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HUGE NETWORK OF GIGABIT-READY SCHOOLS & LIBRARIES IN NW MN

New Contract for the Largest Regional Network of its Kind

Northwest MN, February 17, 2015—Over 120 schools and libraries in northwestern Minnesota have access to up to 10 Gigabit fiber-optic connections through a renewed contract between Northwest Minnesota Special Access (www.nwmnsa.com) and NWLINKS (www.region1.k12.mn.us/NWLINKS).

It's all due to a partnership of 18 independent telecom companies that have come together to create Northwest Minnesota Special Access (NMSA), designed specifically to serve the bandwidth needs of schools and libraries in the region. The result is a world-class network.

George Fish, NMSA Board President, said "Northwest Minnesota Special Access and its members are heavily invested in the local communities they serve. This network is a perfect example. Learning can take place effortlessly because we can handle any of their data needs—now and long into the future."

NMSA was formed to serve the consortium of schools and libraries called NWLINKS. NWLINKS members enjoy private network connectivity across the state, centralized support, and buying power to ensure appropriate bandwidth for their needs. NWLINKS members also benefit from the assistance of Region 1 in Moorhead when applying for grant funding, preparing E-rate applications, and more—saving each district time and money.

Bob Wheeler, NWLINKS Executive Director of Region 1, said, "There are a lot of advantages to this network." He added, "And frankly, having all 18 independent local telecoms do things together has been great."

Continued...

A Story of Opposites

In the digital divide story there are the 'have' and the 'have-nots' when it comes to technology access. Part of the digital divide story is that people in rural areas do not have access to the same quality data networks as their big-city counterparts. This is demonstrated by ventures like the Google Fiber projects, which connect only the most populated locations in metropolitan cities.

The population density issue is one of the biggest challenges in getting advanced services to rural communities, yet the members of NMSA have overcome those obstacles.

"It's a bit of a David and Goliath story. Our independent companies were created to specifically to serve these rural areas. We work hard and smart to create networks that rival any others—metropolitan or world-wide," says Fish.

So, although the digital divide is real for some, the opposite is true for these northwest Minnesota schools and libraries. They are able to purchase all the data they need and the network is ready today for virtually any future demands.

Ultimately, the advanced technology network and new contract, are a great win for the children and communities of northwest Minnesota.

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Northwest Minnesota Special Access, LLC, is a consortium of 18 Independent Local Exchange Carriers serving northwest Minnesota schools and libraries with ultra-fast broadband.

Members include Blackduck Telephone Company (Paul Bunyan Rural Telephone Cooperative); East Otter Tail Telephone Company (Arvig); Farmers Mutual Telephone Company; Federated Telephone Company; Garden Valley Telephone Company; Gardonville Telephone Company; Halstad Telephone Company; Loretel Systems, Inc. (Arvig); TDS Telcom; Midwest Telephone (Arvig); Paul Bunyan Rural Telephone Cooperative; Red River Telephone Company; Rothsay Telephone Company; Runestone Telephone Company; Twin Valley-Ulen Telephone Company (Arvig); Val-Ed (d.b.a. 702 Communications); Otter Com, Inc.; and Wikstrom Telephone Company.

Their 10 Gigabit network delivers Internet, video, and private network connectivity between participating schools and libraries allowing access to educational resources throughout the world. Geographically the network covers close to ¼ of the state, and over 250,000 users from over 140 schools and libraries (120 in the NWLINKS contract, and about 20 under direct contract with telcos) in Northwest Minnesota have access to the NMSA network each day.

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