

Nicasio Gets Broadband Internet; Bolinas Secures Funding for Network

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(TNS) — As Nicasio, Calif., residents are gaining access to broadband Internet for the first time, the Bolinas community is in line for its own \$3.1 million fiber-optic-to-home broadband network.

Earlier this month, Nicasio residents received a full demonstration of the fiber-optic connections, but the 220 homes won't be hooked up for a few weeks, said Patrick McDonnell, a member of the Nicasio Landowners Association's Broadband Subcommittee.

"It's great to see it perform as advertised," McDonnell said. "We're all excited to see it come online soon."

The Nicasio residents were the beneficiaries of the first state grant for a fiber-to-home broadband network in Marin. Residents qualified for the \$1.5 million grant from the California Public Utilities Commission after privately raising \$994,000.

Nicasio is primarily a farming and ranching community. Nicasio School, the Nicasio Fire Department, a church, a Druids hall and other small businesses would benefit from the new broadband service as well, according to county officials.

Meanwhile, the same state commission has awarded a \$1.86 million grant to support a similar project in Bolinas, which will get underway as soon as the Nicasio system is up and running. About \$1.2 million for the project is private investments. The Bolinas Gigabit Network project will provide gigabit fiber-optic service to more than 500 homes, business and public institutions in Bolinas.

The grant for both projects was awarded to Inyo Networks Inc., of Vallejo, which is finishing up work in Nicasio before making its way to Bolinas. Nicasio is being connected to unused fiber-optic cables installed to serve Lucasfilm facilities in 2014. Jennifer Blackman is the general manager of the Bolinas Community Public Utility District. She said the district Board of Directors in early 2017 voted to become a local government co-sponsor of the project in Bolinas. At that time the board also established an Internet Access Subcommittee, said the general manager of the district.

“As (the district) and our other community agencies have stated, the lack of broadband in Bolinas is a threat to public safety, and highly problematic for our businesses and community institutions, especially our health clinic,” Blackman said. “The average resident attempting to access the Internet for a home business or entertainment simply does not enjoy the services that most other residents in the Bay Area take for granted.”

Tim Flanagan is assistant director of the county’s information services and technology department, which is supporting the projects.

“High-speed Internet has become, to some degree, a utility like electricity and gas,” Flanagan said. “For us, it’s also about digital equity and making sure that our residents have the same access.”

In Nicasio, a majority of property owners participated in the prepayment program. Residents could enroll in a \$3,000 five-year plan, a \$6,000 10-year plan or a \$12,000 20-year plan. Nonsubscribers would pay about \$89 a month.

Peter Pratt, a county-hired consultant working with the ad hoc Marin County Broadband Task Force and Inyo Networks, called the projects “a model for rural California communities.”

The Marin Broadband Task Force includes representatives from the Marin County Administrator’s Office, the Marin County Department of Information Services and Technology, Marin County Department of Public Works, District 4 Supervisor Dennis Rodoni’s office and other county agencies.

“The technical challenge of reaching the community with needed connectivity to the outside world had to be solved,” Rodoni said in a statement. “A year ago, we had to work with CPUC staff to make sure Bolinas remained identified as a high-priority community for funding. ... Today, we have success thanks to your contributions to all of those efforts.”

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