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Karen Burns

# Broadband to Expand in Lex

## Downtown Lexington, the East End and Cardinal Valley should be hot by late summer

### By Kakie Urch

Free wireless broadband service will be introduced in those areas of Lexington in time for the Alltech FEI Equestrian Games, Mayor Jim Newberry announced at a news conference in the lobby of the government center this morning. Newberry announced about \$1.1 million in state and federal public safety grants and a \$550,000 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, saying that these funds and a collaboration between a consortium of public, private and educational agencies, including the University of Kentucky and the Blue Grass Community Foundation made the announcement possible.

The city has been working for years on a plan to bring broadband to the downtown, and last year made the first step, bringing a rehabilitated broadband tower online in the downtown area and making it available to law enforcement only by VPN.

But visitors to the downtown have been unable to connect to any free city wifi.

Using newly engineered broadband on city traffic lights and Kentucky Utilities-owned lampposts, the network will allow law enforcement to have better and more integrated response and to share information more easily between patrol car terminals. The \$1.1 million collection of state and federal grants will help with that.

As an added benefit, the traditionally digitally underserved neighborhoods of the East End and

Cardinal Valley will get both a free broadband wireless connection and a concentrated



Mayor Newberry's press conference announcing Lex's expanded broadband

effort, through the Blue Grass Community Foundation's administration of the \$550,000 Knight Foundation Grant, to help residents use the connection for educational, informational and vocational uses.

"Knight Foundation believes that access to information is a core community need, as essential as good schools, safe streets and clean air," said Jorge A. Martinez, Knight Foundation's director of information systems.

A map of which areas will be served by the free connection is still being developed and will be available online. City officials, in a news release, said that "The new network will add the underserved areas in the East End and Cardinal Valley, the corridors and the college town area between the University of Kentucky campus and the business district. The college town area also has been a focus of the city's work to improve South Limestone Street."

The network will, in essence, be an extension of the University of Kentucky's signal and users would log on as guests, much as users on the campus already do. ■

Kakie Urch is Asst. Professor, New Media School of Journalism and Telecommunications, University of Kentucky

# Wi in the Sky

## By Kakie Urch (Reprint Ace Feb 2, 2009)

While we're talking about Wi in the sky, let's state out front that I was one of the lucky ones.

It was pretty clear that the ice had taken my broadband cable, slouching all aglisten slowly toward the first floor, but somehow, thanks to the grace of a neighbor's unsecured connection, I was able to remain online during the storm that Gov. Steve Beshear has termed the worst natural disaster in recorded Kentucky history.

But many people, some of them with children, sick or elderly family members, and some without power or heat, weren't as lucky. Everything that came through a cable, wire or

pipe was out of service. And the neighbor wasn't hot. If a municipal wifi system had been in place, thousands of Lexingtonians would have been able to more quickly receive emergency information, continue to work in some cases, and definitely keep in touch with support networks that take some of the burden off the city.

The Internet was invented to keep the world's computers talking during Armageddon. When the Defense Department envisioned Cold War worst case outcomes, it figured it needed a way to keep the computers talking to each other until the people could poke their heads back out of the shelters. Sounds a little like last week, with lots more radiation.

It's not just for natural disasters or say man-made disasters — I remember about once every three months that we're just 20 miles from the igloos of mass destruction at the Bluegrass Army Depot in Richmond — or terrorist disasters, God forbid, in the homeland. Though all that would be a nice use of the technology that was invented for disaster.

Municipal wifi is good for business, good for education, good for creativity and good for the entrepreneurship that by nature is going to spring up even more rapidly as people find ways to fight back against the economic end-of-times.

Municipal wifi has also shown in other markets to offer people an educational and economic hand up. I've seen with the children in Title I schools that if you put a bunch of poor kids around a computer, they become a bunch of interested, engaged kids who see with curious eyes and endless possibilities. With people at MIT working on a project to give the developing world \$200 laptops and companies like Dell and HP looking at a soft-

ening market in the developed world, surely a wider spread of computer access is something Lexington should embrace.

What Lexington needs is a commitment to the digital infrastructure to continue and expand its history as a city of "clean industry." We've long heard the tale about how the city fathers hunkered down at a country club table eons ago and decided to invite IBM in to keep the smokestacks out.

That was a smart move. And this time, the city is actually following straight into the basket for the rebound.

What Lexington needs is wifi and according to Rama Dhuwaraha, the top technology person at the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, what Lexington will get, by summer, is wifi. Free wifi.

The University of Kentucky has led the way in recent years, both with its on-campus wifi and its remarkable digital campus plans. Dhuwaraha (with strong support from Mayor Newberry) and UK's Doyle Friskney have forged a model of a public-private partnership. And it will make your laptop hot, allowing access to the UK guest signal throughout downtown. The city and the University, last summer, took up a "town-gown" MOA — Memorandum of Agreement — to use the abandoned SkyTel equipment (sold to the city for \$10) to begin to offer wifi downtown, for free.

That's a great sign and one that we should make sure happens, quickly, with an eye to expansion, if possible, to the entire county. UK and the city are just putting the finishing touches on the adjustments required to the towers.

Microsoft has identified some of the "hottest" cities — where there is the most and most affordable (i.e. free) wifi available as

free to users and city and university plan to split ongoing costs 50/50. And free is the "only model that's going to work because if you charge for it, people will just go somewhere it is free." Should the city make the commitment to "facilitate commerce and make this a quality of life thing?" Dhuwaraha says yes.

Amongst the most technological, there is some debate about whether we should act now or wait and see if Lexington, like Baltimore, becomes one of the lucky test markets for Sprint's 4G network that provides the fast fast indoor/outdoor multimedia signal that can carry fat fat packets at the speed of light, and will, industry publications and studies assure, supercede wifi.

(For a cost, of course. You'd have to add to your Sprint bill, add a Clearwire charge to that and run it all through your smartphone that's \$150 minimum, \$300 if its name starts with an "I"). To that, I present the thousands and thousands of people, many older or living in poverty, who are clinging to their rabbit ears as the digital television switch is delayed. So let's act now to put in place critical digital infrastructure that we can use in this economy, in this cycle, in this administration of possibilities.

Also Dhuwaraha says, with an eye to the future, UK and the city have already has approached 4G vendors like Clearwire about coming to Lexington. What vendors want to see is a critical mass of people already using the service before they come in, he says. And here's where UK and Lexington are working together best for the future: they are proposing to vendors to come in and use the FEI Equestrian Games as a testing and proving ground for their new services. Now, that's the way to think like Austin!

**"So, whether or not anything is ever built at the corner of Rosenberg and Vine, and whether every Kentuckian is one day toting an iPhone as we did a long rifle, we should be able to sit in the middle of that hole this summer, get a signal, get some work done and check the Snow Emergency Route maps." —Ace, What Lexington Needs, February 2, 2009**

Seattle, San Francisco, Austin, Portland, OR, and Atlanta. Those are some pretty decent qualities of life, with Austin being one of the cities the Urban County Government and other leaders visited in person to gather ideas. And all of them, like Lexington, have the creative and economic engine of a university (or universities) at their center and outskirts. Education is infrastructure, as Lexington (and now a new president) definitely acknowledges...and the information that is education travels through the air on this wifi.

Dhuwaraha says that the signal will be

So, whether or not anything is ever built at the corner of Rosenberg and Vine, and whether every Kentuckian is one day toting an iPhone as we did a long rifle, we should be able to sit in the middle of that hole this summer, get a signal, get some work done and check the Snow Emergency Route maps.

[Reprinted Ace, February 2, 2009]

*Kakie Urch is an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Telecommunication at University of Kentucky.*



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