

Muskoka Community Network



**Facilitating the implementation of
telecommunications solutions for the regions of
Muskoka and Almaguin**

2006 ANNUAL REPORT

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

September 27th, 2006

On behalf of the Muskoka Community Network (MCN), I am pleased to present the 2006 annual report.

This year has been a positive one for MCN with some tangible progress regarding our role as facilitator for improving our area's broadband infrastructure, education, and awareness.

This year FedNor chose MCN as a broadband champion for Muskoka and Almaguin. This ensures that we will be operational for approximately two years under this agreement.

Milestones this year have included laying the groundwork for improved broadband infrastructure, delivering education and awareness on technology, and providing a subsidy program to small and medium enterprises to acquire broadband through satellite.

MCN is also working to secure resources and take the lead in holding a technology conference in Muskoka. This conference would be designed to attract industry leaders and demonstrate what is possible, and thereby create a vision for the development of a more developed technology industry in Muskoka.

Our next major milestone will be funding approval for the roll-out of extended broadband infrastructure. This approval is critical for the development of our economy, and approval will result in an improved economic and social climate for Muskoka. We are optimistic we will acquire the investment to improve broadband infrastructure, but until that is confirmed there is no guarantee.

The next year looks promising as we continue our programs and services. Things are moving forward in a very positive way.

Regards,

Doug Beiers
MCN Chair

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

September 27th, 2006

It has been an exciting year at MCN. The changes in the environment have allowed MCN to resume operations and move into high gear. This required kick starting operations and setting up office systems and procedures, and hiring a project assistant.

Working to improve broadband connectivity and provide information and education on adopting and maximizing technology use is our core function at this time.

Additionally, MCN is working as a technology advocate which involves providing and acquiring information from stakeholders on a continual basis.

More specific information on the programs and services that MCN delivers is provided in this annual report, and we hope that you find it insightful.

Regards,

Rob McPhee
Executive Director

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Company Information

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MCN BOARD OF DIRECTORS	
Doug Beiers	Chairperson
John Finley	Treasurer
Ken Albrough	Secretary
Carmen Austrup	Director
Jim McLaughlin	Director
Marguerite Urban	Director
Doug Wilson	Director
Rob McPhee	ExOfficio

MCN STAFF	
Rob McPhee	Executive Director/Program Manager
Laurie Hutcheson	Project Assistant

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Executive Summary

Muskoka Community Network (MCN) is a not-for-profit organization facilitating the implementation of telecommunications solutions for the regions of Muskoka and Almaguin by working with, and forming partnerships with both the public and private sector.

The MCN is governed by a Board of Directors who provide regional representation on a geographical, and industry basis. The Board of Directors allows for 12 Members. In addition, MCN currently has 2 staff which includes an Executive Director/Program Manager and a Program Assistant.

It is MCN's vision to provide communities and residents of Muskoka and Almaguin with a telecommunications network which will deliver broadband to the vast majority of businesses and residents. Additionally, services on this network would be provided at competitive rates which are comparable to rates found in other more urban areas.

The purpose of this broadband network is to contribute to:

- A competitive economy;
- Improved education;
- Wealth and job creation;
- Quality of life for residents.

MCN has been dormant for several years due to funding withdrawal from Provincial and Federal sources. Fortunately, that changed this year when MCN was chosen as a broadband champion by FedNor. This funding allows MCN to operate until at least September 2007. Additionally, if MCN is successful in acquiring funding for broadband infrastructure, an extension to this program will mostly likely be required and requested from FedNor.

As a result of this program funding MCN has again become operational and is working to provide services to the businesses and residents of Muskoka and Almaguin. These programs and services currently include:

- Working to secure funding for improved broadband infrastructure;
- Working to assist Muskoka Algonquin Health Care to secure funding for a Picture Archiving and Communication system
- Delivery of technology best practices workshops for business;
- Delivery of a subsidy program to provide satellite internet to business.
- Working to secure funding to hold a technology conference in Muskoka.

