Going with the Incumbent:

Fort Wayne Connects With Verizon

A planned $75 million investment is helping kick off a far-sighted, ambitious municipal program

Graham Richard ■ *Mayor, Fort Wayne Indiana*

Fort Wayne, Indiana, is the first city in the Midwest to be selected for Verizon's fiber to the premise (FTTP) technology. Construction started in early March and will continue for the next 18 to 24 months. Broadband Internet is critical to a city's growth and development, just as railroads were in the 1800s and interstate highways were in the 1950s. But broadband is only the beginning. Here's how we intend to capitalize on this innovative infrastructure to better serve residents and businesses in Fort Wayne.

More than 65,000 households and small businesses are being connected, at a cost to Verizon of as much as $75 million. The project will give Fort Wayne a significant competitive advantage over other Great Lakes cities. Fort Wayne, second largest city in Indiana, is the only large city in the region with this service and its unmatched reliability, incredible speed and limitless potential for voice, data and video connections. We expect the economic development stimulus to be substantial.

Imagine the possibilities. Our city managers will be able to digitally synchronize traffic signals using real-time technology. Public safety may be enhanced by more sophisticated home-protection systems. Medical services may be delivered faster as doctors, nurses, hospitals, and homebound patients communicate face-to-face online. Schools will be able to share materials with other learning institutions and on-line learners at lightning-fast speeds.

FTTP will allow homeschool parents to share learning experiences with other homeschool parents and children. Web cameras in backyards and babysitters' homes will allow parents to see their children during the day. FTTP will allow us to remotely monitor and con-

trol activities of public interest. River gauges, water-pressure sensors, traffic conditions, bird feeders, lawn and landscape conditions, bus stops, sidewalks our children use on school days, playgrounds, parking lots. Only our imagination limits the uses.

We already have some experience with broadband. Fort Wayne was, in fact, the first community in Indiana to link all schools with broadband technology. Through the efforts of the Allen County Education Network (ACEnet), students and teachers share high-speed intranet and Internet connections. ACEnet also provides live video conferencing and distance learning. Comcast, the Indiana Telecommunications Network, and the Intelnet Commission have done a tremendous job with this program. The network connects 87 schools and 3,000 teachers serving over 54,000 students. The network also serves the IPFW (Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne) campus, reaching another 11,000 students and 1,000 staff members.

Fiber is the Catalyst

Our city's $1 billion investment plan includes tax incentives, an investment partnership and an urban investment strategy. I have set a goal of $1 billion of urban investment in the city over the next three years. That's realistic. In the first month of 2005, investments by Fort Wayne Newspapers joined Verizon's announcement, so we're already almost $100 million toward the goal.

We aim to have the most digital downtown of any city in the country. Two Community Revitalization Enhancement Districts (CREDs) help Fort Wayne offer tax incentives to investors. The downtown CRED allows the city to capture increased sales and

income tax dollars generated by new investment there. It also allows for a 25 percent investment tax credit for qualified investment in downtown business. We're completing the expansion of our Grand Wayne Center; it hosts a variety of national conventions each year. The expanded convention center will be completed this month and has the capability to connect up to 1,400 computers to the Internet at once, through wireless and hardwired broadband.

The city has also created an investment partnership with the Fort Wayne-Allen County Economic Development Alliance and the Downtown Improvement District. They work together to aggressively seek the interest of developers. This is the first time in over 20 years that both city and county development plans are being updated together. It will help make us more competitive as we develop economic development opportunities. Innovation and investment will be the tools. The plan is expected to be completed by September.

I recently announced an "Innovation Initiative" that supports new business development and job creation. The initiative includes an Innovators Forum, the creation of venture capital funds and iTeams for Broadband. The Innovators Forum will allow the community to come together to explore innovative business ideas and to support new business owners. The idea is to give Fort Wayne a competitive edge in technology. We want our business leaders to be inspired, involved, innovative, and committed to investment.

Inc.com recently ranked Fort Wayne 16th among the 50 best small metro places for entrepreneurial businesses. A study conducted by the Northeast Indiana Workforce Investment Board shows Allen County's patent rate at

0.54 per 1,000 people. That's 50 times the national average of 0.01. Government Technology magazine has recognized Fort Wayne's efforts for superior work in reshaping and advancing digital government. In 2003, Fort Wayne was ranked as the number one digital city in the country for cities our size by the Center for Digital Government.

