

Kirkland about to get wired with fiber-optic plan

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KIRKLAND – Installation of a fiber-optic network across DeKalb and Ogle counties is slated to reach the Kirkland area soon.

The nonprofit Illinois Fiber Resources Group, known as iFiber, is leading the effort to install a network hundreds of miles long throughout northwest Illinois to provide better access to broadband. Northern Illinois University is acting as the fiscal agent for the \$68.5 million project.

Herb Kuryliw, network and technology architect for NIU, said the iFiber program stemmed from an NIU pilot program that ended in 2006. He said the 711 miles of fiber-optic network being installed throughout the area is meant to be an economic driver for community anchor institutions, such as schools, hospitals and government agencies.

"We'll be able to reach out to communities with small populations – 150-home communities – and bring a superhighway of broadband activity," Kuryliw said.

Construction of the network started about two months ago, said John Lewis, chairman of the iFiber organization. In that time, about 50 miles of fiber-optic cables have been installed among Rockford, Belvidere and Cherry Valley along Business Route 20 and Route 72, he said.

The network is heading along Route 72, and Kirkland is the only city in DeKalb County that is part of this portion of the project. Though the network is traveling along the road, it shouldn't disrupt traffic, Lewis said.

"The only time it will affect traffic is if it's going under a street," he said. "But homeowners may see some strange equipment along the right of way."

People likely will see cable boring equipment and hand-hole construction crews, as well as staked or painted areas to identify digging areas while the network is being installed.

Lewis said the construction crews, Aldridge Electric Company and Kelso-Burnett, are laying an average of two to three miles of fiber-optic network per day. He did not know when Kirkland's section would be finished. Once it's completed, Lewis said the network will provide Internet speeds that are 1,000 times faster than dial-up Internet.

Kuryliw said the network is aimed to help underserved communities and spur economic development. He said a study showed that many communities in the area still are using dial-up Internet. Without the network, he said some businesses might have to spend thousands to locate to smaller towns. But this way, they have access to high-speed Internet at a low cost.

"It's what's called a middle-mile project," Kuryliw said. "It's open to allow private companies to develop off this broadband at a low rate so a company can become profitable in a small community."

Kuryliw said several schools are using dial-up Internet and some have come up with creative ways to utilize the fiber-optic network. The network also is expected to be useful for hospitals, he said, as hospitals make the move to store medical records electronically.

The upcoming fiber-optic network construction plan is slated to include the following areas:

- Belvidere
- Route 72 in Ogle County from the Ogle/DeKalb county line to Byron
- Route 72 in DeKalb County from the Ogle/DeKalb county line to Kirkland
- Route 251 in Ogle County from Route 72 to Route 64
- Route 64 in Ogle County from Route 251 to Oregon
- Areas within Rockford