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**ARTICLE FOR CONSIDERATION**

Border to Border Broadband: Windom

Community commitment boosts broadband use

*The Border to Border Broadband series spotlights project partners in the Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities (MIRC) Initiative, a Blandin Foundation-administered project funded in large part through an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant, which have demonstrated innovation in expanding broadband use.*

Believe it or not - Windom , a southwest Minnesota community with a population of just over 4,000, enjoys some of the fastest broadband in the country. WindomNet, a community-owned fiber optic broadband provider, provides fiber optic access to 1,060 homes in Windom.

A Well Wired Community Center

Windom leaders and organizations have built programs that address needs in sectors throughout the community: education, economic development and public safety. Windom is home to the Business Arts & Recreation Center or BARC. With ultra-fast broadband (10 Mbps downstream) and state of the art videoconferencing equipment, BARC has become a center for innovative education and business use.

Economic developer Mark Hanson has heard from at least three businesses interested in relocating to Windom based on the assets at BARC and the superior broadband access throughout the community. As well as attracting relocating businesses, broadband has been a tool for developing new, local business.

Home to recent immigrants, Windom has become a multilingual community. To meet the needs and capitalize on the assets of the new residents, BARC started a program that provides remote access to interpreter training through the University of MN College of Continuing Education, Translation and Interpreting Program. The remote interpreting classes have helped improve communication in the community, and have provided career opportunities to non-native English speakers. (Learn more on the Blandin on Broadband blog: <http://tinyurl.com/4n4r2jy>.)

Broadband in Education

WindomNet provides free fiber access to the school district, which has allowed the high school to offer wireless access points. Students can now use handheld devices and laptops to study, without straining or compromising the school network.

Like BARC, local schools have jumped into videoconferencing for staff training and teacher interviews. The cost saving so far is estimated to be $1,500 in training fees and more than $4,000 in travel and staff time saved.

Public Safety Increases with Better Communication

Broadband has also allowed Windom to make public safety improvements, such as installing 13 new laptops in vehicles used by police, firefighters and EMTs. First responders can download Google maps of locations before responding to calls, get more information on topics such as hazardous materials when necessary and do paperwork on the scene rather than taking time later to fill out reports.

The school is waiting on a grant to put additional security cameras in the school.  Once that is complete, all of the cameras will be remotely accessible by the police department, increasing safety for students on the campuses.

Businesses Getting on Board with Broadband

Planning is in the works to unveil “Finding Windom”, a community portal for residents and tourists that will highlight all local businesses, in October. The portal is an effort to build awareness in the local business community about the importance of online marketing and improve the community's overall online visibility with search engines and online maps such as Google maps, Foursquare and Facebook Places.

The project offers all businesses the opportunity (support and knowledge) to have a web site, get involved with Facebook and create a brief promotional video. This e-collateral will be featured in the community portal. To promote the project Windom will include a QR Code (code scan-able with a smartphone) to their Welcome to Windom billboard.

Windom is a broadband leader in Minnesota both for access and adoption, and their reach is expanding. On July 25, another federal funded project broke ground in nearby Lakefield to extend WindomNet’s reach to eight surrounding communities. (Learn more on the Blandin on Broadband blog <http://tinyurl.com/3qnhx2e>.)

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[*Blandin Foundation*](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?llr=ybbp6cbab&et=1103773224757&s=0&e=001GJu_FLYtuNfRZwJfz7PvjGrcOfOd447luaULSv3M83kl8cm4HQS2v6H2I8ErOQdGTAOD1UsuB68SuKOULXw-D16ZC5hyNqtoFlI6euQ6xrlrslt5FC6yGBiyl748kJpk)*, Minnesota's largest rural-based private foundation is located in Grand Rapids, Minn.  Its mission is to strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area, through grants, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives.* [*www.blandinfoundation.org*](http://www.blandinfoundation.org)*.*

*The* [*Blandin Broadband Initiative*](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?llr=ybbp6cbab&et=1103773224757&s=0&e=001GJu_FLYtuNfRZwJfz7PvjGrcOfOd447luaULSv3M83kl8cm4HQS2v6H2I8ErOQdGTAOD1UsuB6_O5Vxw1RLfB09t2wGUugLts8oaYJlyYos5yux6L2lSxaFPehlqFx5jhk8vpKa1w-M=) *supports broadband expansion across Minnesota. Media contact: Allison Ahcan, Blandin Foundation,* *arahcan@blandinfoundation.org* *or 218-326-0523.*