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Wireless Internet coming to Lowville EXPANSION EXPECTED: Wind farm pitching in for community

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LOWVILLE — The wireless Internet wave is coming to Lewis County.

And, with the help of Maple Ridge Wind Farm, wireless service soon could reach not only the Lowville area but the Tug Hill region as well.

"We start deploying gear there early next week," Vincent T. Jordan, president of RidgeviewTel, Longmont, Colo., said last week.

Mr. Jordan's company is eyeing the county courthouse on North State Street — with its connection to the Development Authority of the North Country fiber-optic line — as the initial antenna site from which to broadcast a WiFi, or wireless fidelity, signal.

After working out technical and design issues, the county likely will enter a service agreement with RidgeviewTel, said Thomas P. Gunn, Lewis County's director of information technology.

"We do look for a rapid development of this system," he said.

Area residents and businesses may be able to receive service from RidgeviewTel as soon as mid-July, Mr. Jordan said. The cost for wireless Internet service through RidgeviewTel starts at \$29.99 a month, with a one-time \$30 activation fee, and Internet phone service would add about \$10 a month. Seasonal residents can reduce their bills to \$5.95 per month when they are not in the area.

"I think it should reach most everyone in the town," said Lowville Town Supervisor Arleigh D. Rice, noting the antenna would cover a five- to seven-mile radius.

The company also offers free service to partnering municipalities.

The town of Harrisburg, after accepting proposals from three wireless companies, has already reached an agreement with RidgeviewTel.

"They have a pretty good track record," Harrisburg Town Supervisor Norman L. Roof Sr. said.

RidgeviewTel, which provides wireless Internet service in 25 Colorado communities, has started service in Alexandria Bay and is working to bring service to Cape Vincent, Fort Drum, Gouverneur, Ogdensburg, Waddington and Watertown.

Mr. Roof — who has been working over the past couple of years with officials from DANC, the Tug

Hill Commission and the wind farm to bring broadband Internet access to Harrisburg and neighboring towns — said he is excited to see the initiative coming to fruition.

"We could not have done this without the cooperation of the wind farm," he said.

DANC plans to run a fiber-optic spur from its main line along Route 12 to Maple Ridge's meteorological tower on Cobb Road for \$75,000, Mr. Roof said. The wind farm, which plans to utilize RidgeviewTel's services, is to pay \$62,500, with area towns covering the remaining \$12,500, he said.

While the wind farm could have installed a direct, fiber-optic line for about \$50,000, Maple Ridge officials were willing to contribute extra funding — along with free use of their tower — to provide community access to high-speed Internet, Mr. Roof said.

Since the new fiber-optic line won't be installed immediately, RidgeviewTel workers likely will try to establish a point-to-point wireless connection between the courthouse and the Harrisburg tower as a temporary way to provide service to Tug Hill more quickly, Mr. Jordan said.

Eventually, antennas could be put on other towers, silos and other high points throughout the county to expand the range of the wireless network, he said.

"The ultimate goal at the end of the day is to make this available to as many people as possible over the three counties," Mr. Jordan said.

Mr. Gunn, also the county's 911 coordinator, hopes to utilize the WiFi system to improve emergency communication and possibly provide in-vehicle Internet access to police and other first-responders. It would also provide a backup for the county's current high-speed Internet service from Time Warner Cable, he said.

The county last year established a wireless computer network among most of its buildings.

Premier Wireless, Canton, also is trying to create a north country wireless Internet network. It currently provides service to more than 100 customers in the town and village of Canton and the town of Madrid, and is looking to expand into other areas of St. Lawrence County.

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