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Wireless work funded by state in El Dorado County

Broadband Internet service the goal in the next 2 years
By Roger Phelps

A broadband boom in El Dorado County's remote rural pockets is not a far-fetched idea.

State money to the tune of \$240,000 has funded data gathering designed to lure a provider of high-speed Internet, the El Dorado Business Alliance announced July 15.

"Broadband offers the promise of expanding business development while preserving the quality of life in the Sierra Nevada foot-hills," alliance officials announced.

Brent Smith, chief executive officer of the Sierra Economic Deve-lopment Corp., said his group is hard at work on the project in El Dorado and neighboring counties, surveying more than 1,500 people.

"We've done 10 formal workshops with power-point presentations," Smith said. "We've essentially compiled the data on broadband interest -- who has it and who wants it? That information has been aggregated. The second step is, we'll give the data to a provider. Who will play with us, and provide by 2010?"

Workshops were held during June in Pollock Pines, Georgetown and Fair Play.

"Businesses have understood the benefits -- information and links to the global economy are going to be the drivers," said Sam Driggers, El Dorado County economic development director.

Driggers said it was his understanding that western El Dorado County is not 100-percent served with broadband Internet.

"Around Highway 50, and in the denser areas, yes, but in the rural areas, probably not," Driggers said.

Driggers said most civic leaders seem behind the broadband drive as a means to bettering the local economy, naming among them county supervisors Helen Baumann, Ron Briggs and Norma Santiago.

Money for the surveys and workshops came to SEDCorp. from the California Emerging Technology Fund. As a condition of approving the phone-company mergers of SBC and AT&T, and of Verizon and MCI, the state Public Utilities Commission ordered SBC-AT&T to commit \$45 million and Verizon-MCI to commit \$15 million over five years to the technology fund.

The Telegraph's Roger Phelps can be reached at rogerp@goldcountrymedia.com, or post a comment at folsomtelegraph.com

Keywords

El Dorado County, high-speed Internet, Broadband, Pollock Pines, Georgetown, Fair Play, AT&T

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