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Kasich announces broadband expansion

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Shawnee State University's broadband capabilities will take a big step forward later this year thanks to the expansion of OARnet (Ohio Academic Resources Network) in southern Ohio.

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Gov. John Kasich announced Thursday that Shawnee State University will be included in phase two of the OARnet expansion. Made possible with the support of Kasich, Representative Terry Johnson, and Senate President Tom Niehaus, SSU President Rita Rice Morris said the inclusion means an increase in Shawnee State's bandwidth capacity from its current 1 gigabyte to an eventual 100 gigabyte capacity, aiding in increased research capabilities, advancements with high-tech areas such as gaming simulation, and economic development.

Kasich said State Rep. Terry Johnson raised this issue, saying southern Ohio didn't get an interstate highway, but broadband is the 21st century interstate, and southern Ohio should get that.

"So I want to give Terry a lot of credit for raising this issue," Kasich said.

Kasich's announcement was received with enthusiasm at SSU.

"This is a game changer for Shawnee State -- and our entire region," Morris said. "SSU will work to partner with area educational institutions and health facilities for research. We are still learning what opportunities will be made possible with this outstanding resource, but we are already thinking of the possibilities for our immersive gaming program and its potential impact. With greater broadband width, paths could be opened for more entrepreneurship for students and faculty, for instance. "

Kasich said John Conley, chief of P-20 Educational Technology for the Ohio Board of Regents, was in his office with a map of Ohio showing most areas of the state connected -- areas such as Columbus,

Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton and Toledo, and, by June, Akron, Youngstown and Athens -- but something was missing.

"And I said, 'why do we not have Portsmouth connected? Why aren't we upgrading them to this really high-speed stuff,'" Kasich said. "We should just put a little more money in there and get this thing done."

Kasich said all the bids for installation of OARnet came in low, leaving money to add Shawnee State University.

"We basically scoped this out and added on what the additional cost would be to come on down to Portsmouth, and what this means to Shawnee State or other research institutions such as Southern Ohio Medical Center is what they are going to be able to transmit," Conley said. "Shawnee State University is fifth in the country in gaming and engineering degrees. They have a fabulous facility over there. Dr. Morris has done a great job at Shawnee State, and they have the lowest tuition in Ohio over there too. So I really think it's going to be an economic engine where researchers come to campus at Shawnee State and work with business partners in the area to come up with products using this technology and create jobs in Ohio. That's the key."

Kasich said OARnet in southern Ohio is a big deal that has the potential to transform the area.

The network's capacity enables Ohioans to conduct research, schoolchildren to take virtual field trips across the state and around the world, and doctors to seek second opinions on critically ill patients.

As an eligible participant in the OARnet Network, Shawnee State University will be able to extend access to this technology to private businesses that are sponsored by SSU.

"We want to use this exceptional resource of increased broadband width to maximize economic opportunities for SSU and southern Ohio," Morris said. "In the coming weeks, we will be exploring ways to work toward that goal under the leadership of our Board of Trustees and working closely with the Board of Regents and OARnet."

The expected OARnet expansion will take place later this year. Shawnee State University will be included in the second phase of the project with increased capacity expected to be available at some point in 2013.

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