

Angola first to benefit from technology initiative

By Jamie Lemke-Barrand | Posted: Tuesday, February 28, 2006 12:00 am

ANGOLA

Years after talk of getting a municipal area network going in Steuben County first began, the first steps are being taken toward making it a reality.

Fiber optic cable is being laid beneath the streets in Angola. Crews have been out on the streets getting the cable in for several days.

"Yes, they're here, and we're doing it," said Nate Armstrong, systems administrator for the city of Angola.

Angola's city government will be the first entity to benefit from I-Man, a subsidiary of the Steuben County Community Foundation. I-Man was developed as a plan for providing a high-speed fiber optic municipal area network to support the needs of the growing Steuben County community. Armstrong said with the new fiber optic lines, the city's wastewater, water, planning, clerk's and other offices will all be linked.

"With the cable that's being laid, access will also be left by the hospital and schools so they can hook in later," Armstrong said.

I-Man has been headed up since its inception in December 2000 by Bill Geiger, owner of Clear Lake Electric. Geiger has worked closely with many organizations and government entities on the project, including the Angola Industrial Growth Board, Northern Indiana Public Service Co., Steuben County Rural Electric Membership Corp., the city of Angola, the Steuben County Community Foundation and the Fort Wayne-based Cole Foundation.

Geiger said as a businessman, he realized years ago that the economy was sliding and he wanted to do what he could to keep his, and other businesses in the area, profitable. Friends of Geiger's, Jad and Jay Donaldson, own Titanium Solutions in Ann Arbor, Mich. When Geiger became concerned about the local economy, Titanium Solutions had just developed a fiber optic ring in Sturgis, Mich.

"The county was at a point of economic downswing," Geiger said. "As an electrical contractor, I realized we needed to bring what was in Sturgis here to Steuben County and implement it."

Geiger initially went to Angola Mayor Bill Selman with his ideas in December 1999, Geiger said.

"The city couldn't really do anything at that time," Geiger said. "The money just wasn't there. So I really did a lot of brainstorming."

It was then that Geiger hooked up with the Angola Industrial Growth Board. With that organization's help, a feasibility study on the fiber optic network was conducted.

"The Angola Industrial Growth Board were the forefathers that went together 30 years ago to build the industrial park in Angola," Geiger said. "They're really a dormant organization right now, but a couple of years ago they had some money in their kitty. And they facilitated the feasibility study through Titanium Solutions."

Part of the study was also paid for by NiSource, Geiger said. After the study was done, I-Man was established through the Steuben County Community Foundation.

When the city of Angola started talking about linking up its government offices, Geiger said, he knew I-Man could help.

"The city doesn't have the money to facilitate that fiber optic backbone," he said. "I met Nate and heard he wanted to get the city offices linked. That fit right into our business plan."

The solution was the city paying \$23,000 into I-Man for use of the network, Geiger said.

"This is something that, if they had done it on their own, would have cost the city more than three times what we charged them.

"We wanted to run lines through the heart of the community," Geiger continued. "And it just so happens that the (Angola) city offices are right in the heart of the community."

Even though the laying of the cable is a major project, those traveling through Angola won't notice much of a difference in the way traffic flows. The streets where the cable is being laid will have to be narrowed some, but no street closings will be necessary. This, Armstrong said, is due to the fact that M & C Trenching of Fremont, which is laying the cable, is using directional boring.

With directional boring, also known as "trenchless technology," conduit is run underground through a small hole. It is pulled through pipes and comes up through another hole at the end of the route. This means no traffic tie-ups and no utility interruptions. About one mile of cable is being run in this first phase of the technology initiative.

"As we build this and satisfy the needs of our community, we will be putting money back into growth and operating endowments," Geiger said.