Cammick, Corbeil address broadband

THE JOURNAL STAFF

When Oconee County received a $9.6 million federal grant for a $15 million broadband project in 2009, there was great excitement that all areas of county — even the most remote — would have access to affordable, high-speed internet service.



Cammick



Corbeil

About 250 miles of fiber optic cable have been installed, and six Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have signed contracts with the county to provide the service to residents and businesses in Oconee County.

County offices, schools, libraries and most fire stations are up and running with the broadband service.

The concern remains about whether the most remote areas of the

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county — often referred to as "last-mile service areas" — will ever get service. The county has said it is working to offer incentives to companies willing to offer service to those areas, but many have expressed doubts at council meetings about whether those areas will ever be served.

In the third part of a series of questions leading up to Tuesday's Republican primary, The Journal continues its questions for Oconee County Council District 1 candidates Edda Cammick and Paul Corbeil.

Today's question: How would you measure the success or failure of the county's broadband project? Explain your answer.

Corbeil: "This has been a complex but successful effort to date that will benefit our citizens for years as the build-out continues. Oconee County received a federal grant to build a 'middle mile' network that private Internet service providers will use to connect homes, businesses and institutions to the web. The primary focus remains to provide services to unserved and underserved communities in addition to public safety and educational facilities. The 'middle mile' was completed in August 2013 federally required timeframe at budgeted cost — a major achievement. Since then, key institutions have been connected. That process continues. These institutions provide a revenue base that will help to lower fees for all customers. Recently, in April, a list of authorized ISPs was published. Staff continues to work hard on access and pricing details with ISPs and our mutual future customers. Stay tuned, it's still early."

Cammick: "FOCUS (Fiber Optics Creating Unified Solutions) was to provide broadband connectivity to county government and its affiliates and unserved rural areas. The project was 'sold' to us residents with promises of Internet access for unserved areas. At my end of the county, the middle mile loop ends on Highway 11; those who live west of 11 (my neighbors) have been excluded from this project, as well as those who live too far from the middle mile in other parts of the county. I feel connecting county government and its affiliates will be a success, but connecting the rural areas will prove incomplete. I don't understand the loop around Seneca where broadband is available. Saying 'the grant was for rural areas and all of Oconee is considered rural' is a lame excuse. The loop around Seneca should have gone to an unserved rural area, as was the intent of the grant."

Friday's question: What should the county's role be in economic development? Do you support giving cash, tax incentives and infrastructure to lure business?

BAND: Candidates ounty's Internet project