

October 22, 2008

FEDERAL TESTIMONY FOR HIGH SPEED CONNECTIVITY FUNDING

Thank you for this opportunity to address the panel.

My name is Gary Ricer, CEO for Guernsey, Monroe, and Noble Tri County Community Action Corporation.

We concurrently implement close to 40 public service programs encompassing a 1,500 square mile radius.

Our mission is to serve the impoverished, less fortunate of Appalachia Ohio and offer a hand up as opposed to a hand out! Our services include but are not limited to: Workforce Development and Retraining, Housing and Weatherization, Teen Prevention Services, operation of 3 Senior Citizens Centers, 7 Head Start Schools, Healthy Smiles Dental Clinic, Home Energy Assistance Programs, 2 Broad Band Connectivity Centers, and a myriad of other initiatives.

In 2003 GMN Tri County became the first and only Community Action in the nation to receive a Federal High Speed Connectivity Grant. In 2007 we received our second Federal Broad Band Grant. Funds provided by the USDA (Rural Development) were \$383,284 in 2003, for Woodsfield (Monroe County seat) and \$316,840 in 2007 for Graysville (Southern Monroe County).

Funds provide for a 2 phase Broad Band initiative. First being the establishment of a Broad Band Connectivity Center whereas higher learning is offered in a library type setting.

For the first time in the history of Monroe students can receive a college accredited degree from an institution of higher learning without having to travel long distances. We further are pursuing collaboration with local government whereas a Common Pleas Court Judge can arraign prisoners alleviating exorbitant transportation costs and eliminating security threats to the general public. The possibilities of utilization of our federally funded Broad Band Connectivity Centers are endless. It has been a win-win situation met with overwhelming success by local government and the general public alike!

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The second piece of our federal funds allow for the providing of high speed internet to our subscribers through the strategic placement of a tower grid and repeater (back haul) stations. The average cost is \$29.95 per month making Broad Band not only affordable but leveling the playing field globally for conducting business from these rural, remote locations.

Due to the geographically rough, rugged hilly terrain of Appalachia, most subscribers have no other opportunity to receive high speed broad band. Critical end users (CEU's) Police, Fire, EMS, etc. receive our service at no charge.

From helping a student electronically research homework to a grandmother swiftly receiving anticipated family pictures to the rural business entrepreneur downloading critically important large files in record time, to an emergency squad paramedic researching medical information when seconds count, rural America desperately seeks Broad Band Connectivity. Needless to say our waiting list is long and impatient!

In closing, in representing those we serve, I'm respectfully requesting future funding be constant, far reaching, and if at all possible, increased. One means this might be accomplished is shifting a mere 10% from the hundreds of millions in Broad Band Loan Programs, which in my opinion are underutilized, to Broad Band Grant Programs. This approach would serve tens of thousands more of your rural constituents in record time reaching measurable objectives without the time consuming fight for increased appropriations.

Our Federal Field Monitor, Ron Mellon has referred to GMN Broad Band as the "poster child for rural broadband in America". We are successfully operating a Broad Band Program that would normally cost several millions of dollars to build and maintain on a shoe string budget a fraction of that!

I have a full time staff of only two, who climb the towers, answer the phones, complete the billing, conduct free seminars, public presentations, install the radios, and so on.

We cover close to 400 square miles, have grown in subscribership by over 500% in two years, and have literally dozens on a waiting list. Not to mention our constant battle with the peaks and valleys of Appalachia limiting our wireless penetration. We have repeaters in farmers fields on grain silos, water system storage tanks and everything in between.

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To our federal representatives, agencies and its members, thanks so much for the vision to grasp the importance of Broad band for Rural America.

Please continue the fight to provide Appalachians an “on ramp” to the information superhighway of the 21st century!

Respectfully Yours,

Gary W. Ricer
Executive Director

GWR/lc