

IT Planning and Mini Grant Program 2004-2005

Hartington organizes eBay project

Hartington is taking an intergeneration approach to technology-related development. The technology committee surveyed students from Hartington Public and Cedar Catholic High Schools as well as the general public. The surveys revealed some interesting differences between high school students and the general public. Cedar Catholic and Hartington Public students are far more likely to chat online (85% and 75% respectively) than the general public (40%) and to listen to music online (77% and 78% respectively) than the general public (34%).

The technology committee involved both youth and seniors in a community eBay project. Local residents put record albums, vintage magazines, a Smith Corona typewriter and other items on eBay to raise money for local technology projects. The project has also generated interest in using eBay. Fifteen people attended a hands-on workshop demonstrating how to sell items on eBay.

A partnership between the Hartington Public Library, University of Nebraska Extension in Cedar County, Hartington Economic Development, and the Community Information Technology Committee has been formed to provide technology training in the community.

Community Champions: Mike Becker, Hartington Telecommunications and Jane Armstrong, University of Nebraska Extension

Cuming County redesigns Web site

With assistance from a Technologies Across Nebraska IT Planning Mini Grant, Cuming County Clerk Bonnie Vogltance solicited citizen input on e-government services.

“We wanted to make the Cuming County Web site more user-friendly and to find out what specific items residents would want to find and use,” said Patty Schinstock, who is working as a consultant to Cuming County on their Web site redesign. “Participants included mayors, county supervisors, school officials, village board members, and residents.”

There was widespread agreement that the Cuming County Web site should be used to promote economic development and tourism and should link to community pages. Communities also realized that it was important for them to keep their sites updated. Additional economic development links, a community calendar, and a search option will be added to the redesigned Cuming County Web site. Seasonal pictures will be

featured on the site, helping to publicize local events and depicting county life. A list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) will be developed for each office. Fillable forms will also be made available. Nebraska.gov is working with Cuming County on the redesign.

Community Champions: Bonnie Vogltance, Cuming County Clerk; Patty Schinstock, Consultant; and Carroll Welte, University of Nebraska Extension

NCDA, JAGWireless partner to bring broadband to Nemaha County

Thanks to the efforts of the Nemaha County Development Association (NCDA), nearly all residents and businesses in Nemaha County will soon have broadband available to them. The Nemaha County Development Association had talked to a number of service providers about providing broadband service over the past 5 years. NCDA's first effort involved collecting the names of Auburn residents and businesses interested in subscribing to DSL and presenting the list to the local telephone company. Satisfied that there was sufficient demand in Auburn, the telephone company began providing DSL.

Over the years NCDA continued its efforts to work with providers. In 2004, NCDA began discussions with JAGWireless to provide service to rural Nemaha County. Funding and assistance through Technologies Across Nebraska's IT Planning and Mini Grant and the Nebraska Public Service Commission's Nebraska Internet Enhancement Fund aided NCDA in their efforts. JAGWireless put up a Web site with information about their planned wireless broadband service. NCDA publicized the site and encouraged residences and businesses interested in subscribing to register at the Web site. JAGWireless broadband service is expected to be available in Nemaha County in early 2006.

Community Champions: Jed Wagner, Kris Rogge, and T.O. Davison, Nemaha County Development Association

Buffalo County finds majority of businesses have Web presence

The Buffalo County Technology Committee developed a survey to assess the county's information technology (IT) resources and needs. The survey was administered in partnership with the University of Nebraska at Kearney to collect information from Buffalo County businesses. The survey showed that most of the responding businesses have Internet access and 72% have a Web presence. Three out of four businesses consider information technology more than a minor component of their businesses. Over 70% of the respondents indicated that providing access to training opportunities would help meet their needs. Over half of respondents replied that the training they need is in basic skills. The survey also revealed that many small businesses believe that information technology is their greatest asset but also the greatest barrier to their growth. The survey indicated that cost is the greatest obstacle to maximizing the use of IT for 47% of the respondents. These numbers, and other facts

garnered from the survey, suggest that businesses in Buffalo County are using technology but not at the level required to be competitive in the information age.

The following activities have been identified by the Buffalo County Technology Committee to meet the needs highlighted by the survey results:

- Promotion of technology group activities
- Telecommunications infrastructure analysis
- Completion of community asset inventory
- Networking opportunities for information technology professionals
- Partnership development
- Workforce development
- Programming
- Identification of potential funding sources for plan activities

The technology committee has met to discuss how to implement the plan.

