



Updates

October 2007

The Official, Periodic E-Newsletter of Connect Arkansas

Connect Arkansas: A Delivery Platform Neutral Entity – and more!

On March 28, 2007, Governor Mike Beebe signed the *Connect Arkansas Broadband Act* into law to expand broadband infrastructure throughout Arkansas. The legislation paved the way to make internet access and usage available to all Arkansans. Connect Arkansas, a 501(c)(3) private, non-profit organization, was formed to implement this plan and progress is actively underway.

Words such as “delivery platform neutral” may sound unusual, but the concept is clear. Connect Arkansas will work with all internet service providers to accomplish its two initial objectives:

1. To prepare Arkansas residents and businesses to maximize the benefits available through broadband use.
2. To make broadband service readily accessible in every home and business throughout our state.

Stay connected. The journey is just beginning...

Welcome

Welcome to the inaugural edition of Updates, the official newsletter of Connect Arkansas. We will provide a new edition periodically to keep you informed on Arkansas’s development and progress in delivering broadband service to all homes and businesses in the state. Broadband has incredible benefits and creates opportunities for personal and business users alike.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to each of you who contribute to our organization’s success. As public, private, and educational sector partners working together, we have had, and will continue to have, a very positive impact on both the short-term and long-term futures of our state.

While Connect Arkansas is still relatively unknown, we hope to make it a well-known and easily integrated resource as we steer Arkansas into the fast lane of the worldwide information highway.

C. Sam Walls
President of Connect Arkansas

The truth is in the numbers

Did you realize that Arkansas ranks:

49th among online states in online populations?

47th in deployment of broadband telecommunications?

23rd in deployment of Information Technology (IT) in public schools?

Entrepreneur Spotlight: Mack's Prairie Wings

A story of the internet and rural Arkansas



In the 1930's, M. T. "Mack" McCollum, the owner of McCullum's Hardware Store, noticed that duck hunters were coming to Stuttgart, Arkansas and the surrounding area to hunt. More importantly, he noticed that when the hunters came, they needed gear – and lots of it. Since then, "Mack" has continued to capitalize on this trend and thus began the roots of what is now called Mack's Prairie Wings - a 104,000 square foot building, of which 32,000 is retail showroom space. Located in Stuttgart (the "Rice and Duck Capital of the World"), Mack's Prairie Wings is world renowned and is often referred to as "The Waterfowl Mecca." For the last seven years, Mack's has also been the Number 1 Winchester Steel Shot dealer in the world.

While the large retail storefront accounts for a large part of their total sales, much of Mack's growth began in 1993 with the addition of its catalog business. That year, more than 2.4 million catalogs were mailed out.

In 1997, Mack's business model evolved to include internet shopping through their website at www.mackspw.com. "When we added the website, it was not integrated into our inventory system," Mack's Executive Vice President Chuck Lock said. "You could view the product, order it, then we printed the order and we re-entered it into our system. There was no information about whether it was in inventory, delivery dates and such."

By 2002, Mack's decided that it was time for an upgrade and purchased new software that integrated the website orders with the inventory and management systems. While the sales continued to climb, Mack's continued to save more time and money. Today, their internet sales account for more than 23% of Mack's total sales. According to Lock, "We reduced the number of catalog copies down to 1.8 million and we anticipate that trend will continue."

"The internet is just part of my day because I have my computer on from the time I arrive in the morning until I leave at night," he said. "It makes it so much easier for retailers because the consumer has usually researched the product they want before they come into the store to get it. The educated consumer makes a more exact request, and that saves both of us time and money."

Mack's dedication to teaching the next generation the heritage of the outdoor sportsman has turned what was once a small retail store into a world renowned "Waterfowl Mecca." One thing is for sure, their presence via mail and on the web has been noticed.

Briefly Speaking

Broadband News Travels FAST

Connect Arkansas will bridge our state's digital divide – and lots of folks are excited. The Connect Arkansas team is traveling the state to meet with the more than 15 internet service providers. Large and small providers alike are encouraged to become a part of the effort to get the state "plugged in" to the internet.

Broadband Defined

Broadband commonly refers to high speed internet access. Broadband service transmits large amounts of data at much higher speeds than dial-up internet service. Arkansas's broadband service will provide internet access at a minimum of 384 kilobits in either direction.

Other Connect Arkansas Bulletins...

- Make plans today to attend the SouthEast ITT Conference on April 15 – 16, 2008 in North Carolina.
- Do you need a Connect Arkansas representative to meet with your organization? Do you have questions about the organization? Just give us a call at 1-800-216-7237 or 501-374-9247. You may contact us on the web at info@connect-arkansas.com.

Connecting with Connect Arkansas

Connect Arkansas will link broadband providers with local and regional communities. Development Phases 1 and 2 are underway at this time. They include:

Phase 1: Initiating Connect Arkansas – creating a legal entity; identifying, engaging and garnering support from stakeholder communities; facilitating the industry partner(s) collaboration.

Phase 2: Getting Connected – Starting eCommunities; collecting and creating preliminary maps using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to show where broadband is in use at this time.

Phases 3 and 4 involve the actual implementation of the strategies outlined by the new organization and all follow-up activities.

Bottomline: Broadband access and use in Arkansas will help every resident embrace the future in a positive way. Studies suggest that the broadband initiative has the potential to create 8,200 jobs and to add more than \$2.6 billion to the gross state product. Arkansas's towns, cities and regions can retain and strengthen their existing resources. Entrepreneurs in rural areas will have a worldwide marketplace. Parents can monitor their children's schoolwork. The benefits are unlimited!

Stay tuned for our next e-newsletter as we begin to define opportunities and areas of interest related to Connect Arkansas.