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Ceremony set to kick-off broadband project

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VAN WERT - Last summer, Com Net, Inc. was awarded \$30 million in stimulus funds (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) as a part of their \$43 million broadband project that was designed to add 700 miles of fiber to its high capacity network. The program is part of the GigE Plus Availability Coalition that plans on expanding broadband services to 28 Western Ohio Counties.

That plan takes its first concrete steps on Thursday June 16 at Wayne Trace High School at a ceremony to celebrate the beginning of work on the GigEPAC project. The Com Net portion will extend from Butler and Warren counties in the south the Michigan state line and east to Seneca County. This includes Van Wert, Paulding, Putnam, Mercer and Allen counties.

The program will provide connectivity to their high capacity network for up to 880 community institutions including schools, state and local government offices, libraries and support agencies. The goal is to allow affordable broadband access for consumers and businesses, spurring investments in these communities to increase business involvement and employment. At the time of the award last July, 20 of the 28 counties had unemployment rates higher than the state average.

Com Net plans on working with other Middle Mile partners to expand broadband access across Ohio. Last year the company's existing fiber system went through Lima, Delphos, Ottawa and Van Wert locally. Proposed fiber lines would include from the Van Wert city limits to Ohio City and on to Rockford. It would also go west to Convoy before turning north to Payne. Lines running through rural areas would have splice points every mile, allowing residents living outside the cities and villages to have access as well. At a point yet to be determined, a Last Mile project would provide access to broadband to residences too far off the fiber path to connect with this project.