The City of Fort Wayne has committed $250,000 as part of a gap-financing fund to be established at the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center. We hope the program will encourage start-up technology companies, especially those in the life sciences and bioscience areas, to establish a presence in Fort Wayne. The fund will bring early stage capital and product and development expertise to these ventures. Its goal is to spur job creation, and to create and retain high-growth entrepreneurial technology companies.

The iTeams for Broadband will promote innovation and investment. They will examine areas such as health care information systems, intelligent transportation tools, public safety, learning technology, advanced manufacturing, and library services. The iTeams will bring a fresh perspective as Fort Wayne works to be the competitive leader in the Midwest .

Expanding And Creating Jobs

In 2004, 64 businesses announced expansions of their operations that totaled $310 million. These projects retained over 7,000 jobs and created 1,000 new jobs. The Alliance is doing a great job as the lead organization for economic development opportunities in Allen County. Since 2000, 16,000 jobs have been retained and 4,000 new jobs were created. Fort Wayne's economy is fast transitioning to innovation rather than manufacturing. This effort will take time, but we are making good progress.

A great example is Fort Wayne-based ZOOM Information Systems. In January, ZOOM unveiled its new wireless system at the National Transportation Research Board Conference in Washington, D.C. It updates road and traffic conditions in real-time. The company used a city vehicle in its demonstration. The vehicle traveled several city streets to show how the system works. Sensors in vehicles are used to compile real-time data on road conditions, traffic flow and so forth. The data is then relayed to local government officials. The technology is also being used in the private sector. Boeing is a partner with ZOOM. We anticipate that ZOOM's efforts will make our streets safer and improve our services to our own community.

Using business practices to better serve customers and attract businesses earned us national recognition in the book *Lean Six Sigma for Service* by Michael George. In the book he said "All of these people and their organizations were impressive, but it's the city of Fort Wayne, Indiana, that really amazed me – perhaps because I, like most people, had low expectations when it came to government services of any sort… What's really intriguing are the dozens of city employees who are reducing lead times, streamlining processes, providing better quality service to citizens and holding down costs."

The city has saved more than $10 million by using Six Sigma and other good business practices. Other city technology advances include paying utility bills and city fines online, reducing the time it takes to get permits, filling potholes in four hours instead of four days, and reducing missed garbage pickups by 50 percent. All of these factor into the equation when it comes to attracting new businesses and jobs. Being innovative in delivering services is helping Fort Wayne attract high-tech, high-paying jobs that help our community grow and develop.

Fort Wayne also has one of the few interactive Web map pages in the country. Users can perform searches by address, street, park, or neighborhood association. Developers and businesses can access maps of sewer and water service areas and zoning information without making a phone call or visiting city offices. Educators can use City Council district, neighborhood association and census tract maps to help students understand the different functions of city government. Residents with an interest in historic districts and parks can view maps about those topics. The map page meets a variety of needs from different sectors of our community.

The Fort Wayne Police and Fire departments are using technology to make our community safer. We now use an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS). Our new hotspots system enables police officers to wirelessly transfer data from their in-car computer to the department's records management system. This technological time-saver allows our officers to spend more time on the streets in their districts and less time at police headquarters.

Fight Crime With Broadband

The new system also allows crime scene investigators to transmit fingerprints from crime scenes directly into the AFIS database. That means officers can have positive identification of possible suspects while the scene is still fresh. Another broadband program is the installation of towers on all city fire stations.

This work done by the Indiana Data Center through their nearly 20 hotspots in the community allows police officers to download and upload necessary data at fire stations nearest to them while on patrol.

We also have the capability to do video conferencing from our public safety locations. The Indiana Data Center also benefits businesses and residents with broadband for faster computer connections.

Our advances in technology and innovation demonstrate that Fort Wayne is a great location to start a business. The Verizon fiber to the premise program, our innovation initiative and the $1 billion urban investment plan are examples of how innovation, investment, inspiration, and involvement can revitalize a city and community.

Just like a business, a city must have a competitive edge and a strategic focus. Every business and every city competes in the global innovation economy. We are working every day so that Fort Wayne will be a leader with the most innovative broadband. ◆

About the Author

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