

## **Rural Issues Task Force Meeting Minutes**

Chair: Tina Nerat

July 21, 2004

### **Pat Lanthier – Connecting Progress and Preservation**

Broadband supports economic development. Rural areas are a problem to reach. “Connect to Compete” is a slogan for all employee groups. Success triad is visionary leadership, soft infrastructure (training, skills), and hard infrastructure (network, hardware). Policy leadership is vital.

The new economy is fast, global, knowledge-worker dependent, and network based. Communications are critical. New economy is ruthless, especially since 9/2001. The telecom meltdown has made it worse. Broadband technologies are the best ever – wired, fiber, CATV, wireless - as well as cheaper, better, faster, and more choices.

Mother Lode eXpress connected progress and preservation. It works to increase region’s competitiveness while retaining quality of life. This effort started in 1999 and has attracted \$1.3m in cash and in-kind support. A community assessment was done. There is a wireless ordinance in Tuolumne County. An old opera hall was transformed into a WiFi hot spot. There are maps of broadband coverage (very important), which is increasing in the region.

### **Larry Burkhardt - Nevada County Telecom Initiatives**

Nevada County is heavily rural, with treed/mountainous terrain. It is shifting from a resource-based economy to medical manufacturing, IC design, tourism, agriculture, broadcast equipment, and scientific glass-blowing. There are an estimated 50% home businesses from manufacturing to high tech. Larry is with Economic Resource Council, a public/private development corporation. Without broadband access, they will be bypassed in the new economy.

A telecom team was formed in 2000 with reps from gov’t, business, and education. They evaluated what they have, what they need, and how to close the gap. They used a rural e-commerce grant to train businesses and to assess feasibility to expanding broadband with metro network. They also identified fiber routes and existing DSL service areas. A survey done in 2001 identified an overwhelming demand for DSL. Businesses were willing to pay more for good connectivity. Since then, SBC has increased DSL coverage. Wireless providers have entered the market.

The telecom team is now planning for broadband needs using a demand model, drafting telecom policy for the county, defining home architectural and construction requirements, and pursuing grant funding. Community advocates, partnerships, government participation, and persistence are keys to success.

## **Organizing for Rural Technology Advocacy – Tina Nerat**

Humboldt County is remote and rural, on the North Coast six hours' drive from San Francisco. The Redwood Technology Consortium (RTC) started in the mid-1990's with a few techies meeting in someone's living room. It has grown from these few people to a non-profit corporation of 125 businesses and individuals in less than 10 years. Meetings now draw 40-60 people every month. A yearly Tech Expo is put on and scholarships are awarded every year. The RTC was instrumental in resolving SBC/Caltrans fiber optic impasse over right-of-way compensation. RTC is influential in the community and is a group people want to belong to.

Key factors to success were: partnerships (SBDC, chambers of commerce, economic developers, media, telecom vendors, and educational institutions), dues based on membership type (biz, individual, student, honorary), infiltration on various boards/committees around town, newcomers to area, good web site, visible events, public meetings, and being inclusive to everyone.

### **Meeting Participants**

Brent Auernheimer

Rushton Brandis

Larry Burkhardt

Mary Liz DeJong

Bill Halverson

Dewayne Hendricks

Tina Nerat

Richard Piper

Dan Theobald

Ernie Ting

Julie Van Fleet