

### Front Page Articles

## Business at the speed of light

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New fiber-optic system means faster Astoria IT connections

By Joanne Rideout

New high-speed Internet business service has arrived in Astoria. Local firm iFocus Consulting has partnered with Newport telecommunications firm CoastCom Inc. to offer drastically wider bandwidth via a new fiber-optic cable network within the city limits.

Promoters say the new fiber-optic infrastructure is ideal for businesses and agencies with multiple locations that need faster connectivity, and organizations that need to transmit large files rapidly.

The new service will vie with established carriers Qwest and Charter Communications. While some new services may also be available from these carriers, iFocus and CoastCom say their prices are more competitive.

CoastCom is known in Tillamook County as the IT brains behind Tillamook Lightwave, a high-speed telecommunications consortium that includes Tillamook PUD, the Port of Tillamook Bay, and Tillamook County.

CoastCom manages the Lightwave infrastructure, in the form of a fiber-optic cable system that provides high-speed global connectivity from an area north of Wheeler to south of Tillamook. The system has redundant connections to major metropolitan centers in Oregon.

Greg Palser, president of CoastCom, said the Astoria fiber-optic connectivity was a natural segue from the Tillamook project.

"It would never have happened had we not already been involved in Tillamook Lightwave," he said. "Once we had access to fiber up to Wheeler, we were able to negotiate with other carriers to get the infrastructure to Astoria." [continued...]

## What does all this mean for Astoria?

"We provide increased bandwidth for a little extra money," Palser said. "We offer services that are more competitive than previous providers have been."

Services available through the iFocus/CoastCom partnership are available only to business customers for now.

Improvements include Ethernet First Mile (EFM), a service that transmits native Ethernet data over voice-grade copper lines, something Palser said Qwest does not offer here.

The service also means increased speed. Current Internet service in the Astoria area is mostly "asynchronous," which in laymen's terms means that it takes significantly longer to upload large files than it does to download them.

The new synchronous service means data transmits at the same speed in both directions. That can be a boon for sending large files from one user to another. It means employees can spend more time working productively instead of nervously tapping their fingers while they wait.

This is good news for businesses with multiple locations that communicate using virtual private networks (VPN). VPNs use the Internet to transmit private network transmissions between offices and telecommuting workers.

"We have customers who have VPN," said Chris Womack, president of iFocus. "Their bottleneck is upload speed."

Another option is enhanced DSL service that will offer faster download speeds of 10-18 Mbps (megabits per second), compared to about 7 Mbps available now.

The city of Astoria is already using the new service to allow on-the-spot data transmission between different offices around town.

"Last October we started talking with the city about a joint ownership fiber project. They needed to connect the public safety building with the aquatic center to share network resources," said Palser. "That project was completed in May, and along with the city's sites, we've connected Columbia Memorial Hospital."

Palser said the faster, wider bandwidth capability will be especially helpful for medical professionals, who will be able to send large files such as MRI scans instantaneously to specialists inland for consultations.

Womack said the new service is a good bet for business customers, especially in a crisis: during the December 2007 storm, CoastCom-installed networks in Tillamook County never failed, preserving a critical means of communication.

Palser said the new fiber optic infrastructure will likely draw business to the coast.

"It's good for economic development," he said. "If you don't have good infrastructure for digital transfer, it's impossible to get technology companies to invest in your area."

Womack said partnering with CoastCom was a no-brainer for his business, thanks to the company's stellar reputation.

"Before we had this route into Astoria there was no alternative," he said. "From our standpoint it's an excellent communications tool that hasn't been available."