In addition to the support provided by FedNor, MCN recognizes the selfless contribution made by the volunteers who serve on the Board of Directors.

Programs and Service Delivery

Improving broadband access, and providing training and awareness within the region are the tangible products that MCN currently provides. Several programs and services are offered and each is described here.

Broadband Infrastructure Program

This year MCN has worked to determine which areas are served by broadband and which areas are without. This research has provided a reasonably clear picture of unserved areas, and as a result was the basis for the RFP which MCN issued. The purpose of the RFP was to select a credible vendor who could supply broadband to unserved areas. Submissions to the RFP were evaluated by a skilled evaluation committee and subsequently Muskoka.com's submission was chosen.

The next step in this process is to secure funding for deployment. Funding has been requested from a variety of sources including the Province of Ontario, the District Municipality of Muskoka, and FedNor. MCN is optimistic that a combination of support from these organizations will allow for this project to be delivered, however, there is not any guarantee of that.

Best Practices Workshop

MCN has been delivering best practices workshops to the business community. These non-technical workshops are directed at business decision makers who want to learn more about leveraging technology in their business. So far over 80 participants have taken these workshops. Content of these workshops are focused on web development, E-commerce, and technology management. All costs for these are covered by MCN, so the cost to participants is nothing.

SIRA

MCN is now delivering a program called SIRA (Satellite Internet for Remote Areas). This program offers a subsidy to businesses that require internet, but are not able to acquire it through traditional means such as DSL, Cable, Wireless, or Fibre. Through this program businesses can have a broadband satellite system installed and receive a subsidy of up to 75% to a maximum of \$1000.

This program is modeled on NeoNet's SIRA program. NeoNet is a community based network similar to MCN and is based out of Timmins, Ontario.

Initial response to this program has been strong and positive. Satellite is a respectable broadband solution for small business, and this program provides tangible results that are appreciated by the recipients.

Technology Conference

It is apparent that a unified vision in our region to provide growth in the technology industry is lacking. As a result MCN is working to develop a vision for a technology conference which would have the goal of showcasing technology to the business and political leaders to demonstrate the economic benefits for the development of a this industry. MCN believes that by understanding the technology industry and demonstrating the benefits of growing this industry a unified strategy can be developed and executed.

This strategy would be focused on developing the technology industry in Muskoka. This industry could then become another pillar in the economy. As such this industry would provide opportunity and diversification to the existing economy.

As a result of this vision, MCN is working to acquire resources and support for this conference.

Muskoka Algonquin Health Care (MAHC) PACS

One of FedNor's programs is a *broadband application* program. This program can provide funding for technologies that make use of broadband such as Geographical Information Systems(GIS) which are typically used at the municipal government level, or Picture Archiving and Communication Systems (PACS) which are typically used in hospitals.

As a result, MCN has worked with Muskoka Algonquin Health Care (MAHC) so they are aware of this program. MCN has also worked to determine program requirements, and acquire copies of successful applications under this program. This information has been forwarded to MAHC and this framework is expected to be used in their funding application.

MAHC is expected to submit an application to FedNor for the development of a PACS system early in 2007. Under FedNor's guidelines MAHC could be eligible for up to \$500,000 for this project.

MAHC is keeping MCN updated on the progress of this project, and where required MCN will assist.

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Challenges for 2006/2007

Funding Approval for Broadband Infrastructure

MCN is hopeful that the funding for broadband infrastructure will be approved and acquired. If applications are not approved, or the process stalls for some unforeseen reason, MCN will have to re-evaluate the best use of its resources.

Subsequently, if the application is approved this project will consume a significant amount of time. Keeping the other projects in focus and on task with the resources that MCN has available will be challenging, but is expected to be manageable.

Technology Conference

While there is great desire and need for a technology conference, MCN does not currently have the resources within its grasp to deliver a conference. As a result, MCN will be working to acquire resources for a conference.

Additionally, MCN is working to identify other stakeholders and interested parties who could become partners on this project.

NOTE: This report was originally published incorrectly as a 2005 report. References to 2005 have been replaced correctly with 2006 references.