

MVTV

Wireless provider hopes to grow in rural Southwest Minnesota

Wireless Internet access may be something people in towns take for granted these days. But many rural areas in southwest Minnesota have continued to lag behind.

To help meet the growing technological infrastructure needs of the rural regions, MVTV Wireless is expanding its reach.

Based in the Granite Falls area, MVTV has been providing wireless Internet to rural areas in west-central Minnesota for over a decade. Now, thanks to funds received through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, MVTV has embarked on a \$1.4 million project to expand its reach into much of southwest Minnesota.

MVTV President Daniel Richter noted the project was three years in the works but money received from the federal government gave the project a jolt.

“About three years ago, Bob Turner, Kjell Turner and Lucan Community TV contacted me and knew we had some tower sites in Granite Falls and the surrounding area,” Richter said. “The city of Windom was getting out of tower maintenance and ownership. Bob suggested we could offer broadband wireless Internet off one of those towers. We met with the City and negotiated a purchase of the tower. The city had done the fiber-to-the-home project here and didn’t need the tower anymore.

“MVTV’s board decided it made sense to come down here. We’ve been a rural television provider for 50 years. In the 1990s we got into providing the Internet to rural areas. We wanted to go where high-speed Internet wasn’t—in the rural area. That’s always been our target market.”

Richter noted that the ARRA specifically targeted broadband projects for unserved or underserved areas.

“Now, the terms unserved or underserved does not mean there aren’t Internet service providers out there,” Richter said. “What’s happening is people need higher speeds. We built our system as an open architecture. We can continue to add equipment. The equipment we had 11 years ago still works fine, but there have been more advances in equipment.”



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ACCESS POINTS like this one have been installed in the Windom and Jeffers areas to transmit high-speed wireless signals.

MVTV put together a four-project area, with the rural areas around Windom covering the largest chunk of that region at 4,000 square miles. MVTV installed six new base stations in Granite Falls, New London, Spicer, Windom, Jeffers and Wabasso.

From those base stations, an additional 34 access points will be installed bringing MVTV’s total reach to 100 access points and nearly 20,000 square miles of rural area.

The goal is simple: bring high-speed Internet to people who haven’t had it before or whose current Internet access isn’t fast enough to meet their growing Internet needs.

“What we’re finding is that many people in rural areas do not have access that is fast enough for what they want or need the Internet for,” Richter said. “For example, Netflix is the biggest promoter of downloading movies at home off a broadband connection. Typically, you need a connection of 1.5 megs per second to download video. If people want to send pictures or take online classes, a lot of those run on a minimum of 768 kilobytes or preferably 1.5 megs. When we first started 11 years ago, a 256K connection was fast compared to a 28.8K dial-up connection. Today, it’s not nearly fast enough because of how people use the Internet. Almost overnight, the need for more bandwidth has grown.”

MVTV uses fourth-generation Alvarion Wi-Max technology, which maximizes signal strength and receiver capability.

A box installed on the customer’s



JOEL ALVSTAD 11/17 MVTV 003

KJELL TURNER (left) and Daniel Richter (right) show one of the Alvarion Wi-Max receivers that will help rural customers receive wireless high-speed Internet access.

home would receive the wireless signal from the base station. A single wire will carry that signal inside, either to a router or directly to a computer.

With a high-speed MVTV connection, farmers will be able to follow live markets, students can take online classes and more rural people can work from their homes. That’s what makes the Internet tomorrow’s most-important infrastructure.

MVTV is a non-profit 501C4 corporation.

“We do not pay dividends and do not have a return on investments,” Richter said. “The money we receive pays our bills and goes toward expanding our system. We’re doing this to help whatever areas we’ve gotten to. The rural community hasn’t been the first to the market because it’s spread out.

“Only about 8% of the population of the United States does not have high-speed Internet, but it’s almost all in rural areas. We were awarded this funding through the ARRA because rural areas in southwest Minnesota were deemed unserved or underserved.”

MVTV offers a variety of packages, depending on a customer’s Internet needs.

MVTV has also brought on Kjell Turner as a local authorized representative. Richter noted that Turner will continue to run his own business but will be on call for customer service requests and set-ups.

“We sent out post cards to most everyone in the area,” Richter said. “We have an online subscription form. We have customer service representatives at our office and anyone wanting to sign up can contact us and we’ll forward those requests to Kjell and he will contact people to set up a time.”

Richter added that MVTV is excited about expanding into the Windom area.

“We’re adding about another third to our existing system and we’re very excited about getting this project underway. Everything is ready to go. This is the new infrastructure and it’s moving ahead for the rural area. We’re trying to make it easier for people to live and work outside of cities. That’s what we’re all about.”