

Wireless

South Pittsburg provides free Wi-Fi for its community

on Tap

BY CAIRA CONNER



If you still think the only thing in rural Tennessee is a whole lotta nothin', think again. South Pittsburg (pop. 3,925 as of the 2000 census) is the first city in the state to have free Wi-Fi Internet access for all its citizens and businesses.

There are roughly 400 cities across the country currently offering Wi-fi to their inhabitants, but South Pittsburg is among the few doing it free of charge. Why this decision? "There's a genuine need for it," says City Administrator T.J. (Tom) Landers. "South Pittsburg is a rural community, and most of our residents have limited income. Our mission was to provide the Internet for free so that everyone, especially children and those who could not afford it otherwise, would have the same opportunities to access information."

South Pittsburg was connected, literally, via partnership with local cable company Trinity Communications. Trinity heard about the mayor's interest in installing citywide wireless Internet and immediately offered its services. "It was an incredibly easy decision on our part to form this relationship,"

says Trinity Communications Network Manager Steve Sahud. "The infrastructure was already in place because of television cable wires; all we had to do was add the Wi-Fi hot spots across the city."

Indeed, Wi-Fi access was easily established in South Pittsburg by replacing cable wire with a wireless tap, and installing router and transceiver boxes in each home. Signals were received from 110 different towers strategically placed throughout the city. Since most of South Pittsburg's power lines run through alleys and streets, access was available for even the most remote parts of town. "For some of the harder to reach areas, we set up wireless cable modems in the home," Sahud explains. "We simply ran a cable line directly from the pole to the house."

Surprising as it may be that a town of South Pittsburg's size and geographic location is one of

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America's premier places to offer free wireless Internet, Sahud is convinced that it was much easier to get Wi-Fi here than a larger, more populated city.

"There aren't massive buildings in the way blocking the signal," Sahud says. "Our lines of communication are open and flowing freely."

Free-flowing information is just one of the benefits of South Pittsburg's Wi-Fi connection. "The Internet is the biggest tool available in communication and research," Sanders says. "We want our rural communities to be able to use it. The more educated and informed our people, the more desirable we are for busi-



nesses looking to recruit staff or establish offices." Existing businesses will reap the benefits of free wireless connection, too—it is now much easier for them to share and access information from all different coasts. "Our reach is no longer confined within the city," Sanders says.

Not to mention, Trinity Communications is pretty pleased with the partnership. "We're a local, community-oriented company," Sahud says. "We don't strive to be a big corporation; this kind of homegrown operation is the exact thing we like to do with our services. It's about getting in the spirit of the community."

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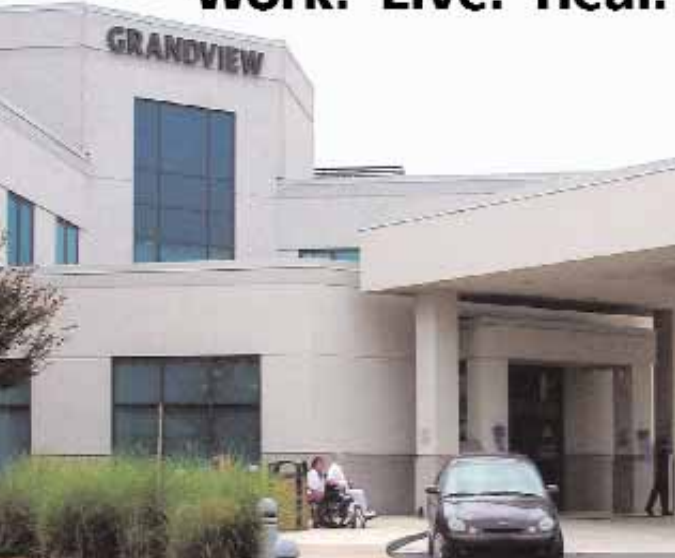
—Steve Sahud, Trinity Communications



The last time Sahud checked, he couldn't find any other city in America that was offering completely free wireless Internet to its residents. The City of South Pittsburg pays Trinity \$2,000 per month to keep its Wi-Fi running—a cost that may or may not adjust with time. "We



provide this service so that our city is better off," Sanders says. "The cost is budgeted into the city's expenses, and we intend to keep it that way. You can't put a price on giving future generations a step in the right direction." **tn**

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