

Working@Home: 407 Orange St., Oakland, California

As Silicon Valley culture spills over into the East Bay, broadband is becoming a hot-button issue in Oakland, California. Condo owners at 407 Orange made their building competitive in this tech-savvy environment with the help of AT&T Fiber. Thanks to Shauna Serdahl of Associa, Justin Hess of AT&T and Stan Cardoza of the 407 Orange Street Homeowners Association for gathering the information for this profile.

By Masha Zager / *Broadband Communities*

Oakland, once San Francisco's quiet, low-key neighbor, has suddenly become the new "hot spot." Home buyers fleeing San Francisco's inflated real estate market are discovering charming, walkable neighborhoods across the bay and rapidly bidding up prices there. In this tech-savvy region, one thing they all need is reliable broadband.

At 407 Orange St., a condominium building in Oakland's Adams Point neighborhood, residents complained about poor broadband for years. "We were at the end of AT&T's DSL line," says Stan Cardoza, now the board president. "If it was 5 o'clock in the afternoon and you wanted to download something, buffering would happen." Cardoza and many of his neighbors worked from home several days a week, and as

their broadband needs increased, they became increasingly dissatisfied with their service.

Several years ago, Cardoza, then a board member, volunteered to find out what it would take to improve service to the building. "I knew I wanted a fiber optic system because it was the newest thing coming," he says. He quickly learned that the building, constructed in 1970, could not easily be rewired. Contractors' bids for installing a fiber network ranged from \$60,000 to \$80,000 – a steep price for a building of only 38 units. A special assessment would be required to pay for the network, and to make matters worse, there was no fiber service provider in the area. Putting fiber into the building wouldn't help if the only service to the building was DSL.

As San Franciscans began pouring into the neighborhood, the problem became increasingly urgent. However, a solution was on the way. AT&T, which began its fiber services rollout in 2013 in Texas, accelerated the rollout in 2015 after the acquisition of DIRECTV, adding dozens of new metro areas to its list. In 2016, Associa, the homeowners association's manager, met with AT&T and discovered

At 407 Orange St., residents who work from home appreciate symmetrical gigabit service delivered over fiber.



that the company was interested in bringing fiber to multifamily buildings in Oakland. Associa suggested 407 Orange St., AT&T agreed, and Cardoza, who had just “semi-retired,” volunteered as the condo’s point man for the project.

“I was pursuing fiber, they were offering it, and it all came together,” Cardoza says. Even better, AT&T’s new fiber distribution hub for the neighborhood was conveniently located right outside the building.

Although AT&T’s investment in the network eliminated the need for a special assessment, the project was still logistically difficult. Cardoza spent long hours working with AT&T and its contractors to make the installation as smooth as possible. The condo owners wanted to avoid replanting their shrubbery, and they wanted the interior of the building to look as if nothing had changed. Together, Cardoza and AT&T developed a fiber pathway that avoided the plantings, ran through the

garage and the stairwell, and ended in what Cardoza calls a “little tiny box” over each apartment doorway.

Cardoza also helped set up the in-unit installation schedule, signed up the residents, kept them informed about the process, and attended every installation, making sure the results satisfied everyone.

Each homeowner was able to choose whether to install fiber; all but six or

seven did, Cardoza says. Because the fiber ends at each doorway, even the few residents who didn’t opt for fiber services will be able to sell their apartments as “wired for fiber optic services.” He notes, “The latest sale went at \$100,000 over the asking price, and this is why.”

And as for those residents who did choose fiber, Cardoza says, “The people I’ve talked to are very happy with what they received.”

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH HIGHLIGHTS **~ 407 Orange St., Oakland, California ~**

- Condo unit owners working from home needed fast, reliable broadband.
- AT&T Fiber completes first installation in the Oakland area.
- OFS InvisiLight hallway solution blends smoothly with the décor.
- The condo board assigned a liaison to work closely with the design and installation teams.

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH

Having a condo board member deeply involved with the fiber installation project resulted in a design that everyone could be happy with as well as a smooth installation process.

VITAL STATISTICS

Property Description: Located in Oakland's Adams Point, a vibrant residential district near Lake Merritt, 407 Orange St. offers the best of city living. It's in a walkable neighborhood close to shops, movie theaters, restaurants, cafés and parks, with easy access to public transit and freeways.

Demographics: Diverse in age and ethnicity

Greenfield or retrofit? Retrofit

Number of units: 38

Style: Garden apartments

Time to deploy: Nine months

Date services started being delivered:
May 2017

SERVICES

Services offered on the network: High-speed internet access up to 1 Gbps symmetrical, video, voice

Technical support: Provided by AT&T

BUSINESS

Which parts of the network are owned by the service provider, and which parts are owned by the property owner?
AT&T owns the network.

Is there a marketing agreement with the property owner? No

Is there a bulk-service agreement? No

Take rate: More than 80 percent

Network benefits: Owners selling their units advertise that fiber optic service is available. This makes the property (built in 1970) more desirable compared with newer buildings that do not yet have fiber service available.

TECHNOLOGY

Broadband architecture: Fiber to the unit using GPON technology

Where are ONTs placed? On the media wall in each unit. If an owner did not take service, no ONT was installed, and the fiber was terminated in the hallway over the doorway.

Methods for running cables: Exterior raceways, OFS InvisiLight hallway solution

LESSONS LEARNED

Answers from Justin Hess, AT&T

What was the biggest challenge? Bringing the fiber optic wiring into the building, finding the best route to each unit and installing the fiber wires and housing so it blended with the building and didn't look added on.



An unobtrusive fiber terminal is over each apartment doorway.

What was the biggest success? The placement of a small fiber box over the hallway door of each unit. The box is consistent with the décor and looks as if it has always been there. This was completed before the in-unit installation.

What was done to limit disruption during the installation? The homeowners association assigned a point person to work with the installation teams. A daily schedule was made up, and each owner could choose a convenient date and time for the in-unit installation.

What should other owners consider before they get started on a similar deployment? They should know that in pre-existing buildings, determining the correct install path takes a long time. Meeting with the various installation teams at the outset makes the project go faster – be sure to include the team that brings fiber from the street to the building, the team that runs the housing to the appropriate spots and to the final disbursement location, the team that runs the lines into the disbursement box, and the team that runs the fiber to each unit and also inside each unit.

Stan Cardoza: "Somebody who is educated, available and detail oriented should be the point person. It's not an easy thing to do in a homeowners association because it takes a lot of time. I have a background in interior design, so I could visualize the problems and come up with ideas. For example, we protected the fiber in the stairwell to make sure people couldn't grab the line and rip it. You need to have one or two people who have attended all the meetings and have knowledge of all the issues to make sure the follow-through is consistent." ❖

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