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**Ballroom with a Twist**  
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## Broadband project moves to construction phase

By ED GEBERT  
Times Bulletin News Writer

An effort to bring broadband Internet service to the area officially kicked off on Thursday with a ceremony at Wayne Trace High School. Com Net, Inc. has begun burying fiber optic cable which will connect schools, businesses and others in rural areas via high-speed network to the worldwide web.

"Today's celebration marks the beginning of construction on 700 miles of fiber optic plant that will connect with existing facilities of Com Net and its partners to create the backbone of a new, highly-survivable, broadband infrastructure that will serve as an enabler for economic development throughout the region," stated Com Net CEO Tim Berelsman.

Crews Thursday afternoon were already at work near the intersection of U.S. 127 and St. Rd. 114, burying the fiber. The GigE Plus project itself carries a \$43 billion price tag, but \$30 million of the cost was picked up by the federal government through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act last year. Com Net, in partnership with OARnet, Zayo Bandwidth and 33 last mile service providers came together to apply for the stimulus dollars that are making the project possible.



Wayne Trace Local Schools Superintendent Steve Arnold speaks during the celebration of the beginning of construction of Com Net, Inc.'s broadband project. The project will open up more areas in the region to high speed internet service.  
(Times Bulletin/Ed Gebert)

Berelsman stressed the value of broadband in economic development. "There is a megasite industrial site in Van Wert," he shared. "We'll be going right in front of the industrial site, setting access points so we will have made that industrial site in Van Wert fiber-ready. And we plan on doing that at other industrial sites as we go throughout the state because that is one of the first things businesses ask nowadays: 'Do you have rail? Do you have road transportation? Do you have fiber connectivity or

high-speed fiber?" What we're doing is allowing the communities to say 'Yes we do.' That will draw businesses into the area, or present the opportunity to locate in this area."

The celebration was hosted by Wayne Trace since that school is the first institution that will be connected by this project. New Wayne Trace Superintendent Steve Arnold said this will be a welcome addition because the school has often lost service due to the weather. "In addition to not having downtime, fiber will allow for faster speeds and greater bandwidth -- two necessities needed to provide the best 21st Century education possible," Arnold stated.

The GigE Plus project is designed to provide connectivity for community anchor institutions like schools, and offices of state and local government, public safety, and community support organizations and public libraries. This will in turn open the network to others connection through local Internet service providers in Van Wert, Paulding and surrounding counties.

NOACSC Executive Director Ray Burden was particularly excited about the opportunity for local schools. "This levels the playing field for school districts to provide such a great opportunity, to add that Internet access," he stated.

Along with local partners in the project, a representative from the office of Sen. Sherrrod Brown was present on Thursday to congratulate the group on reaching the construction phase. "High speed broadband access is critical for economic development and job growth," wrote Brown. "Thanks to economic development funds, this broadband access platform will help bring jobs and business investment to western Ohio."

In all, the GigE Plus project will connect persons in 20 counties in western Ohio with broadband service.