

Grant would help purchase fiber optics to connect town

by **ROB METZLER**
Correspondent

The Town of Amherst plans on upgrading its computer networking capabilities to improve communication between various departments and has applied for a state grant to help ease the costs.

The new fiber-optic network would connect various town buildings to allow for faster communication among the locations, including Amherst Town Hall, the Harlem Road Community Center, Amherst Pepsi Center, the Police Department, Town Court and the Fire Control Office.

Jerry Galkiewicz, director of information technology for Amherst, said the biggest benefit to residents will be the long-term cost-effectiveness of the network.

"Fiber-optic networks can last from 20 to 40 years," Galkiewicz said, adding that the current seven-year-old wireless wide area network is becoming difficult to maintain and find replacement parts for. "The upgrade would also increase the speed that data

is shared by 300 times."

He said the resulting network would be much more reliable and provide faster data access to all connected departments."

Sweet Home School District, which pays \$35,000 a year for access to Time Warner Cable's network, would see substantial savings, said Thomas Miller, director of finance and plant services for the district.

He said owning the network instead of leasing it is more cost-effective over time.

"That \$35,000 net cost might drop to a few thousand dollars a year for maintenance of the wires," he added.

Some of the infrastructure for the project is already in place. Miller said his district worked with the State Department of Transportation to install conduits for the fiber-optic cable when the reconstruction of Sweet Home Road took place, creating an underground passage for the lines.

The University at Buffalo supported the project and has offered its own fiber-optic network as a bridge to some of the north-

ern areas of the network, said Frederick Wood, assistant director of community services for UB. He thinks the project has great potential for upgrading services in Amherst.

The public would see benefits from the improved network, including the possible inclusion of the libraries' databases and archives to helping solve

rush-hour traffic in the Village of Williamsville, he said.

"Some of the network could potentially control traffic signals on Main Street," Wood said.

Amherst, along with Sweet Home School District, the Village of Williamsville, Erie County and the Snyder Fire District, applied for the New York State Shared Municipal Services Incentives

Grant on Oct. 25.

The grant is designed to encourage cooperation and sharing of services between government agencies and funds 90 percent or up to \$200,000 of each party's costs. The projected cost of the upgrades is \$575,000, Galkiewicz said. The parties should know the status of the grant by the end of the year.

Pepsi Center *(Continued from page one)*

Center to generate additional revenue, which is why we try to stay in contact with USA Hockey and we bid on national tournaments and take part in USA Hockey-sponsored training sessions and trade shows," said Guzdek of changes taking place at the center in the past few years. "I believe this is why we have been successful obtaining two USA Hockey national tournaments in the next two years."

He estimates that those tournaments will provide \$3 million in economic impact to the area.

"The additional tournaments we are able to bring in not only generate revenue for the facility but provide an economic impact to the business community," he said. "The success of the Pepsi Center translates to success in our business community — hotels, food, shopping, gas, recreation."

While Guzdek foresees success, this past year brought some hardships to the center. Utility costs

increased \$123,000, and due to closures during the October storm, the center lost an estimated \$26,000. And when a compressor failed, the center had to spend \$20,000.

The center also endured increased utility costs during the hot summer to keep the three rinks frozen.

With all expenses and revenue calculated, Guzdek is happy with where the Pepsi Center stands nearing the end of the year.

"The recent success of the Pepsi Center is also due to the support of the local hockey and figure skating associations that call the Pepsi Center their home. Further, the employees have played a major role in the transformation as well," he said. "Together, with the support of all of the user groups, the Pepsi Center is on the road to fiscal stability."



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