You Can Do It With Broadband!

What Is Broadband?

Broadband is another term for high speed Internet, which allows for communication and information sharing from one person to another, via a network of computers that connect people across counties and across the world.

In just the past ten years, the Internet has completely changed our economy, health care system, government, and the way people interact with each other and the rest of the world. As more everyday activities and services move online, broadband is no longer a luxury. The Internet has become a necessary utility, like electricity, phones and clean water, and we all deserve the right to affordable, quick and dependable service.

Who Benefits from Broadband?

Businesses & Employees
We now live in a global economy, and it is changing fast. High speed Internet access has become increasingly necessary for businesses and workers who participate in this economy. With high speed Internet, small town business owners can market and sell their products to both individuals and large distributors across the country, and telecommuting allows people to earn a good living working from home via the Internet. Broadband access also helps develop a more skilled work force, as people can participate in online trainings and even apply for jobs on the Internet. Additionally, many industries now require high speed Internet access as a necessary part of doing business, using the Internet to track inventory and payroll, or even selling products over the Internet.

Parents, Students & Teachers
Modern education requires modern teaching tools. Virtual learning through broadband has the ability to reduce the isolation of rural schools, exposing students to subjects, like foreign languages or advance sciences, that school districts may not otherwise be able to offer. Additionally, broadband Internet access allows teachers to communicate with students when severe weather keeps schools closed for days at a time, which is especially important in our mountainous Appalachian region. For communities wishing to avoid the 'brain drain' that occurs when young people leave home after graduating high school, never to return, broadband can be an essential tool in helping keep youth connected to educational and employment opportunities, while working and living in their home communities.

Doctors, Patients & Healthcare Providers
High speed broadband is essential for the provision of healthcare in rural areas. Access to telehealth, or health services via the Internet, means access to specialists that a patient would not otherwise have access to in many rural communities. Additionally, hospitals and clinics depend on the Internet more than ever before to access patient health records and communicate information between doctors to provide patients with the best treatment possible.

Local Government & Communities
In addition to the individual benefits to citizens, communities as a whole stand to benefit from broadband access. High speed Internet can allow local governments to operate more efficiently and save money, as well as provide critical infrastructure for emergency communications that allow ambulances and fire departments to respond to disasters more quickly and reliably.

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Folks across the region are already using broadband to grow their businesses and improve their lives.
Here are just a few examples:

- A young couple in rural Scott County, Virginia are rebuilding an old homestead on a family farm while making a living using high speed Internet to market their agricultural products and how-to books.

- High speed broadband offered by Mountain Telephone in Morgan County, Kentucky, has made it possible for business professionals to return with their families to their home communities and telecommute to offices in Louisville and beyond.

- Members of a community group in Magoffin County, Kentucky worked with their local rural telephone cooperative to bring broadband access to an underserved part of the county and are now planning to make use of this service by equipping their community center with computers with high-speed Internet access that will provide residents with education, healthcare and job training resources that were previously unavailable.

Access to broadband provides residents of Appalachia access to the benefits of telemedicine, telecommuting, higher education distance learning, improved emergency communications systems, and a greater connection to the global economy. In a rapidly changing world with a growing global economy, high speed Internet technology is playing a more important role than ever before. Broadband access will be key in connecting our region to the rest of the world and building a stronger economy here in the mountains.

But in too many rural communities, the opportunity to use the Internet to its full potential is limited by lack of network infrastructure, accessibility and affordability. In fact, a recent study found that only half of rural residents across the country actually have broadband access in the home. Fortunately, efforts are underway to increase affordability and access to broadband across the region, and you can be a part of the movement!

How Can You Get Broadband?

First, contact Internet service providers to see if broadband service is available in your area. If so, you need a subscription and a standard personal computer to connect. Pilot programs are being developed to provide free or low cost home computers and reduced price internet fees in some communities. Libraries and other community agencies often offer digital literacy classes to improve computer skills.

If broadband is currently unavailable or too expensive in your area, there are some steps you can take:
- Contact Internet service providers as well as state and local officials to let them know that your community needs broadband access, and encourage your neighbors to do the same. Start a petition campaign of potential customers.
- Push your local government to work on extending affordable broadband service. Community owned networks are a workable option for lower cost service.
- Contact your state representative, congress person and the USDA Rural Utilities Service to see if there are resources available to help bring broadband to your community.
- Visit the Central Appalachian Regional Network website at http://carnnet.org/broadband_telecommunications.php oe scan the QR Code below for links to additional broadband resources.

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