

Broadband project officially under way: Hicks speaks at groundbreaking

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The project to bring a reliable high-speed broadband network to LaSalle and eight other Northwest Illinois counties got its ceremonial kickoff this week with a groundbreaking in Dixon.

The Illinois Fiber Resources Group's project potential has been compared to the development of the interstate highway system and the rural electrification program.

iFiber, an Illinois nonprofit organization, will provide extremely high-speed network transport services to public and private customers.

There will be direct access to eligible public sector anchor organizations such as schools, community colleges, libraries, health care facilities, municipalities, county and public safety facilities.

Through service providers, iFiber also will offer the system to private sector businesses and residential subscribers.

The groundbreaking Monday at Sauk Valley Community College drew a 100-member crowd to hear speakers including LaSalle County Board Chairman Jerry Hicks, D-Marseilles, a member of the iFiber board of directors.

Approximately 190 miles of the 900-mile system will be in LaSalle County. Hicks noted LaSalle County already has contracted to have the buildings at its governmental complex on Etna Road in Ottawa rewired with fiber cable so it can tie into the iFiber project.

Not only will that enhance Internet speeds, it will have other benefits, such as reducing the number of conventional telephone lines necessary for county offices, he said.

"There's a multitude of other possibilities and benefits," Hicks said. "Of course, one of the most important will be that having better broadband should help us reel in new business and development growth."

Other speakers at the groundbreaking also stressed the economic development the project is expected to generate.

The other counties involved in the iFiber project are Boone, Carroll, JoDaviess, Lee, Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside and Winnebago. The North Central Council of Governments headquartered in Ottawa also is involved.

Funded by a \$69 million federal grant, iFiber is part of the National Telecommunications and Information Agency's Broadband Technology Opportunity Program.

The grant is administered by Northern Illinois University. Design engineering and permitting are being coordinated by Baxter & Woodman engineering.

Construction, which actually began earlier this year, is being completed by PirTano Construction Company of Addison in Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lee and Whiteside counties; and Aldridge Electric of Libertyville, which partnered with the Kelso-Burnett Company of Rockford in Boone, LaSalle, Ogle, Stephenson and Winnebago counties.

For more information about the project, visit www.ifiber.org.



Photo: Steve Stout
Jerry Hicks