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The K-Net Story: Community ICT Development Work

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The Kuhkenah Network (K-Net) provides information and communication technologies (ICTs), telecommunication infrastructure and application support in First Nation communities across a vast, remote region of north-western Ontario as well as in other remote regions in Canada. This private telecommunications network supports the development of online applications that combine video, voice and data services requiring broadband and high-speed connectivity solutions. K-Net is a program of Keewaytinook Okimakanak (KO), a First Nations tribal council established by the leaderships of Deer Lake, Fort Severn, Keewaywin, McDowell Lake, North Spirit Lake and Poplar Hill bands to provide a variety of second level support services for their communities. *Kuhkenah* is an Oji-Cree term for *everyone, everywhere*.

The KO First Nation communities are part of Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), located in northern Ontario, across an area roughly the size of France. NAN includes a total population of approximately 25,000 people. The majority of this population is aboriginal and lives in remote communities with 300-900 inhabitants. For most of these communities, the only year-round access into or out of their area is by small airplane.

The accompanying video (http://streaming.knet.ca/fednor/brian_beaton3_300k.wmv) provides a brief overview of some of the work that has gone into building and sustaining the regional network that supports local community based networks (CBNs). The video was produced by members of the K-Net team working in partnership with George Ferreira, a PhD candidate at the University of Guelph who is completing his thesis work using video material as a medium to present evaluation documentation as well as influence policy and program development (Ferreira, 2004).

This video was created as part of a larger collection of video material that is being used for a variety of applications. On a Saturday morning in December, we went for a drive around my community of Sioux Lookout and spent time to talk about our work, our partners and our understanding about how these networks can develop and why they are important in remote and rural communities. In the video there is a scene where the base of the new 7.3 metre satellite earth station is being built. Today that satellite dish is operational and the pictures and the video story documenting the construction of this infrastructure are now on-line at http://tech.knet.ca/photos/satellite.

The production of these videos resulted in several other significant multi-media presentations being produced and shared on-line. The resulting work and presentations are helping others around the world understand the potential and the possibilities for these types of local ICT developments in their own communities. One important product of this work was a multi-media presentation that was produced with the Institute for Connectivity of Americas (http://icamericas.net) and other partners and presented at the World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva. The entire presentation is available on-line at http://smart.knet.ca/kuhkenah_flash.html and consists of a collection of case studies that include an Introduction to K-Net and four specialized case studies covering Network Development, Education, Health and Economic Development, along with accompanying video material for each chapter of the production.

Community vision and need have been the driving forces behind K-Net's development. The results impact local communities and the entire region's health, education and economic opportunities. These video productions provide an explanation of the network's history, some of the key players, partners and

accomplishments to date. The videos and accompanying print material demonstrate how First Nations people are finding ways to harness these new technologies to strengthen and support the entire community, including their traditions, language and cultural heritage.

The KO First Nation communities have experienced an impressive amount of development in a relatively short time period. Two of the communities have gone from having one phone for 400 people four years ago, to accessing broadband services from individual homes today. This rapid development of K-Net's technical infrastructure and services, and its impact on local health, education, and economic development is introduced in these videos. The K-Net experience and the stories from the communities and the people involved in this work demonstrate how local needs and demands can drive technology and network infrastructure development.

References Cited

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