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**Department of Commerce**
& Economic Opportunity
**OFFICE OF BROADBAND**
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# Connect Illinois Round 1 Breaks Ground

## Connect Illinois: Round 1 Breaks Ground; Round 2 Application Window Opens

We announced the first $50 million in Connect Illinois broadband infrastructure awards last June which included 28 projects extending fiber connectivity to over 26,000 locations throughout Illinois. As ground breakings continue, we'll profile the projects -- and the progress!

In this edition, we focus on awards to two Round 1 "last-mile" projects:

- Grafton Technologies in rural Jersey County, which has accelerated deployment to meet remote learning needs; and
- Madison Communications in Macoupin and Madison counties, which emphasized the link between broadband connectivity and local healthcare providers to speed delivery of telehealth.

In a future edition, we'll look at the expansion of Cook County's "middle-mile" institutional fiber-network, among others.

Connect Illinois, with $400 million committed, is the largest state broadband matching grant program ever. It provides the magnitude of funding needed for state-driven broadband ubiquity – and lasting broadband equity. The application window for Round 2 funding, announced in October, runs December 1, 2020-March 1, 2021. Click here to view the introductory webinar for Round 2 of Connect Illinois.
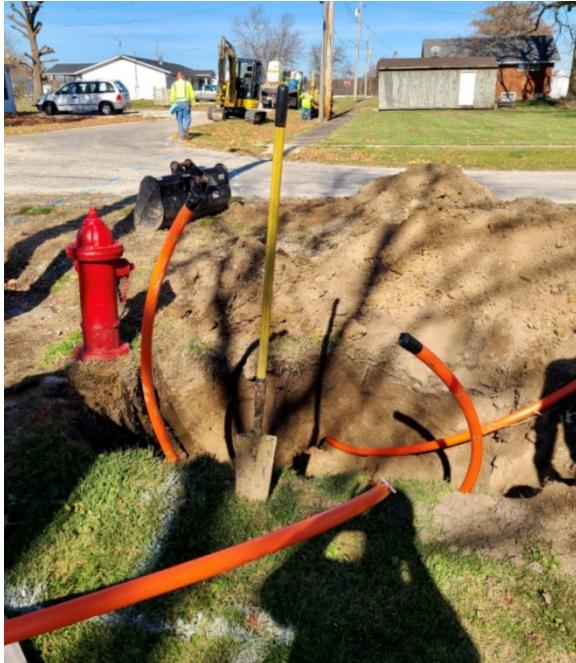
*Matt Schmit*

Matt Schmit
Director, Illinois Office of Broadband

## Grafton Technologies

Connect Illinois Round 1 awarded funds to Grafton Technologies, an over 100-year old family-owned business in rural Jersey County, located just north of the Metro East region. In a funding partnership with the State of Illinois, Grafton Technologies, Inc. [received a $1.5 million grant to help with the $3.9 million project](). This "Broadband Access" project has Grafton building its network to provide broadband speeds capable of 1 Gbps/1 Gbps in the unserved area, with initial plans also providing various speed tiers, such as symmetrical 5/5Mbps, 50/50 Mbps, and 100/100 Mbps.



The resulting fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) network deployment will serve a total of 584 locations, specifically previously 460 unserved households and 124 previously unserved businesses, farms, and community anchor institutions, improving access to critical school e-learning and telehealth applications.

Reliable, high-speed broadband is crucial for attracting long-term investment and creating jobs in the area. Furthermore, better broadband will allow Jersey County farmers to become more efficient, productive, and competitive with the use of precision agricultural tools.

With its own construction crew and equipment, Grafton Technologies has the ability to construct and complete the project fully in-house -- which facilitates an accelerated project timeline to meet county needs.

## Madison Communications

The "Go Madison GigaSpeed 18" project will serve approximately 9,300 businesses, farms, households, and anchor institutions in Macoupin and Madison counties. In particular, the predominantly "last-mile" FTTP project will connect over 8,700 households, 400 businesses, 50 farms, and 70 community institutions -- and includes strong partnership with local healthcare facilities.

The project will offer various service and pricing tiers, with the capability of attaining speeds of 1 Gbps symmetrical or more to every location. Madison Communications believes sustainable broadband adoption will transform these unserved areas into highly productive communities, opening doors to advancements such as precision agriculture. Education, health care, energy efficiency, and public safety will also improve with high-speed internet access.

Madison Communications will deploy throughout Madison and Macoupin counties in Southwest-Central Illinois, including to the communities of Carlinville, Gillespie, Benld, Sawyerville, Mt. Clare, Wilsonville, Mt. Olive, Staunton, Livingston, Prairietown, Williamson, New Douglas, Worden, Hamel, Holiday Shores, Midway, Bunker Hill, and Shipman.

## Governor Pritzker Recognized for Telehealth Leadership

On December 7, the Partnership for a Connected Illinois (PCI) will hold a virtual event to honor Excellence in Telehealth Leadership, giving the Award for Policy Changes to Advance Telehealth & the Award for Advancing Telehealth by Innovation to Governor J.B. Pritzker.

