Oconee County, college broker broadband deal

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CLEMSON — Oconee County and Clemson University are closing in on a partnership agreement that would bridge their broadband connectivity.


Pepin

Jim Pepin, Clemson University's chief technology officer and director of high performance computing, said Friday that Oconee's future broadband network presents a natural partnership opportunity with the university.

Pepin, considered by many to be an authority on high performance computing and communications, sees Oconee's budding broadband network as an important component to his goal of establishing a statewide network that enhances research and education to two-year colleges and higher.

Pepin said South Carolina is in catch-up mode. For example, he said Coastal

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DEAL: A win-win

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Carolina University's speed of connection tops out at 100 megabits, while colleges and universities in North Carolina generally have 10 times that capacity.

Oconee County has emerged as a budding player in the information superhighway as it gets ready to begin work on a $14.3 million project to create a 245-mile fiber optic trunk that will bring affordable broadband Internet access to businesses and residences in Oconee. A $9.6 million federal grant is helping to fund the project.

Oconee's network would be a component of Pepin's goal to increase broadband capacity statewide.

Pepin said he and Oconee officials should have a formal arrangement worked out in the next month or so.

"They are a natural partner," Pepin said of Oconee's broadband venture.

Mike Powell, the Oconee County Information Technology director, said the deal is important because it would give Oconee's future network access to Clemson University's connections to Internet exchanges in Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C.

"It reduces the risk of losing connectivity," Powell said. "Atlanta is Tier 1; it goes anywhere. We are Tier nothing. We want to build a Tier 1 capability."

Pepin said officials are looking at an area on Highway 123 where Oconee's fiber optics network would connect with Clemson University's system.

Powell has said that Oconee's fiber optic cable would be placed first in Walhalla and would proceed toward Seneca.

Oconee still is in the process of getting federal Environmental Protection Agency clearance of no impact from its proposed project.

"Pre-engineering work is ongoing," Powell said. "There's a lot of work still happening."

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