

Local broadband program makes pitch to council

By Jim Shilander jims@kpcnews.net | Posted: Wednesday, April 14, 2010 12:00 am

ANGOLA — A local broadband effort that's already connected Angola and Steuben County government, Metropolitan School District of Steuben County and Cameron Memorial Community Hospital is looking to grow and become a model for the rest of the state.

Jad Donaldson and Bill Geiger both serve as project developers for the Indiana Metropolitan Area Network (IMAN), which provides broadband access to education, business, governmental and other non-residential entities, while providing funding to the Steuben County Community Foundation. They and Sharon Stroh, who is serving in a management capacity for the effort, presented an overview of their efforts to the Steuben County Council, hoping to make them aware of the effort.

Donaldson, an alumnus of Tri-State University, said he'd originally came up with the idea for the non-profit venture while working to install fiber-optic broadband lines for AT&T for a school system in Mishawaka. He said his goal was to provide cheaper broadband connections to businesses and other entities who might spend more money on lesser connections such as T1 lines, then use the subscription fees to support the Steuben County Community Foundation. Donaldson said the goal of the venture is to provide "the last mile," for a connection, connecting those just outside the reach of existing broadband lines into the higher speed connection.

Fees from the connections in each town go into funds for that community held at the community foundation, potentially providing major revenue for those communities, Donaldson said.

Geiger said the venture, which began 10 years ago, has completed it's first phase, by making connections within the city of Angola. Further connections would be aided by a recent decision by the state to allow the company to place its lines within state highway rights-of-way, as for-profit utilities do.

Stroh said the goal now was to connect even more of the county, starting with bringing fiber-optic lines to Fremont, then to Pleasant Lake.

Donaldson noted that the company wasn't competing directly with companies like Verizon or Mediacom.

"This is not a product that they would offer," Donaldson said. "This is outside the scope of their business model. Here, the community

owns the fiber but doesn't restrict the access."

Council member Sara Tubergen, who serves on the board of IMAN, said she hoped the effort would serve as a major selling point for economic development.

"This puts us on the map for businesses when they come here," Tubergen said.