

Fiber optic network will help hospital first, then 2 counties

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October 26, 2011 WILLIAMSPORT, IN -- The faster health information network that will soon be available at St. Vincent Williamsport Hospital is just the tip of the iceberg, in terms of benefits to the larger community.

Business people, educators and residents hoping for faster Internet connectivity in their homes are joining hospital officials in cheering for the addition of a fiber optic network through Fountain and Warren counties.

The network is being run underground for about 24 miles, including a stretch underneath the Wabash River, in the largely rural west-central Indiana counties. It's expected to be up and running early in 2012, first at the hospital and then offering faster access for businesses and school corporations.

Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman visited Williamsport Tuesday to recognize the work being done there on the Indiana Telehealth Network, of which the new lines in Fountain and Warren counties will be a part.

The Fountain and Warren leg of the project is costing about \$1 million, with 85 percent of the cost being paid for with federal grant funds.

"For us to be able to bring this technology and our (community's) match was only 15 percent, it really was a miracle of sorts," said Steve Eberle, executive director of the Warren County Local Economic Development Organization.

"The linking of rural hospitals with broadband is the original spirit of the project ... but more importantly, you're going to establish a broadband hub in areas that are traditionally very underserved."

The economic development agency joined Warren County and Attica governments, St. Vincent, the Attica Community Foundation and a private donor in providing the local matching funds.

Jane Craigin, chief executive officer of St. Vincent Williamsport, shares excitement about what the project will mean for both the health care facility and the counties. She said patients will benefit from the easier access to electronic records and information sharing with larger hospitals in Indianapolis and beyond. In the future, physician consults could be provided to these rural patients from abroad, depending on the technology and circumstance, Craigin said.

"But the community is going to benefit from this as much as the hospital," she said.

Eberle said as Internet usage ramps up in the area's doctor offices, classrooms and businesses, "that increases the odds that a residential provider will want to come forward."