

Farmington group begins work on pitch to land Google network

By James Monteleone The Daily Times

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FARMINGTON — Local leaders met Friday and began hatching a strategy to impress Google and be chosen as one of the California Web giant's proposed gigabit-per-second community Internet networks.

Google's proposed connection would represent Internet access more than 62 times faster than the best-available service in Farmington.

Google earlier this month announced intent to select an unspecified number of communities across the country to establish an "ultra high-speed" Internet network as an experiment on the future capabilities of a faster fiber line Web connection.

Local participants meeting at Merrion Oil and Gas offices Friday agreed that establishing one of the nation's fastest Internet connections in Farmington would drive future economic development with new technology-driven industries. The service would allow them and other users to work around the country through top-quality Internet access.

Web access available in Farmington ranges from basic dial-up connections to broadband service, but Farmington's high-speed connection is on par with many larger, urban communities, according to Comcast Cable, which installed the higher-speed access here in 2009.

Following Google's Feb. 10 announcement of the project, Farmington Mayor Bill Standley appointed a task force of community leaders to pursue the gigabit-per-second potential. That committee has expanded to a coalition of nearly 20 city and county leaders, dubbed the Google Partnership Creators, who collectively will draft the application for the improved Web service.

The application is due to Google on March 26.

"We are going to have an all-out effort to have a response to Google that will, I think, show up the uniqueness and the strengths of our community, and hopefully we'll pop out (among) maybe 1,000 responses," said Jack Little, chairman of the mayor's task force.

The gigabit-per-second Internet connection has the potential to create new economic development because it can attract people with work-at-home, Internet-based jobs to live in Farmington, without being isolated from the fast connections necessary to do business with the rest of the country, said T. Greg Merrion, a member of the task force.

"One of the economic development elements of this is more and more people aren't working in offices like this. They're working wherever they want to live, whatever hours they want to work, and they're working out of their house as long as they're connected to the world with a computer," Merrion said. "You get this type of ultra high-speed fiber in our community and all of a sudden ... you're going to be able to attract people that want to live in, really, what most of us consider is the greatest place on earth anyway."

San Juan Economic Development Service Director Margaret McDaniel agreed, saying the improved Internet access could lure companies looking to

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The Google Partnership Creators task force is scheduled to meet again Friday.

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"This is leaps and bounds above" what's already available, McDaniel said. "I think it's exciting and a great opportunity."

A first step to getting the Farmington area on Google's radar is to encourage residents and area businesses to get online and nominate Farmington as an ideal candidate for the project.

Members of the group on Friday suggested asking area businesses to encourage employees to nominate Farmington for the project en masse. The group also planned booths at upcoming community events where residents could learn about the prospect, and if interested could use available computers to tell Google that Farmington is a good choice for the project.

Regardless of whether Farmington is selected, the task force is beginning the process of identifying San Juan County's telecommunications infrastructure needs and will continue work to improve regional communication, members agreed.

"The biggest need we have is to think positively and not (with) inferiority because of our isolation," Little said. "We want to be with the rest of the world, and the only way we can do that is with communication."

Google said the communities selected for the project will be announced later this year. The company intends to connect between 50,000 and 500,000 homes in multiple cities to the gigabit-per-second network.

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