

WatertownDailyTimes.com

Wireless Internet on tap in 3 counties

RIDGEVIEWTEL: WiFi provider approaches several communities

You may use this copy for your personal, non-commercial use only. Redistribution or repurposing without express written permission of the Watertown Daily Times is strictly prohibited.

By **DAVID WINTERS & KELLY VADNEY**
TIMES STAFF WRITERS
Wednesday, May 30, 2007

A pioneering wireless Internet provider has set its sights on the north country.

RidgeviewTel, of Longmont, Colo., has approached municipalities in three counties about installing antennas to broadcast the WiFi, or wireless fidelity, signal to residents, greatly expanding the number of homes and businesses that will be able to receive high-speed Internet service.

The company, which specializes in providing Internet service to rural communities, is using the Development Authority of the North Country's fiber-optic line for its wireless Internet and VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) point-of-entry.

"We're an alternative high-speed Internet service," President Vincent T. Jordan said.

The company, which provides wireless Internet service in 25 Colorado communities, is targeting St. Lawrence, Jefferson and Lewis counties for new coverage areas. RidgeviewTel's Web site lists Lisbon as a community it already serves, along with Alexandria Bay, Cape Vincent, Fort Drum, Gouverneur, Lowville, Ogdensburg, Waddington and Watertown. The company is working hard at getting service to those communities up and running.

Mr. Jordan said that Lewis County has indicated it wants to be a "model county," allowing the company to provide wireless Internet service everywhere within its borders.

He said the company hopes to bring the service to Watertown by late June or early July.

Alexandria Town Supervisor F. Sampie Sutton said the new service will give residents, even islanders, affordable high-speed Internet access. Castle Cable offers service in the village and Redwood, but doesn't go much farther, Mr. Sutton said. RidgeviewTel antennas have been installed on the town's water towers.

An antenna was added to the top of River Hospital to create a "hot spot" along the St. Lawrence River for boaters, Mr. Jordan said. The signal from River Hospital will serve the river about a mile and a half to the east and about five miles west to the Thousand Islands International Bridge. The company is working on identifying locations in Cape Vincent that could be hot-spot points farther up the river, Mr. Jordan said.

Town offices will receive free Internet service, officials said.

RidgeviewTel is moving fast.

"This all came as a surprise. They came to us two weeks ago," Gouverneur Supervisor Robert R. Ritchie said. "They put up a unit on the pole behind the town barn where the point of presence is with DANC and a receiver on the top of E.J. Noble Hospital."

The hospital will be a "hot spot" where anyone can have Internet access, said Gouverneur Councilman Timothy

J. Monroe, a veterinarian who is president of the hospital board.

The company's equipment, which is being tested, has a radius of 7 miles, so it also will serve some rural residents, Dr. Monroe said.

The entry of RidgeviewTel won't necessarily kill Gouverneur's proposed partnership with Citizens Telephone, Hammond, to provide high-speed Internet, phone and cable television services.

"Folks wanted more reasonably priced television," Dr. Monroe said. "We're still talking with them."

Lisbon Town Supervisor Roger A. Watters said the service would benefit many residents, but the proposal first needs approval from the town Planning Board. Its next meeting is June 11.

Mr. Jordan said a temporary antenna has been installed atop the town's water tower to determine the range available.

The cost for wireless Internet service through RidgeviewTel starts at \$29.99 a month, with a one-time \$30 activation fee. Adding Internet phone service, available at a variety of prices starting at about \$10 a month, will boost the bill .

Boaters will have the option of paying \$4.95 a day or \$9.95 a week for basic access, Mr. Jordan said. Customers with residential access will have free access to "hot spots." Seasonal residents can reduce their bill to \$5.95 a month when they are not in the area. They can simply log in and have it activated to full service when they return, he said.

Times staff writer Martha Ellen contributed to this report.

Copyright 2007. Watertown Daily Times, Inc., Watertown, NY. All rights reserved.