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Redwood man purchases three broadband franchises

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A Redwood resident has bought multiple franchises from a broadband communications company in a move that may give the Colorado-based corporation a more firm local footing.

Jeremy Durand purchased three franchises from RidgeviewTel, LLC, including one in Alexandria Bay, earlier this month, according to the company. RidgeviewTel declined to reveal the other locations, saying that they were not yet established.

RidgeviewTel has been competing against Premier Wireless of Canton to be the leading wireless Internet service provider in the area. Both Internet providers have been using the Development Authority of the North Country's fiber-optic lines to bring the Internet to their wireless transmitters.

Sandi P. Avila, director of franchise operations for the broadband company, said the new franchises will help RidgeviewTel succeed by creating a local presence. Mr. Durand will be the area owner and operator, with the company providing network support from Colorado, she said.

"What we provide is still local because Jeremy is running that facility," said Mrs. Avila. "It's still a local company as far as we're concerned."

According to the company press release, Mr. Durand previously had worked for a local cable company for 24 years. He bought the three franchises because he saw a great need in the local area, the release said. Mr. Durand declined to speak about his recent purchases, saying he was too new to the company.

The 3-year-old RidgeviewTel, which has roughly 1,000 customers, also serves Alexandria Bay, Cape Vincent, Fort Drum, Gouverneur, Harrisburg, Lisbon, Lowville, Ogdensburg, Waddington and Watertown.

On Friday, RidgeviewTel announced that the company had received a request for proposal from the town of Harrisburg and that it was formalizing a plan to install infrastructure in the area. Details of the installation or a time frame were not released.

Thomas R. Sauter, deputy executive director for DANC, said his group welcomes competition between such companies as Premier and RidgeviewTel.

"The world operates on Internet access these days, so why should people that don't have access be disenfranchised?" said Mr. Sauter. "It doesn't particularly matter which company provides the service. The company that provides the best service at the best price will be the service provider that captures the most market."

Mrs. Avila said company officials decided to offer services initially in the north of the state and work their way south, offering high-speed Internet to communities and towns as they go.

The service is aimed at rural communities with little or no access to Internet service, said Mrs. Avila. She said their goal is not to compete in markets already served by DSL or cable.

RidgeviewTel has plans starting at \$29.95 per month.

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