

## **DRA funds broadband technology study for Delta**

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HELENA-WEST HELENA —

The Delta Regional Authority has presented Connect Arkansas \$149,563 to fund a study that will help develop a plan to enhance the deployment of broadband technology in Arkansas, Desha and Phillips counties.

Pete Johnson of Clarksdale, Miss., the DRA co-director, met Saturday at the American Legion Hut in Helena with U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln and Sam Walls of Little Rock, Connect Arkansas president, to make the joint announcement.

Lincoln called access to broadband technology “critical to our efforts to spur development, create jobs and bolster our economy.”

Walls, senior vice president of Arkansas Capital Corporation Group, the governing arm of Connect-Arkansas, called broadband technology a “game changer.”

Walls said the world was moving in the direction of Internet technology “whether we want it or not.” Walls said there were far too many people in the U.S. without access to the Internet.

“I am extremely impressed with what I see,” Walls said.

Thanking Lincoln for her support, Walls said, “We can move forward on identifying community needs for broadband technology. We are grateful for the chance to do this work.”

Connect Arkansas was established in 2007 when Gov. Mike Beebe signed the Connect Arkansas Broadband Act. A private, non-profit corporation, Connect partners with stakeholders throughout the state in developing and implementing a comprehensive plan for statewide broadband deployment to endure the creation of a competitive broadband structure that not only will improve personal lives, but spur economic growth, Walls said.

“Connect Arkansas looks forward to working with community leaders to expand broadband awareness and availability in Phillips, Arkansas and Desha counties,” Walls said.

Walls said the funds would be used to help launch e-community programs in the three counties in partnership with the iDelta program initiated by the DRA in 2007.

Johnson said the presentation was part of DRA’s continued commitment to the iDelta process. “The Delta Regional Authority is proud to partner with Connect Arkansas on a project such as this,” Johnson said.

“Connect Arkansas has a great track record of developing e-community leadership groups that can promote and foster participation in helping Delta counties upgrade their internet awareness access,” Johnson said.

Noting that DRA presented Coahoma County, Miss. its broadband grant about 18 months ago, Johnson said getting the technology to fruition would be a long process.

“Coahoma County had to locate the ‘hot spots,’” Johnson said. The “hot spots” include the Clarksdale Police and Fire Departments, the Carnegie Public Library, and the Clarksdale and Coahoma County school districts.

Johnson said economists had determined that each dollar the DRA provided had increased per capita income 15-to-1 from 2002-2007.

Johnson said the Internet’s impact on global communications would be likened to the creation of

the Rural Electric Administration in the 1930s.

“REA brought electricity to homes in rural America for the first time,” Johnson said. “The Internet will have an even greater impact through broadband communications.”

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