Clarenceville to go fiber-optic

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Media Specialist Irene Savage prepares to project an image from her Apple iBook laptop using the tech-cart at Grandview Elementary.

As soon as Clarenceville Schools gets permission to install fiber optic cable on Detroit Edison poles, many things will change in the district – not the least of which will be all its telephone numbers.

The change is just part of a detailed technology plan the district was required to submit to the State of Michigan. It was approved Thursday, just before Director of Technology Jim Phipps presented it to school board members. He explained the fiber optic cable will have the capacity to send video between school buildings, even though the district isn't set up for that yet.

"It's like laying a highway with six lanes instead of four, because you know you're going to need six eventually," he said.

Phipps gave a hands-on demonstration of new technology carts, one of which will be stationed in each of the district's four buildings. The cart contains a projector, video cassette recorder and speakers, so that teachers can hook up their laptop computers to make class presentations.

"Is that enough?" board chair Matt Boettcher asked of the supply.

"No, but it's a start," Phipps replied.

Any grants for which the district applies will be tied to the 30-page plan, which includes mission and vision statements, a description of technologies the district plans to acquire, projected costs and a timetable, as well as an outline of how the equipment and curriculum changes will be implemented.

The goal, Phipps said, is to integrate technology into every aspect of the curriculum, so there is no separate technology curriculum. Teachers will being working with English curriculum changes next fall; math and science will be delivered in the two succeeding years. Over the next three years, the district's operating system will be upgraded, along with software.

Eventually, grade books will be on-line, not for the general public but for teachers, to allow for automated grade reporting. Computer labs will be upgraded using Durant funds, which were gained through a lawsuit against the State over special education funding.

Phipps said the fiber optic and phone upgrades will be completed this school year, along with installation of an Internet firewall that would stop computer viruses before they got into individual computers. Next year, teacher voice mail will be fully implemented, so that staff members can connect with homework hotlines and building information boards.

Over the three-year plan, computers at the high school media center, middle school instructional lab and elementary schools will be upgraded. A series of cards will be created to help teachers integrate technology skills into their regular classroom lessons, Phipps said.

The biggest hurdle, he believes, will be funding. The district passed a technology bond in the summer of 1996, which provided funding for one computer lab at Botsford and Grandview Elementary Schools and two each at Clarenceville Middle and High Schools. Also, 10Mb fiber optic "backbones" were installed in each building.

"It was screamin' at the time," Phipps said of the system's capacity. The new system will have 10 times that speed.

Since 1996, the plan reports, the district's technology infrastructure has been upgraded very little. A District Wide Area Network was created, linking the four buildings, and larger capacity servers were installed as student need exceeded capacity. Each classroom now has at least one PC or Macintosh computer connected to the building network and the Internet.

Email was installed in 1998-99 and has been widely used by administration and staff members. The high school's television studio is also included in the technology plan, which proposes upgrades in 2005. The biggest issue, Phipps believes, will be funding. While Durant dollars and the district's Sinking Fund may be used, the plan suggests partnerships be struck within the community to provide for some technology needs. The budget for the plan totals about $921,000, spread almost equally over this school year and the next two.

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Disabled Botsford employee hit hard by cutbacks

BY PAUL R. PACE
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Bruce Reilly depends on transportation to get to his job.

Bruce Reilly would like to keep his job at Community EMS, a subsidiary of Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills.

But recent budget cuts to rectify a multi-million dollar deficit for the hospital will affect his ability to get to and from work.

And if he can't get to work, he'll be out of a job soon, he says.

Reilly uses a power-assisted wheelchair because he has muscular dystrophy. Through the hospital's free transportation for patients, he was able to pay a simple $1 daily fee to get a lift from his home in Commerce Township to his job entering data into computers.

The hospital's decision to cut the free customer transportation service in July in order to quell its massive budget deficit affects Reilly's ability to get to work.

The hospital is extending the service for him until the end of October, however.

So far, Reilly says, hospital management isn't interested in helping him reach a reasonable way to keep his job without being in the office.

He said he recently got the bad news in the form of a letter from Gerson Cooper, CEO of Botsford Health Care Continuum.

"I immediately raised a fuss after learning this and asked for an equitable amount to pay the company for the service," he said.

He said, the hospital quoted him $97.50 per day with an employee discount.

Such an expense would hardly make it worth going to work, he said.

Reilly said this price was cheap compared to other services in the area. Municipal van service doesn't reach into Commerce.

His personal modified van is used by his wife Pauline for her job during the day, he said.

"I have two children which complicates my situation since my oldest son is developmentally impaired and we only have someone assisting him in our home for a short time after school," said Reilly.

"I am not one to garner sympathy from people. I am uncomfortable with that," he said. "I am appalled at the lack of compassion and understanding shown me by a progressive caring health care provider. This provider is putting me out of a job."

The offer to work from home is also a possible solution, Reilly said, but management doesn't seem interested.

Botsford spokeswoman Nancy Dumas, said Reilly's rides to work and home were offered out of courtesy.

"He came to look at it as an entitlement," she said.

The $1 daily fee would not begin to cover the expense of the transportation service, Dumas added.

"My understanding is we offered him to change his hours to work around his wife's schedule," she said. "He prefers not to do that."

Reilly said because of his children, working outside his wife's job schedule is not a viable option.

"We really don't want to lose him," Dumas said. "We've extended (the transportation service) to help him find alternative transportation. We researched other transportation companies but he lives outside the range of most services."

She also said allowing Reilly to work at home "is not an option for this employee."

The Sept. 16 issues of Crain's Detroit magazine reported Botsford has also cut physicians and renegotiated contracts with insurance carriers, in order to deal with more than $14 million in operating losses anticipated this year.

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