



Springfield Wi-Fi complete

Justin A. Hinkley • *The Enquirer* • April 17, 2009

SPRINGFIELD -- As this city celebrates the completion of a blanket Wi-Fi network, its neighbor is preparing for one of its own.

More than a year later than expected -- after delays caused by summer and winter storms, logistics in casting signals and contract talks with Consumers Energy -- Springfield's citywide Wi-Fi is complete, officials announced in a ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday.

"You never say 100 percent in our business, but basically the city is covered," said Eric Schoen, vice president of Advanced Computing Devices, the company that installed and will operate the network.

What "covered" means, Schoen said, is from almost anywhere in the city, residents with wireless-capable computers can log on to the Internet. He said the network was working at speeds comparable to landline DSL.

While maintaining Springfield, ACD will be working to bring Wi-Fi to Battle Creek, Schoen said. Crews are surveying downtown and the Post and Washington Heights neighborhoods as the first places to install the network.

Work in Battle Creek brings the project back where it originally began in 2007. Battle Creek Unlimited, the Calhoun Intermediate School District, the city of Battle Creek and One Economy, a nonprofit technology company, wanted to bring affordable Internet to low-income residents in the Cereal City. Battle Creek didn't qualify for the \$750,000 state grant that funded the work, so BCU applied on Springfield's behalf.

"Now that Springfield's done, we're very much interested in going back to the table with ACD and get back to moving forward with our project," said Cheryl Beard, BCU technology marketing director.

She said specifics such as funding will be worked out at that table and Battle Creek's Wi-Fi still is in its infancy. She couldn't say when it might be complete.

Meanwhile, officials in Springfield are happy their network is up and running.

City Manager Frank Peterson said the Wi-Fi will show "Springfield has a progressive mindset," which he hopes will attract business to the city.

"But what's best is that it's a good feeling to put Internet into the hands of people who otherwise couldn't afford it."

Springfield residents can access the Wi-Fi service for \$10 per month; businesses can sign up for about \$50.

Peterson said the city is working to install a free hot spot in the farmers market in Begg Park. It should be operational by the opening of the market, May 2, Peterson said.

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