

**Contact:**

**Tino Breithaupt**

Traverse City Area Chamber of  
Commerce  
(231) 995-7106

**Jan Kellogg**

Northern Lakes Economic  
Alliance  
(231) 582-6482

**Cyndy Fuller**

Manistee County Alliance for  
Economic Success  
(231) 723-4325

**For Immediate Release: March 10<sup>th</sup> 2010**

## **EDCs Align Efforts for Broadband Availability**

The Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce's Traverse Bay Economic Development Corporation, the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance, and the Manistee County Alliance for Economic Success have aligned efforts that focus on bringing High-Speed Internet availability across a 10-County region of Northwestern Michigan. "We have been working diligently in facilitating a cooperative effort among a self-selected group of private-sector companies on their coordinated applications to obtain American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding," said Tino Breithaupt, Senior Vice President of Economic Development for the Traverse Area Chamber of Commerce and lead's the efforts of the Chamber's Traverse Bay EDC. "Creating a common alignment with other regional Economic Development organizations helps to strengthen support for Broadband Service providers investing to bring High-Speed Internet service into areas that cannot obtain it today".

Availability of High-Speed Internet is patchy throughout Northwestern Michigan. While more densely populated areas can obtain some level of service, there is less availability to the outlying areas. A series of recent inventory assessment studies conducted within Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Manistee counties identified that less than 60% of households within the five-county region had access to High-Speed Internet service. This is well below the 2008 state average of 78% and highlights a disadvantage the region has in being competitive with other communities to attract economic growth opportunities.

Under ARRA, \$7.2 billion has been allocated within two rounds of funding for 'Last Mile' and 'Middle Mile' projects. Last Mile is considered the delivery of broadband service to end users. Middle Mile delivers broadband service to 'anchor institutions' such as educational, health care, and community support organizations. A big boost that begins to address the inconsistency of broadband availability in our region is the \$33.8 Million ARRA Round One award to Merit Networks, Inc. of Ann Arbor. Their plans include running fiber optic cable in Northwestern Lower Michigan through the territories of each regional economic development corporation. "We are excited about the collaborative dialog the Traverse Bay EDC has established among Broadband Service providers that includes Middle Mile providers like Merit. It's only logical we would combine Manistee's leadership efforts in a broader regional endeavor for both Middle and Last Mile providers seeking ARRA Round Two funding" adds Cyndy Fuller, Executive Director of the Manistee County Alliance for Economic Success.

One such provider, Agri-Valley Communications, Inc (AVCI), purchased licensed frequencies that have the capacity and sustainability to deliver High-Speed Internet access wirelessly to residents and businesses in remote locations that cannot obtain a cable or fiber connection. “We believe our foresight in purchasing a license spectrum will help those restricted to dial-up to tap into a reliable and sustainable wireless network” said Ed Eichler, President and CEO of AVCI. “Collaboratively participating with other Service Providers in the region is what the USDA has asked us to do and our combined efforts will make broadband access a reality. We were delighted with the level of tangible coordinated support the economic development organizations are bringing to the table”.

Gary John, Managing Partner of Boardman River Communications, LLC (BRC) in Kalkaska County concurs. “Through their process, the Traverse Bay EDC has brought a qualified and cooperative group of service providers with a common goal to the table. We’ve been transparent in sharing the information required by the USDA to address the broadband gap and meet the needs of our rural community.” BRC has presented plans to cover approximately 597 square miles of Kalkaska County and Eastern Grand Traverse County with Fiber-To-The-Premise (FTTX). “We plan to deliver up to 1000Mbps to more than 10,000 homes, businesses and critical facilities. It’s called *Carrier Ethernet* and is viewed as the replacement technology for outdated SONET/SDH metro and wide area networks. It is considered by many to be the global transport solution for packet-based traffic going forward.” adds Gary John.

A primary effort by each economic development organization is to obtain support from the surrounding communities to assist those Broadband Service Providers who are seeking funding from ARRA Round Two. “It’s important for those making the decision on who will be awarded funding to have visibility on the need of Broadband service and we can help by obtaining written support from those living and doing business within the region.” said Andy Hayes, President of the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance. “With an application deadline of March 29th, we are encouraging residents, businesses, civic leaders and organizations throughout Northwestern Michigan to provide Signed Letters of Support”.

“Frankly, these organizations get it!” said George Boersma, Director of the Technology Partnerships in the Michigan Department of Information Technology. “At its basic level, Broadband availability is an Economic Development issue that is not restricted by lines on a map. For these organizations to combine efforts across geopolitical boundaries and assist the private sector is another positive step in helping to resolve a rural gap in High-Speed Internet service availability”.

Find more information, along with guidelines and Support Letter samples, by visiting the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce’s Regional Broadband Initiative website at [www.tcchamber.org/regional-broadband](http://www.tcchamber.org/regional-broadband), the Manistee Alliance for Economic Success website at [www.allianceforeconomicsuccess.com](http://www.allianceforeconomicsuccess.com), and the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance website at [www.northernlakes.net](http://www.northernlakes.net).