Community Champions: Cindy Houlden, The Economic Development Council of Buffalo County ; and Bryan Kuntz, Intellicom Computer Consulting

Cheyenne County explores online mall

The Cheyenne County Technology Committee conducted a community technology survey. The survey found that nearly three-quarters of the households have a computer in their home and most (90%) are connected to the Internet. Forty-three percent of the Internet households subscribe to broadband.

There is significant interest in computer training. Forty-two percent of the households are interested in taking a course on using the Internet.

The survey also revealed that citizens and businesses are interested in accessing local government information and services online. The most often requested local government services and information include local maps; property tax appraisals; list of available city/county programs and service providers; community calendar; land use, zoning maps, and ordinances; local business directory; ordinances; permits, forms, and applications; and recreational services and costs.

Nearly all (98%) businesses use computers. Only eight percent of businesses with computers do not connect to the Internet. Approximately 80 percent of the businesses with Internet access, subscribe to broadband.

Nearly 60% of businesses have a Web site. Most of the businesses with a Web site (95%) use it for informational purposes. Only 45% use their Web site for taking orders and selling products. Businesses with Web sites are experiencing benefits, including increased communication with customers (72%); gaining additional customers (67%); increased total sales (39%); improved competitive position (37%); reduced costs per unit sold (7%); and increased sales outside the United States (7%).

One-third of the businesses are interested in an online shopping mall for businesses in Cheyenne County.

Based on the results of the survey, the Cheyenne County Technology Committee is exploring the development of an online shopping mall. An e-commerce workshop has also been scheduled for mid-November.

Community Champion: Connie Hancock, University of Nebraska Extension

Wireless broadband comes to Chappell

A year ago, Chappell did not have access to broadband service. A group of community members, led by a local lawyer with assistance from a University of Nebraska Extension Educator, formed a group to address this issue. The group entered into discussions with a wireless Internet service provider and applied for funding from the Nebraska Public Service Commission's Nebraska Internet Enhancement Fund and from Technology Across Nebraska's IT Planning and Mini Grant Program. Another wireless Internet service provider began providing service in Chappell. The group renegotiated their grant application with the Public Service Commission and used their funding to provide receivers for members of the community through a lottery. A total of 35 receivers were distributed. City and county entities received five units at no charge. Thirty residents selected via a lottery system received receivers for the discounted price of \$50. The receivers are normally \$350 each. Residents pay the usual \$25 monthly fee for Internet access. The provider is giving the city and county entities free access.

The Chappell technology committee also conducted a community technology survey. The survey, which was conducted before the free receivers were distributed, revealed that over two-thirds of the households responding to the survey have a computer in their home, and most of those computers are connected to the Internet. Less than one-quarter of the households with a computer and Internet access subscribed to broadband at the time of the survey. In comparison, forty-three percent of the computer households surveyed in neighboring Cheyenne County during the same time period subscribed to broadband.

Most businesses (85%) use computers. Only four percent of the businesses with computers do not connect to the Internet. Approximately 58 percent of the businesses with an Internet connection subscribe to broadband. Just over one-third of the businesses have a Web site. Most of the businesses with a Web site (82%) use it for informational purposes. Only 27% of businesses with a Web site used it for taking orders and selling products. Businesses with a Web site have experienced benefits, including increased communication with customers (89%), improved competitive position (44%), additional customers (33%), increased total sales (33%), and increased sales outside the United States (11%).

There is significant interest in computer training. Forty-six percent of the households are interested in taking a course on using the Internet. Most residents would like to see county and city information available online, including a community calendar; land use, zoning maps, and ordinances; local maps; permits, forms and applications; and property tax appraisals.

The Chappell technology committee has responded to the needs identified in the survey. The University of Nebraska Extension offered a Master Navigator class this fall and another is being planned. Training sessions on using the Internet and e-government are being planned for local officials. An e-commerce workshop will be held in Sidney in November.

Community Champions: Joel Jay, Attorney At Law; Carla Mahar, University of Nebraska Extension; Connie Hancock, University of Nebraska Extension

Seward Memorial Library trains 575

Seward conducted a technology survey in 2004. The survey found that 79% of households have a computer in their home and 88% of the households with computers have Internet access. Over one-half (69%) of the Internet households still connect using a dial-up connection.

