

**NEWS:**

## **Expanding Access to Broadband Downstate**

**JULY 28, 2018** --

Governor John Carney and other officials recently visited three Sussex County sites, highlighting the importance of high-speed internet access and the launch of an effort to improve its availability downstate.

Using the backdrop of a communications tower in Seaford, officials announced on Tuesday the appropriation of \$2 million in state grant money to jumpstart partnerships with private internet service providers using state-owned communications towers to offer wireless broadband service. It is hoped the initiative will largely eliminate

"broadband deserts" -- areas of lower Delaware where residents have no practical access to affordable service.

"This announcement was the result of years of work," said State Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown. "We've been trying to fix the broadband disconnect in Sussex County and this wireless approach is going to make service available and affordable for large areas of the county."

State House Minority Leader Danny Short, R-Seaford, said connectivity is essential for



economic opportunity and the quality-of-life for rural residents. "Broadband internet access is increasingly fundamental to everything we do," he said. "Just as communities in the 19th and 20th centuries that lacked rail and highway connections found themselves in dire economic circumstances, areas without high-speed connectivity today face prospects that are equally as grim. Without it, we're at a loss to compete."

That point was underscored as officials visited Willin Farms, west of Seaford. Fifth-generation farmer Brent Willin told the group that the farm's operations are integrated with web-based applications that track soil conditions, land elevation, required fertilization, and even the force needed to sink seeds to the correct soil depth. The farms' tractors and other equipment are linked to onboard processors that continuously upload data via an iPad to the cloud, giving them the flexibility to make real-time decisions that can reduce material costs and maximize yields.

R.C. Willin said agriculture is increasingly becoming dependent on networked communications. "Without WiFi, you are buying equipment you cannot fully utilize," he said. "On a scale of one to ten [with regard to web integration], we're at about a five with where we expect to be in a few years."

In addition to wireless providers, another future broadband option for downstate residents could be a fiber optic network. Partnering with Crown Castle, the Delaware Electric Cooperative has established a 250-mile fiber optic cable loop downstate. The communications network links co-op managers to two dozen downstate substations, allowing for rapid response to changing conditions.

"I was very impressed with how the co-op is using their broadband network, not only to quickly restore service, but to be able to protect their linemen in the field by remotely shutting off circuits," said State Rep. Charles Postles, R-Milford, during a visit Tuesday to the utility's operations center in Greenwood.

Co-op Manager of Marketing and Communications, Jeremy Tucker said it is hoped the new state Rural Broadband Grant Program will encourage private companies to lease space on the Crown Castle network and provide service to the co-op's members.

**In photo, from left:** [State Reps. Danny Short, R-Seaford; Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown; and Charles Postles, R-Milford](#), stand in front of a state-owned communications tower located at the Seaford Police Department headquarters. The tower was used as part of a demonstration project in partnership with a private company (Bloosurf) to provide wireless broadband service. The successful pilot proved the viability of the concept, allowing access for customers 15 to 20 miles away.