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CONNECT SI EXPANDING BROADBAND ACCESS

BY MEAGAN SEXTON, THE SOUTHERN

MARION - Connect SI is expanding broadband communication throughout Southern Illinois. Officials with Man-Tra-Con (Management, Training, Consulting Corporation) of Marion and Southern Illinois University Carbondale have been working on significant regional economic approaches to develop and enhance opportunities for employment.

"We believe this (broadband) will be a key economic indicator for the creation of more jobs and businesses in this area," SIUC President Glenn Poshard said.

Connect SI representatives said they are trying to bring Southern Illinoisans together and open up job opportunities, which will help the regional economy.

Building the job market in the area also will offer solutions to issues with health care. The initiative is attempting to build a foundation for the future based on the region's shared assets and resources.

Broadband and high-speed Internet connectivity are among the most important building blocks of the initiative. Network providers also are very important to Connect SI.

Man-Tra-Con Director Kathy Lively said the initiative is spurring the growth of knowledge-based employment opportunities and enterprises in Southern Illinois through access to broadband Internet technology.

"The university is still going to be a driving force and because of the quality and specialized experience of the Man-Tra-Con staff, the collaborative momentum of Connect SI will continue to build," said Rex Duncan, executive director of Connect SI.

Brad Housewright, Heartland Communications general manager, who also serves as chairman of the network providers group, believes Internet service for rural areas in Southern Illinois will continue to grow and prosper. The initiative already has reached greater Wabash County and other small towns in the southeastern part of the state.

"This has grown to where we need additional manpower to be able to continue to build this effort,"



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Housewright said.

"We're committed to helping this initiative, which is about to ignite the spirit of Southern Illinois in a way that hasn't happened in a long, long time," Lively said.

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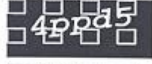
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