

SuperNet connects all Albertans

By Kerri Savage



If you live in rural Alberta, chances are that you can thank the Alberta SuperNet for bringing countless resources, including high-speed Internet access, to your community. The province now has a colossal web of over 13,000 kilometres of wireless equipment and fibre optic cable, connecting 4,200 government, health, library and learning facilities in 429 communities.

Even if you don't have a home computer, you still reap the benefits! The SuperNet is much more than a highway for Internet traffic. It is a powerful network that provides a cost-effective way to connect Albertans in every corner of the province to services that were previously difficult to access if you didn't live in a large city.

It connects schools to videoconferencing, online learning and other resources. It allows smaller healthcare facilities to share and discuss issues with specialists in larger centres. Rural libraries now have connectivity to online databases and the ability to share collections with other libraries. Rural businesses can access global customers and suppliers by purchasing Internet access from service providers who use the SuperNet to reach smaller communities.

The Alberta SuperNet is a broadband network. "Broadband" means that any type of data can be transmitted securely on fibre optic cable, no thicker than a strand of hair, and by ultra-high-speed wireless connections. Because the SuperNet can move data on many different light frequencies or channels at the same time, vast amounts of information can be transmitted.

Before the SuperNet, few Internet service providers offered high-speed services outside of Calgary and Edmonton. Now, about 80 service providers can buy bandwidth on the SuperNet to carry Internet service to customers, regardless of location. Because the network is accessible to all providers at equal cost, the SuperNet allows providers to offer high-speed Internet service at rates that are competitive and affordable.

Science Alberta Foundation uses the power of Alberta SuperNet as part of its province-wide Wonderville.ca Science Challenges. Recently, Grade 7 and 8 students from across the province were tasked with a fun and interactive curriculum-linked project. Grade 7 students built a "thrill ride" capable of carrying a marble "passenger". Grade 8 students constructed a Rube Goldberg device, a machine that is designed to be as complex as possible to perform the simplest task. Students were provided with a digital camera to record a one minute presentation to share with judges from across the province.

The students recorded their project results and were able to upload them easily to a website, now having access to high-speed Internet. The projects were then able to be viewed by a panel of judges and competitors from other schools.

"Without the SuperNet, it would have been very difficult to have participation from rural schools," said science challenge coordinator, Kaya Konopnicki. "Having that access to high-speed Internet gave schools from across the province the option to take part. Participation from a wide variety of communities is part of what makes Science Challenges a success."

Some of the participating schools were from Castor, Radway, Beaumont, Warner, Three Hills and La Crete, to name a few.

For more information about Alberta's SuperNet, visit www.albertasupernet.ca. Visit www.wonderville.ca and check out a fun, Interactive Activity called "Get Connected" and help the cast of characters connect Alberta communities to the SuperNet.