Governor Pritzker promoted and advocated for improved telehealth policies, laws and regulations that ensured access to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. What followed was an immediate, seismic shift in healthcare service delivery. Patient demand for telehealth services increased exponentially in alignment with the need for physical distancing. The Executive Order and the Virtual Care Program allowed regulatory flexibility for the dramatic increase in telehealth in Illinois, improving the quality of care for many.

Healthcare providers rapidly invested in new technology, adjusted clinical workflows and educated staff, patients, and clinicians on telehealth delivery. Within days of the Governor's Executive Order, community mental health providers went from around 10% telehealth to nearly 90% telehealth. Telehealth use in Illinois has remained at a significant and persistent level, with strong indication from patients and providers that this optional flexibility to access care must be maintained permanently.

PCI will also present Awards for improved Care for Underserved Populations to Norwegian American Hospital and Jersey Community Hospital.

## New Benton Report on Open-Access, Middle-Mile Networks

We need more broadband across the U.S. But how do we get it? How can we deploy more broadband and bring about more competition for internet services? In a new report, the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society highlights one important solution: the construction of open-access, middle-mile networks.



"Middle-mile" networks bring data to and from national and major regional internet backbones to a local connection site where, in turn, traffic is handed off to the "last mile" network that connects homes. "Open-access" means the network permits any broadband provider to connect to the network on nondiscriminatory terms and conditions.

**Read the Report**

The fundamental economic principle is simple: Open-access, middle-mile networks can provide the savings that spur last-mile providers to build further and faster to reach residences. In this way, an open-access, middle-mile model

promotes private investment and competition in last-mile service by reducing capital expenditures required to build last-mile connections.

Yet policymakers wonder: If we build it, will they (the broadband providers) come? The answer is that they have. Benton's report, [If We Build It, Will They Come? Lessons from Open-Access, Middle-Mile Networks](#), explains why the federal government should support the construction of open-access, middle-mile networks and how that support can be structured. It provides background on different kinds of open-access, middle-mile networks across the nation and the lessons we have learned about what boosts the chance for their success.

Experience supports funding open-access, middle-mile networks—and federal backing of smart state and local strategies that include construction of such networks.

Illinois Century Network is featured in the Benton report on pages 6, 9, and 11.

## Spotlight on Illinois Connected Communities

*Over the next several newsletters, we will be highlighting communities participating in the first cohort of the Illinois Connected Communities (ICC) program. ICC is a year-long program comprising best practice curriculum, expert consultation, and a state grant of up to $15,000 to assist communities in creating a broadband strategic plan to improve broadband access, adoption, and/or use.*

## City of Harvey

Harvey is a community of 25,000 located in the Chicago Southland.  Mayor Christopher Clark has a strong vision for improved connectivity options for residents and businesses alike with a goal of adopting smart community best practices.  The City's slogan for their economic development efforts is "Trucks, Trains and Technology."  By adding technology to Harvey's tradition as a transportation center, Harvey can enhance its position in logistics.

In its application to become an Illinois Connected Community, Harvey's leadership identified broadband adoption as a critical goal, recognizing that many community residents,  including those in multi-family apartment buildings, need access to affordable, quality internet, devices, and training to participate in distance learning, telehealth, and the digital economy.

The steering team, which includes city officials, library and high school leaders, the area healthcare provider, and both older and younger residents, wants to engage the entire community to become more connected and more tech-savvy, from K-12 and college students to older adults.

Using Connect Illinois Round 1 funds, the expansion of the existing urban, middle-mile Chicago Southland Fiber Network will be a positive asset for growing connectivity options in Harvey.

## Introducing Katie Stonewater

Katie is the Senior Advisor for Energy and Broadband at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) where she assists in policy matters with the Illinois Office of Broadband and serves as Secretary for the Broadband Advisory Council. She has been with DCEO since March 2020.

Prior to DCEO, Katie was the Executive Director of the Energy Council at the Illinois Chamber of Commerce.

Her experience includes over ten years of government and policy work, beginning as a policy fellow with Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn focused on broadband and energy issues and then as a legislative assistant for Congressman Jerry Costello in Washington, DC. In DC, Katie engaged in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, aided local communities in seeking funding from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, and helped to move forward initiatives such as ensuring regulatory fairness in the energy economy. Katie also staffed the House Science and Technology Committee. Katie is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She spent a semester in Belgium and a year teaching English in Prague, Czech Republic.

## News and Resources

Dec 4 | Will Congress finally pass economic relief and target support to reduce the digital divide? Charlie, Lucy, Football. (Benton Institute)

Dec 2 | Ken Griffin joins CItadel exec in giving another $1 million to boost internet access in Catholic schools (Crain's Chicago Business)

Dec 1 | Open-Access, Middle-Mile Networks: Deployment and Competition (Benton Institute)

Nov 24 | Illinois Office of Broadband Director Matt Schmit on StateScoop podcast: Are states relenting on municipal broadband during the pandemic? (StateScoop Radio)

Nov 20 | What 2020 Taught Us About Broadband (Benton Institute)

Looking for more broadband policy news? The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society offers a free, reliable, and non-partisan daily digest that curates and distributes news related to universal broadband. You can subscribe to this service here to learn how broadband delivers opportunities and strengthens communities.

Illinois Broadband Connections
727 Chicago Ave, Evanston, IL 60202