



## **Connected Tennessee**

<http://www.starhq.com/news/html/news/articles/articles.asp?day=Thursday&article=nw-connectenn.html>

BY Steve Burwick  
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High-speed Internet is becoming a reality for more people in unreached areas of Tennessee including Carter County, thanks to the efforts of Connected Tennessee and local officials who see the need to fill the gaps with a widespread broadband network.

Alyson Sumerford, state operations manager for Connected Tennessee, spoke about the benefits of having a broadband network which provides access to the Internet during a meeting Wednesday at the Elizabethton-Carter County Chamber of Commerce.

Sumerford said Carter County has some unserved and underserved pockets in rural locations, but added that the number of households is relatively low in those areas that are not served. Providers base their service on the need expressed in an area, and the cost considerations of providing that service.

Carter County is currently served via DSL (digital subscriber line) by CenturyLink, cable modem by Charter Communications and Comcast Corporation and via fixed wireless by Planet Connection Internet. Mobile wireless providers include AT&T, Sprint, U.S. Wireless and Verizon Wireless. Satellite providers HughesNet and Wildblue are also available in Carter County, though they are not as affordable as fixed broadband providers.

Only about 70 percent of county residents (including residents of Elizabethton) own a computer, and about 61 percent have Internet service at home. Of those, only about 31 percent have broadband service.

The Carter County eCommunity Leadership Team has identified nine sectors in which it has outlined plans for greater broadband availability: agriculture; business and industry; community-based organizations; government; health care; higher education; K-12 education; libraries and tourism; and recreation and parks. Team membership comes from each of those sectors. Three priority projects are being looked into by the team: enhanced broadband awareness and access, enhanced access to computing facilities and technology training and downtown wireless Internet access.

Sumerford said a centrally-located resource offering public access to computers would be a good idea to focus on. A downtown wireless access location sponsored by local entities, which businesses could buy into, is another approach. She said security would

be a concern, along with other issues. Chamber Director Candy Craig said such as idea is currently being discussed.

Sumerford said the mountainous terrain in Carter and some of the surrounding counties presents challenges, but added that new technology enables previously unreached areas to obtain service.

"If you think you can serve people, it's just a matter of convincing a cell provider to provide enough bandwidth to serve that area, and they're going to get a return on their investment, " she explained.

Sumerford said most people who use the computers that are available at the public library are using the service either because they don't have Internet at home or the library offers more speed.

"It's pretty hard to fill out an application for a job or submit for unemployment or do anything on dial-up," said Sumerford.

In a 2008 report released by Connected Nation, CT's parent organization, it was stated that broadband expansion and adoption across the state could help create and retain more than 49,000 jobs, create more than \$1.6 million in direct income growth and also save residents on health care and gasoline costs (through telecommuting and online shopping for instance) and also cut CO2 emissions.

Connected Tennessee is an independent non-profit organization that develops and implements effective strategies for technology deployment, use and literacy in Tennessee. CT works in partnership with telecommunications and IT providers, public agencies, business and community leaders, researchers and universities.

For more information, visit [www.connectedtennessee.org](http://www.connectedtennessee.org). Inquiries may be made at [www.connectedtn.org/forms/broadbandinquiries/php](http://www.connectedtn.org/forms/broadbandinquiries/php).