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[July 03, 2010]

## Better, faster, richer: Broadband grant pulls \$30 million to Wapak

WAPAKONETA, Jul 03, 2010 (The Lima News - McClatchy-Tribune Information Services via COMTEX) -- A local Internet company received \$30 million in federal stimulus money to improve broadband access in Western Ohio.

Wapakoneta-based Com Net has been awarded \$30 million in federal stimulus funding for their GigE Plus project. The project will add miles of fiber to create a high capacity network to expand existing broadband services through communities in 28 Western Ohio Counties.

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"The bulk of the money will be used to construct almost 700 miles of fiber throughout the rural Western Ohio counties and into the urban counties. There will also be lines into Michigan and Indiana for Ohio companies with satellites facilities," said Com Net CEO Tim Berelsman.

The project is to be completed over the next three years. When it's done, the network will provide a high capacity fiber network that will be accessible to as many as 880 community institutions, including schools, state and local government, libraries and community support groups. The added lines are also expected to make broadband access more affordable for consumers and businesses and encourage investment in the region.

"I like to say it's more, better, faster," Berelsman said. "Today, if you think about it, most of us

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have a 1 megabyte connection. Over time, those speeds multiply by factor of 10. Now, if you watch video in YouTube or Hulu... today those hesitate and they're static. Those will operate seamlessly once we're able to upgrade the core infrastructure." The grant was coordinated by the Ohio Middle Mile Consortium, a group formed with the support of the state and coordinated through the Ohio Academic Resource Network, an arm of the state's university system. The group also includes OneCommunity and Horizon Telecom who both have applications for their own stimulus funds pending, Berelsman said.

Com Net was formed in 1993 as a collaborative between 17 independent operating companies. Today, the company includes 22 independent operators and provides a range of Internet services including broadband management and IPTV services that allows service providers to pipe television programming to households via a broadband connection.

The project is one of three covering almost all of Ohio's 88 counties. Along with the Ohio funding, the Obama administration is issuing 66 broadband development grants across the United States, for a total of \$795 million. The money will come from the economic stimulus plan enacted last year, which set aside \$7.2 billion in grants and loans to upgrade the nation's data networks.

About \$2.7 billion of the money has been allocated to date, including the most recent grants.

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