

“Broadband for Everyone” – It’s essential and you can help

By John T. Ryan - 2007-11-03 - denpubs@denpubs.com



Dr. Peter Schultz discusses the importance of broadband communications at a seminar Monday night at Saranac Town Hall.
Photo by John T. Ryan

SARANAC — A photo of three of his grandchildren boarding an Essex County school bus in many ways summarized Dr. Peter Schultz’s Oct. 29 presentation at Saranac Town Hall. Dr. Schultz’s photo emphasized his belief it is vital to bring broadband communications — high-speed digital transmission of voice, video and data — to every child and home in Clinton, Essex and Franklin counties.

The people of Saranac demonstrated their interest in Dr. Schultz’s vision, filling the town hall to hear what he had to say.

“It makes us competitive and everyone’s economic future depends on it,” Dr. Schultz said.

Dr. Peter Schultz qualifies as an expert. The Essex resident is the co-inventor and developer of the processes used to make optical fiber for telecommunications, a technology that has revolutionized data transmission.

“Today, one fiber [the size of a human hair] can send one trillion times more information per second than the first telephone wire,” Dr. Schultz said.

When fiber technology was merged with the personal computer and user-friendly software in the 1990s, communications were revolutionized. Today, 1.8 billion people worldwide are connected to the Internet and that number has grown 30 percent annually since 2000. The technology has improved business, education, medical care and many aspects of life, but it also enables people in India, China and other countries to directly compete with Americans. Dr. Schultz pointed out there is even competition within this region. The Watertown area and rural Northern Vermont are either totally wired for broadband or are well on their way.

Dr. Schultz recently joined the board of the Community Broadband Network Connect, a public-private community partnership seeking to build a digital communications network in Clinton, Essex and Franklin counties. CBN Connect is coordinated by a community board, the Technical Assistance Center and the Research Foundation at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh.

The broadband network’s cost is estimated to be \$45 million, which CBN Connect plans to raise through state and federal support and through private donations. Once the wire has been laid or wireless transmitters installed, the ultimate goal is to outsource operations to private providers

such as Verizon, Comcast and Charter. Asked why these providers don't currently provide broadband service to everyone, Dr. Schultz explained construction costs are simply too high given the sparse population and expanse of rural communities.

"They aren't being mean; they simply can't afford it," he said.

Howard Lowe, Technical Assistance Center director of development, was present and encouraged North Country residents to help CBN Connect acquire additional federal funding.

"I believe there will be federal funding, but they'll want to see a model work," said Mr. Lowe. "First we have to prove ourselves."

Four communities, including Saranac, are competing to host the pilot project. CBN Connect plans to start construction in the pilot community next fall and hopes to complete the three-county network within the next three years.

CBN Connect has prepared an information page that includes points to be made when writing to representatives and senators advocating financial support for CBN Connect.

For more information, contact Mr. Lowe via e-mail at howard.lowe@plattsburgh.edu.