

Press release



January 24, 2008

Provincial, municipal partnership brings central Alberta online

\$2.5 million grant will connect Mountain View County, local communities to the SuperNet

Central Alberta will be a place to grow, thanks to a partnership of eight central Alberta organizations and the Rural Alberta Development Fund (RADF). The Province announced Thursday that the South Central Rural Alliance will receive \$2.5 million in start up funding for their project "Finishing The Dream" - which will provide SuperNet connectivity to 13 central Alberta communities- including Mountain View County, Carstairs, Cremona, Didsbury, Olds and Sundre.

"Finishing the Dream provides us with a unique opportunity to transform our communities, to give our communities the tools we need to attract business and economic development, improve our quality of life, and create one of the most innovative and connected regions in Canada. With start-up support from Alberta's Rural Development Fund, rural communities like ours truly can be 'a place to grow'," says Doug Plamping, Chief Administrative Officer for Mountain View County.

Financial support from Rural Alberta's Development Fund will:

- Provide \$1.5 million towards the establishment of 13 Community Engagement Sites- public "hubs" for central Alberta community members to access programs, services and courseware through videoconferencing or other broadband learning applications.
- Provide \$1 million towards the establishment of the Olds Extended Community Engagement Site- a program delivery hub connecting all Community Engagement Sites to the Bell e-learning Centre - a Community Learning Campus facility located at Olds College.
- Support the assessment of the project and transferability to other rural communities.

Jim Gibbons, Superintendent of Schools for the Chinook's Edge School Division, says the Community Engagement Sites will allow schools throughout the region to be able to participate in the same educational opportunities as those enjoyed by students in larger centres. "It also allows parents and the community to learn alongside our students, as they're facilities that are available to all of the public."

The funding announcement is the culmination of 18 months of work on the project by the South Central Rural Alliance- a partnership including Mountain View County, the Towns of Olds and Carstairs, the Community Learning Campus, Olds College, Chinook's Edge School Division, Sunchild eLearning Community and the Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development.

Executive Director of the Community Learning Campus Dot Negropontes says the size of the collaborative effort was definitely a positive for the group in their efforts to acquire funding from the Rural Alberta Development Fund. "I think it's very clear that it's going to be beneficial to the region, and the Province sees it as a model that can be emulated throughout Alberta."

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Backgrounder

Finishing The Dream

The Community Engagement Site (CES) concept is the result of the efforts of the Community Learning Campus (CLC), a joint venture of Chinook’s Edge School Division and Olds College, to address the CLC vision of personalizing success for all learners in their home community. Community Engagement Sites provide the “next mile” of the SuperNet build, providing connectivity to rural communities by giving them a public site in their community where they can access broadband technology and learning applications. The concept was founded on the following principles:

The Community Engagement Sites will establish “service hubs” in 12 other communities where people can access broadband technology, learning applications and support. The Community Engagement Sites will provide not only on-site access to services, technologies and support but would also act as the catalyst for community members to learn about the opportunities broadband access can provide, get used to the technology, and begin to develop a “culture of use” in communities throughout the region. Development of these Community Engagement Sites will be dependent on community needs, the availability of facilities, and the availability of resources.

The Olds Extended Community Engagement Site being connected to the Bell e-learning Centre – a Community Learning Campus facility located at Olds College, and acting as the program delivery hub for the network of Community Engagement Sites will be developed continually throughout the project, with expansion required as each element of the system comes on line.

The following sequence is initially proposed:

Sequence	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Community Engagement Sites	Bowden	Elnora	Carstairs
	Cremona	Penhold	Didsbury
	Delburne	Spruceview	Innisfail
	Red Deer	Sundre	Sylvan Lake / Benalto
OECEs	Program Delivery Hub developed at the Olds Extended Community Engagement Site		

Community Engagement Sites

Each Community Engagement Site will have purposefully designed and equipped space that supports eLearning, one-to-one interviews, and community dialogue and innovation.

This purpose-built space will require at a minimum:

- Group space (30-40 m2)
- Break-out and private space (10-20 m2)
- Improved lighting and acoustics
- School and community, business and industry access (extended hours)

The space will be scalable to include a larger group space or several break-out and private spaces depending on the needs of the community.

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This space will be supported by the following technology:

- Permanent mount video conferencing cameras
- Document camera
- Smart Board and supporting technologies
- Printer/scanner
- DVD player
- Multiple Monitors (plasma flat screens)
- Dedicated PC to manage technologies
- Learner /user laptops or computers
- Telephone/speakerphone/ video-conferencing IP phone
- Motorized screens (one non-reflecting)
- Wall to ceiling whiteboards
- Nomadic work stations with laptop hook-up
- Track lighting

Within each Community Engagement Site, a Self Serve Labour Market Resource Centre will be available with Labour Market Information core publications displayed on two display units. A computer dedicated to employment and training will be available to users.

Partners

The South Central Rural Alliance proposal is grounded in strong community support. The ideas have been developed, discussed and expanded by community members, starting as early as 2002 when the Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development was established and began its initial work developing an ICT strategy for the Olds community. Starting in 2004, Olds College and the Chinook's Edge School Division began a unique partnership to establish a ground-breaking Community Learning Campus combining a Core High School, an eLearning Core, a Health and Wellness Facility, and a Fine Arts / Multi-Media Centre on the Olds College campus.

Since those early beginnings, the partnership and community support has grown to include the following key stakeholders:

- Mountain View County
- Town of Olds
- Town of Carstairs
- Olds College
- Chinook's Edge School Division
- Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development (partners include Olds College, Town of Olds, Olds and District Chamber of Commerce, Olds Agricultural Society)
- Community Learning Campus
- Sunchild eLearning Community

Additional supporters for this project include: David Thompson Health Region, Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (Partnerships and Central Region), Central Alberta Economic Partnership, communities in both Red Deer County and Mountain View County, Business Link, Red Deer College, University of Calgary, eCampus Alberta, the Central Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortium, the Olds and District Chamber of Commerce and a wide range of individual businesses.

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