

## College Matters | Opportunities expand with broadband

By [Dr. Tom Jackson Jr.](#) and [Connie Stewart](#) |

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*“To provide a positive, meaningful, educational experience for our students. For HSU to be bold, innovative, and entrepreneurial. To become a model global community. And, to embrace our Hispanic Serving Institution and Minority Serving Institution status with integrity and purpose.”*

— Dr. Tom Jackson, HSU President.

A group of broadband-loving people that includes economic developers; tribal, city and county leaders; and HSU have been meeting weekly to make sure improvements to **telecommunications services are well coordinated. There’s real progress being made on several projects that aim to improve our region’s technology infrastructure and we need** to be ready to prosper and embrace the opportunities they provide.

**A project that HSU is enthusiastically supporting is the proposed “Project Echo”** subsea cable landing, which will connect Humboldt County directly to Singapore and Jakarta. It is in its final permitting phase and if all goes well, it will be completed by the end of 2022. This project is connected to the datacenter in Arcata, which is currently being constructed.

Making permitting easier will help make it more attractive for companies to invest in us.

**Arcata recently adopted a “dig once” policy to ease permitting and construction for** undergrounding utilities and broadband services. The city of Eureka and Humboldt County have also pledged to consider adopting similar policies.

Also, work is progressing on the Digital 299 Project, which will install broadband between Eureka and Redding, benefiting remote communities along the way. Vero Fiber Networks has stepped up to design and build the Digital 299 Project and is hoping to put shovels in the ground before the end of the year if all the permits are received. The region has been working with a variety of companies to get a fiber optic line across

Highway 299 for almost 15 years, but it looks as if it is finally going to happen soon. A big thank you to Assemblymember Jim Wood who has been incredibly helpful on this project and the subsea cable project.

And congratulations to the Yurok, Karuk and Hoopa tribes for moving forward to build and enhance tribally owned and operated broadband systems. The Resighini Rancheria just received funding to study whether they too can create their own tribally-owned system. All of these projects received funding from the California Public Utilities Commission as well as other federal funding sources.

As the community works to assure no one is left behind without access to affordable, quality high-speed service in our region, we also need to assure that no one is left behind because they do not have the devices available to use the internet. So we want to thank Frontier Communications and the California Emerging Technology Fund for working with 11 regional tribes that had students who did not have computers. Frontier and CETF are providing more than 1,400 Chromebooks as gifts to tribal students to facilitate participation in distance learning.

All of this work is vital in creating more connections from Humboldt to the world. One amazing example of what can happen when HSU expertise reaches beyond our local community is our Northern California Small Business Development Center. The SBDC program at HSU oversees programs in 36 counties. It has played an important role in helping businesses during the pandemic, providing over 76,000 counseling sessions and training for over 56,000 individuals. It received an additional \$7 million in federal funding to provide assistance during the crisis. New efforts include the major new Inclusivity Project focused on black-owned businesses and a new Tech SBDC located at UC Davis.

We think almost everyone agrees that we need more **broadband in our region. It's coming. So now the question is "What are we going to do to improve prosperity in the region when we get the broadband we need?"**

Be well.

*Dr. Tom Jackson Jr. is the president of Humboldt State University. Connie Stewart is HSU's executive director for initiatives.*