Most residents are interesting in accessing county and city information online, including a community calendar; list of available city/county programs and service providers; permits, forms, and applications, city/county land use, zoning maps, and ordinances, property tax appraisals, city/county meeting schedules/agendas/minutes, and city/county ordinances. There is also interest in computer training. Twenty-six percent of respondents indicated that they would participate in local computer training.

Nearly all businesses (98%) use computers in their businesses. All but one of the businesses with computers have Internet access. Most businesses with Internet access have broadband connections. Only 11 percent of businesses with Internet access connect via dial-up modem. Sixty-seven percent of the businesses have a Web site. Sixteen percent of the businesses with Web sites are selling goods and services directly via their Web sites. Businesses with Web sites are experiencing benefits, including increased communications with customers (79%); gaining additional customers (72%); improved competitive position (55%); expanded market of customers (48%); increased business profits (41%); increased total sales (35%); reduced costs per unit sold (31%); and increased sales outside the United States (28%).

Based on responses to the survey, the Seward Memorial Library offered three classes a week on a variety of topics including how to use a computer, using e-mail, searching Web sites, digital photography, making greeting cards, and using the IRS Web site to find tax information and prepare taxes. The classes were offered 112 times with 27 different topics totaling 575 participants. An 11 week e-agriculture class was offered. Ten farmers and their spouses participated in the program. After participating in the class, three of the farmers switched from dial-up Internet access to wireless broadband access. One is now controlling his center pivot remotely using a PDA. Several developed spreadsheet applications for their farming operation.

Connect Seward, the organization operating a local portal, offered to develop a Web site for a local business for free. The Web site will serve as a demonstration to the business community. The Web site for Chapters Bookstore is expected to be completed by November 15.

Seward County is also focusing on e-government. After officials in Seward County completed the University of Nebraska Access eGovernment program, they developed a list of e-government Web sites that they liked and why they like them. The officials, with the assistance of University of Nebraska Extension Educator Dennis Kahl, showed the sites to city officials, local business owners, and other members of the communities. The meetings with community members created interest in e-government in the counties and led to the development of Web portal committees. An intern from the University of Nebraska began working on the portal last summer. The portal is scheduled to be completed by January 15, 2006.

Community Champions: Dennis Kahl, University of Nebraska Extension; Jean Jones, Concordia College

Lessons Learned

Local technology development is hard work. Community technology planning and development is hard work and requires the commitment of dedicated and energetic community leaders.

Most households have computers and Internet access. Relatively few households subscribe to broadband, however. Committees in Cheyenne County, Deuel County, and Seward County used similar surveys and methodologies, making it easier to compare their results. The Cheyenne and Deuel County surveys were conducted during the same time period in 2005. The Seward County data was obtained in 2004.

County	% of households with computers	% of computer households with Internet access	% of Internet households with broadband	% of broadband households
Cheyenne (2005)	72%	90%	43%	28%
Deuel (2005)	69%	88%	23%	14%
Seward (2004)	79%	88%	31%	22%

There is demand for basic computer training. Community surveys in Cheyenne County, Deuel County, and Seward County found that between one-quarter and one-half of households are interested in participating in computer training. The Seward Memorial Library had over 500 participants in computer training classes in just one year.

There is growing demand for online community and local government information and services. Surveys in Seward, Deuel, and Cheyenne Counties indicated strong interest in obtaining community and local government services and information online.

Most businesses have computers and have broadband access. In Cheyenne and Seward Counties, 985 of businesses have computers and at least 80% of businesses have broadband access. Deuel County has fewer businesses using computers (85%) and fewer with broadband access (58%).

County	% of Businesses with Computers	% of Businesses with Broadband
Cheyenne (2005)	98%	80%
Deuel (2005)	85%	58%
Seward (2004)	98%	89%

Many businesses have a Web presence and are experiencing benefits from the Internet. There is a wide range in the percentage of businesses with a Web presence. Just barely one-third of businesses in Deuel County have a Web presence. Over sixty-percent of businesses in Cheyenne and Seward Counties have Web sites. Using a different survey format, Buffalo County found that 72% of its businesses had a Web presence.

County	% of Businesses with Web sites	% of Web Businesses Gaining Customers	% of Web Businesses Increasing Sales	% of Web Businesses Increasing Sales Outside U.S.
Cheyenne (2005)	60%	67%	39%	7%
Deuel (2005)	34%	33%	33%	11%
Seward (2004)	67%	72%	35%	28%