

## National experts, officials attend broadband meeting

By **LEE MORRISON**, [lee.morrison@timesreporter.com](mailto:lee.morrison@timesreporter.com)

More than 100 people attended the Broadband and Technology Working Group session hosted by U.S. Rep. Zack Space, D-Dover.

Friday's session lasted from 9:30 to noon at Tuscarawas Campus of Kent State University at New Philadelphia.

"It was a great day," Space said of the first group session of his RENEW Ohio-18 program.

"As with the kickoff breakfast, we continue to be impressed with the turnout, quality and participation involved," he said.

Stanley C. Ahalt led the session. Ahalt oversees high performance computing, networking and research operations

as executive director of the Ohio Supercomputer Center at Columbus.

Also attending was Joe Mefford, director of Connected Nation. He was instrumental in implementing Connect Kentucky, which is being used as the national model for rural broadband access.

"We were very fortunate to have some of the nation's premier experts on this issue in Tuscarawas County today," Space said.

He also said that the range of federal, state and local government officials, service providers and business leaders from throughout the district was impressive.

"They are all contributing to this district and to making its communities a better place to live," he said. "I'm proud of their participation and passion. It helps get our RENEW Ohio-18 off to a great start."

Space said the group is being charged with three objectives, which will be reported on in a white paper in May:

- "discuss ways to facilitate or increase access to broadband in our area so that it is universal access;
- "figure out what we can do to get tech-related jobs here. How do we position ourselves for new tech jobs coming down the pipe, such as computer hardware and software applications? Entire industries are growing up around technology, and we'd like to be a part of that;
- "facilitate communication among those involved locally and at the state and federal levels."

Space said that session attendees included federal, state and local elected officeholders and government

officials, representatives from the telecommunications industry, economic development leaders and directors of Community Improvement Corporations and port authorities.

“They were fostering networks and relationships among these various segments,” he said. “We broke out into groups of 10 to 12 people and did a lot of brainstorming. Everything went better than expected.”

He said the next step is to compile the results and utilize that information in regard to other aspects of RENEW Ohio-18, such as agriculture, advanced energy and health care.

“The whole idea is to create a long-term plan for this region’s economic future,” Space said.

The groups will gather at a summit in May at Zanesville to report and move forward, he said.

Heinz Stucki, former director of the Tuscarawas County CIC, said after the meeting that “Congressman Space’s three points addressed the issues we need to address. I think everybody was very pleased that he’s taking the initiative on broadband, which is a critical issue for the region. He’s to be commended for taking that on because there are areas within the 18th District that have less access to broadband than we do in Tuscarawas County. Also, even though many places within the district have broadband access, it’s more expensive than for urban areas, and that puts us at a disadvantage when it comes to attracting businesses.”

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