KentuckyWired reaches Carroll County with Butler Park install

By Tim Hendrick
Thursday, March 19, 2020 at 1:00 am (Updated: March 19, 1:01 am)

Kentucky's new open-access fiber optic cable has reached Carroll County and is creating opportunities for improved internet and cellular service.

Once the KentuckyWired network installation is complete, access to high speed internet will be available in all 120 counties.

The KentuckyWired service was recently activated making General Butler State Resort Park in Carrollton the first in the state with the high-speed internet service.

"KentuckyWired is a state-run project that has constructed more than 3,000 miles of high speed, high capacity fiber optic cable creating a "middle mile" network connecting government offices, universities, community colleges, state police posts, state parks, and other governmental institutions to the global internet," said KentuckyWired CEO Rob Morphonios said in a phone interview.

It is projected that half of the capacity of the 288-strand fiber will serve the needs of the project entities and the other half of the fiber strands could be leased to private companies. The project will pay for its construction through two ways — first is the savings from Kentucky owning its own middle mile network rather than paying private companies and second through the lease payments of the fiber strands.

The importance to the citizens of the rural counties is anywhere along the path internet service providers will be able to connect to the network and bring faster, more reliable internet to the commonwealth. Cellular providers will also be able to connect to KentuckyWired and build more cell phone towers throughout the state.

Morphonios said the trunk lines that form the Golden Triangle, Louisville, Northern Kentucky and Lexington, was one the first parts completed and the full project of installing the fiber optic lines should be completed by late summer.

What does this mean for the residents of Carroll County?

High speed internet access outside Carrollton's city limits where cable and AT&T data lines do not reach is limited to where one would a strong cellular signal or one of the satellite services. Unfortunately, there are areas of the county that do not have a cell signal.

The opportunity for service providers is there to connect to this fiber network and provide access, said Morphonis. He said there is a website, https://openfiberky.com/, that has information about the fiber network.

Morphonios said that 5G cellular service is available with the fiber optic lines.

The question remains if the population density in these parts of the county would warrant service providers investing in the infrastructure needed to provide high speed internet.

Carroll County Judge-Executive Harold "Shorty" Tomlinson has said in Fiscal Court meetings that the county has been looking for grant opportunities for expanding internet access. He has said there is approximately $950 million in federal funding for the expansion of high-speed access for rural America.

There is a Facebook group called Rural Carroll County Rural Broadband Initiative that is working to get a headcount on who would be interested in True Broadband Internet. The about information on the website said this is not just for the Locust area, but for all of Carroll County. A lot of Carroll County is tied to using their cellular data or satellite for internet. Some areas, such as the Locust community, have no cell service. These areas are forced to use satellite service providers with low data limits and high fees. A fiber network in Carroll County would eliminate the need for all satellite, and wireless telecommunication to homes.

Group page administrator Zach Young said a petition and information about the USDA's Broadband ReConnect Program has been presented to Tomlinson. He said that Tomlinson is now reviewing the information.

The Broadband ReConnect Program furnishes loans and grants to provide funds for the costs of construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment needed to provide broadband service in eligible rural areas.

Young said he is pushing for a county run and owned fiber service as it has already been done in multiple eastern counties in Kentucky.

"I have the information from the rural connect group for just a few weeks and have reviewed some of the information," Tomlinson said in an interview on Wednesday. "I have already talked to a number of the names on the petition about the need. I would like to sit down and talk with Zach [Young] about the proposal. We had a meeting with AT&T several weeks ago and have more discussions planned with KentuckyWired.

"I just want everyone to know that this has not gone on deaf ears and Fiscal Court realizes the importance of having service throughout the county. We went through the same thing when trying to get water to everyone in the county. Funding and how to pay for it become obstacles."

Tomlinson said since he received the information from Young, there has been the health challenge with the coronavirus (COVID-19) and immediate priorities have changed but he would not forget about the need.

KentuckyWired progress to date

The first government office transitioned to KentuckyWired was the Cabinet for Health and Family Services branch location in Owen County last December.

Building manager Karen Wotier said in a press release that with their old system it only took about 10-15 minutes after opening the office before that little circle started spinning on the computer screen.

"Now, with KentuckyWired, [the pages I need] come right up," Wotier said. "It's amazing." She recalled that previously, it was difficult for the CHFS staff in Owenton to get their work done because of a slow

and weak internet connection. The computer system would often crash around 2 or 3 p.m., during their busiest time of the day. The office had caseworkers who could not do what they needed to do to assist Kentucky families.

She said their previous internet provider was unable to help. "They would come in and try different things — add this or that — but nothing worked. We were slow. We couldn't get the cases done," she added.

Wotier said once they were connected they saw a big difference. The CHFS office in Owenton is the first of about 900 state government sites being transitioned to KentuckyWired by October 2020.

Locally, General Butler State Resort Park became the first state park to transition to the KentuckyWired network on Feb. 18. Their internet speed increased from 5.1mbps to 50mbps. Park manager Susan Spears has been out of the office and unavailable for any comments.

Kentucky State Police Post 6 in Dry Ridge was the first post to connect to KentuckyWired. Their available internet speed increased 500 percent and latency problems disappeared, according to the KentuckyWired website.