NY ~

- 1 Gbps, 500 Mbps internet service
- an entrepreneurial workforce-development nonprofit
- preschool
- unique communal living space for young adults
- two diverse congregations



The rectory where Greenlight provides service includes suites for housing up to 20 young adults doing a summer or a year of service.

BUMP, 716 Ministries, the preschool, the Parent-Child Home Program, and Puerto Rican and Burmese church congregations located on the Loretto campus.

## A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

The former church campus is located on the Upper West Side of Buffalo – part of Greenlight’s initial build area. Several neighborhoods in the area will benefit from Greenlight’s FTTH service.

Lori White, government, community, and public affairs manager at Greenlight Networks, says the West Side of Buffalo is “transitioning.”

“There’s a sizable number of refugees, millennials buying and rehabbing houses, and the neighborhood folks who have been there for multiple generations,” she says.

Overall, the cultural makeup of the West Side of Buffalo has been changing during the past 15 years. Buffalo has four resettlement agencies that channel legal refugees. A third of refugees to New York State go to Erie County, where Buffalo is located. Although the resettlement agencies are placing more refugees into other areas in Buffalo, including the East Side and Riverside, the concentration of new residents is on Buffalo’s West Side.

For example, a Burmese family lives across the street from the rectory. “We have lots of diversity around us,” Smith says.

## RAISING AWARENESS, DIGITAL LITERACY

In tandem with extending its network to the 716 Ministries locations and into Buffalo overall, Greenlight is helping new residents understand how to take advantage of government-backed broadband programs. For example, Greenlight is raising awareness of the FCC’s Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program.

Given the community’s diversity, the provider is printing flyers about the EBB program in each native language. In one local high school with a substantial number of international students, 35 languages are spoken.

New residents can get Greenlight’s base 500 Mbps service for \$50 a month. Also, Greenlight is waiving the installation for people who qualify. White says that Greenlight also needs to educate people on using the internet. “We are teaming up with organizations to talk about digital literacy type of programs,” she says. “It has to be more than just free internet. We’re learning a lot about what the community is already doing and how we can support it.”

## FOCUS ON PARTNERSHIPS

A vital element of the West Side Buffalo community is a focus on public-private partnerships that support nonprofit agencies and provide important resources to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Greenlight found that its partnerships with 716 Ministries and BUMP could help it forge other community partnerships. “We’re proud of the community commitment,” White says. “Stephanie is connecting Greenlight with other places that could serve as point-of-presence sites. We’re identifying other communities to hook up with internet.”

## EXPANDING BROADBAND OPTIONS

As part of the FTTH build in the Buffalo area, Greenlight Networks is currently taking preorders for service on the Upper West Side, in the Lower West Side phase 1 area and in Buffalo Elmwood Village. This year, the provider plans to build service to another six areas within Buffalo. By building out its facilities to the West Side of Buffalo, new and existing residents will have new, competitive broadband choices.

Greenlight’s work in Buffalo is part of a broader effort to expand its FTTH footprint. Under a new deal with LeChase Construction, the provider can simultaneously lay fiber in multiple neighborhoods to double its presence to 80,000 homes next year.

Before the arrival of Greenlight, the only choice residents had was Spectrum’s higher-priced cable modem service. Spectrum offered slower speeds and the price for many residents and even businesses was high. As a business customer, 716 Ministries was paying \$300 a month for 100 Mbps service. 716 Ministries now has 1 Gbps service compliments of Greenlight.

“Spectrum was one of the only options,” says Jeremy Hazelton, executive director at 716 Ministries. “It is a little pricey, and the speed is only 20 percent of what Greenlight was offering.”

As was true in other communities, the COVID-19 pandemic also



A preschool located on the church campus benefits from complimentary Greenlight high-speed internet service.

exacerbated the broadband affordability issue in the West Side of Buffalo. Broadband became an essential tool for families: People worked and collaborated remotely and kids participated in remote learning on platforms such as Zoom.

“COVID-19 shined a light on internet disparity,” Hazelton says. “For many families, Spectrum was unaffordable and unavailable, but kids needed to get online. Competition is good for everybody.”

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Property Description:** The former Our Lady of Loretto Church campus on Buffalo’s West Side is home to 716 Ministries, the Buffalo Urban Mission Partnership (BUMP), the Strong Academy, a community health center’s Parent-Child Home Program, and two diverse congregations.

**Demographics:** The rectory houses up to 20 participants in BUMP, AmeriCorps or City Year service programs. BUMP invites young adults to come to Buffalo for a year, live in the community, train in ministry, and use their strengths and passions to serve a nonprofit organization or local church.

Beyond the Loretto campus, other West Side Buffalo residents who may sign up for Greenlight

Networks FTTH service enjoy a mixed urban-suburban experience. Many families and young professionals like the proximity to restaurants, coffee shops, parks and other amenities. Many new residents also call the West Side home. Often associated with Sicilian immigrants who arrived in Buffalo in significant numbers starting around the turn of the 20th century, today the area has large Somali, Sudanese, Middle Eastern, Eastern European, Mexican and Central American, Puerto Rican and Southeast Asian enclaves.

**Greenfield or retrofit?** Retrofit

**Style:** Converted church and rectory campus

**Date services started being delivered:** May 27, 2021

## LESSONS LEARNED

**What was the biggest challenge?** The biggest challenge for Greenlight was getting to the building.

**What was the most significant success?** Greenlight can support the community by providing fast, reliable service so the nonprofit organizations it serves can focus on their missions and continue to serve the surrounding neighborhoods.

**What should other owners consider before starting a similar deployment?** After understanding the space, power and climate control needs, understanding tenants’ needs and how they use broadband is essential.

## SERVICES

**Services:** Greenlight Networks provides 1 Gbps broadband service to 716 Ministries and the other campus tenants.

**Provider choice:** Greenlight Networks  
**Is the point of contact for resident technical support the property manager, the service provider, or a third party?** Greenlight Networks

## BUSINESS

**Which parts of the network does the network provider own, and which parts belong to the property owner?** Greenlight owns the equipment and has an agreement with the property owner for space/power.

**Is there a marketing agreement with the property owner?** No. The service is complimentary. Greenlight Networks hasn’t placed any restrictions on the building occupants.

## TECHNOLOGY

**Broadband architecture:** Fiber to the building

**Where is the fiber terminated?** At the ONT

**Technology:** A mix of GPON and XGS PON

**Vendors/products**

- Nokia (optical network terminals and optical line terminals)
- Greenlight Networks (fiber-based internet service) ❖



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