

By BRIAN FERRY Staff Writer

10/5/2006 - The wire is going onto the poles.

Visible work on the Warren County School District's broadband Internet project moved down Market Street Wednesday as a crew from Masters Communications of Somerset was stringing cable to poles in town.

Masters is officially working for WestPA.net. The district's program was a principal motivation for the network, but the Internet provider will own the infrastructure.

"We're building this fiber optic network," Tom Nuhfer, a WestPA.net partner, said. "The school district will be our first tenant."

According to Nuhfer, three crews are working in the county, from Sheffield to Russell, with "a lot of focus in downtown Warren" right now.

The network includes 53 miles of fiber optic cable.

That cable will carry the district's service and have plenty of space left over for the community's needs, Nuhfer said.

"In terms of the bandwidth that we can provide on our system, I won't say it's unlimited, but it's fiber optic cable which can pass enormous amounts of data," he said.

"Each of the schools is going to be connected up to this," Nuhfer said.

The completion date isn't firm, but "could be until the end of the month," Nuhfer said.

The network will, in terms of computers, turn the county school district into a single location.

"In this case, what's being done for the school district is a wide area network which will allow all their schools to communicate with one another in a way that would be similar to if they were all in the same building," Nuhfer said.

The district's current 6 Mbps Internet transmission service is about right, Coordinator of Technology and Information Management Frank Galeazzo said. The new connection will be 10 Mbps.

However, the buildings in the district share that 6 Mbps and the connection between them is the problem.

"Right now our biggest bottleneck is between the schools," Galeazzo said. "Most of what's been happening is our buildings are maxing out well before our Internet connection."

The current connection between buildings is 768 Kbps.

The new connection will be 100 Mbps — a bandwidth increase of more than 100 times.



Times Observer photo by Brian Ferry

Hanging cable

Brian Foster of Masters Communication hangs cable for broadband Internet at the intersection of Market Street and Fourth Avenue on Wednesday. The cables are part of the Warren County School District's broadband project.

When it's all done, Galeazzo expects the schools to be running at full speed on Nov. 1, there will be several benefits for students.

"Our data transmissions can be a lot faster," he said. "We will be faster to the end user."

"We should be able to provide more resources to our students by removing some of the restrictions we've had on our Internet access because of bandwidth," Galeazzo said.

"We're blocking some high bandwidth sites with video and audio."

The increase from 6 Mbps to 10 Mbps is intended to handle an expected increase in Internet usage by district students.

One of the hot issues in the district recently has been distance learning. That issue will be directly affected by the new connection.

"Our broadband will be able to handle that," Galeazzo said.

The benefits may extend to the bottom line, too.

"The increase may also introduce some cost avoidance in the district," he said.

Galeazzo is one of many in the district who has been looking forward to broadband for a long time.

"This has been long anticipated," Galeazzo said. "We've been trying to bring broadband to the district for three years now."