



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Rural Development
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USDA Rural Development Invests Over \$50 Million for Distance Learning, Telemedicine and Broadband Initiatives

MONTGOMERY, September 30, 2008 – Steve Pelham, State Director of USDA Rural Development, presented checks representing \$1.3 million in grants to education and healthcare providers in six Alabama counties and a \$49.2 million broadband telecommunications loan to International Broadband Electric Communications (IBEC) headquartered in Huntsville with its operations center in Hokes Bluff.

“These successful telecommunication projects represent USDA Rural Development’s continued commitment to help develop sustainable partnerships that are committed to improving education, health care and broadband services in rural Alabama,” said Pelham. “These investments will have a positive impact to help insure that the necessary infrastructure and technology is developed to meet future demands and challenges while improving the quality of life for rural families, businesses and patients.”

Distance Learning grants were awarded to the Conecuh County Board of Education (\$327,413), the Fayette County Board of Education (\$219,484), and the Perry County School District (\$77,339). Telemedicine grants were awarded to the Randolph Medical Center in Roanoke (\$171,530), the Southwest Alabama Mental Health/Mental Retardation Board in Monroeville (\$409,078), and the Wiregrass Mental Health Board in Dothan (\$88,273). These grant funds will be used to increase educational opportunities and improve medical services throughout rural Alabama. Applications for distance learning and telemedicine grants compete nationally for funding. Nationwide, 105 recipients received grants totaling \$28.2 million through USDA Rural Development’s Distance Learning/Telemedicine Program during FY 2008.

International Broadband Electric Communications, Inc., (IBEC) headquartered in Huntsville, Alabama, with its operations center in Hokes Bluff, Alabama, was selected to receive a \$49.2 million loan to construct a broadband over power line (BPL) network. The company will partner with 13 electric utilities to provide BPL service to their members in eight states to connect 41,386 subscribers. The states are Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin. In FY 2005, IBEC received a \$19.2 million loan from USDA Rural Development to provide a broadband over power line network through three electric utilities in Alabama, Virginia and Indiana to connect 20,757 subscribers. These loans are provided through USDA Rural Development’s Broadband Loan and Loan Guarantee Program, which provides low-interest loans to deploy broadband and telecommunications services to rural communities of 20,000 residents or less, with first priority going to areas without broadband.

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USDA Rural Development's mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for rural residents. Rural Development has invested more than \$90 billion since 2001 for equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. More than 1.7 million jobs have been created or saved through these investments. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA Rural Development's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

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List of Distance Learning/Telemedicine/Broadband Recipients – Alabama – FY 08

Recipient: Southwest Alabama Mental Health/Mental Retardation Board, Inc.
(located in Monroeville)

Funding: \$409,078 Telemedicine Grant

Background: Will fund telemedicine technology and equipment to join the resources of 4 rural Alabama Community Mental Health Agencies, comprising 17 locations, and a child health center to expand and improve mental health care services and their availability for currently underserved patients in rural Alabama. The Joining Hands project will serve patients in 15 Alabama counties.

Executive Director: Candace Harden (phone: 251-575-4203)

Recipient: Randolph Medical Center (located in Roanoke)

Funding: \$171,530 Telemedicine Grant

Background: Will fund a telemedicine project to digitize radiological images (x-ray, CT, Ultrasound, and MRI). By using telemedicine, they will be able to transmit these images to a radiologist located at another site which will shorten the turnaround time required for the images to be read by a doctor resulting in quicker diagnosis and treatment for patients.

CEO: Timothy Harlin (phone: 334-863-4111)

Recipient: Wiregrass Mental Health Board, Inc. (located in Dothan)

Funding: \$88,273 Telemedicine Grant

Background: Wiregrass Mental Health Board, Inc., dba SpectraCare, is a non profit, community based mental health center located in Southeast Alabama. SpectraCare provides mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services to consumers of all ages in Barbour, Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston counties. All programs and facilities are certified by the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. SpectraCare will establish an interactive telemedicine program that will connect the Houston County Clinic with seven rural locations comprised of outpatient clinics, day treatment programs and one group home. This linkage will allow psychiatric and nursing staff at the Houston County site to communicate with the consumer and clinical staff in each of the seven rural locations. The project will provide rural consumers immediate access to psychiatric services, nursing services and crisis intervention services in order to reduce hospitalizations. Screenings and referrals, psychosocial assessments, medication monitoring, and clinical updates will also be performed in a more efficient and effective manner resulting in improved quality of care for the consumer.

Executive Director: Melissa Kirkland (phone: 334-712-2720, ext. 222)

(continued)

Recipient: Conecuh County Board of Education

Funding: \$327,413 Distance Learning Grant

Background: Funds will initiate a distance learning project to connect the six rural schools of the Conecuh County Board of Education, the Conecuh County Board of Education (CCBOE) district offices, the CCBOE Technology Department, the CCBOE Resource Center, Compass Academy, the Castleberry Community Center, and Reid State Technical College in a distance learning project utilizing videoconferencing equipment and other telecommunications devices. The distance learning system will deliver shared live and archived classes, project based learning, web based content, professional development, virtual field trips, academic remediation, vocational courses including retraining programs, and other academic and community based programming.

Superintendent: Ronnie Brogden (phone: 251-578-1752)

Recipient: Fayette County Board of Education

Funding: \$219,484 Distance Learning Grant

Background: Funds will be used to interconnect Fayette County schools as well as connect to other high schools already established as distance learning sites. This will allow interactive videoconferencing to provide content and services not previously available to these rural schools. Mobile multimedia and video systems will connect students to learning opportunities anywhere in the world without ever leaving the classroom. When students enter their classrooms at Fayette County Schools they will often wonder, "Where will we go today?" Or, they may ask, "Which world leader will we talk with this afternoon?" All schools in Fayette County will also be connected so that classrooms and teachers can interact and share best practices.

Superintendent: Reba Anderson (phone: 205-932-4611)

Recipient: Perry County School District

Funding: \$77,339 Distance Learning Grant

Background: This project will provide distance learning opportunities for students at the Albert Turner Senior Elementary School and the Uniontown Elementary School. This will allow students to interact with students from around the state, nation, and world. Collaborative projects and virtual field trips for students and professional development for teachers can be accomplished through the use of the distance learning interactive video conferencing equipment.

Superintendent: John Heard, III (phone: 334-683-4144, ext 269)

Recipient: International Broadband Electric Communications, Inc. (IBEC)

Funding: \$49,218,000 Broadband Telecommunications Loan

Background: International Broadband Electric Communications, Inc., (IBEC) headquartered in Huntsville, Alabama, with its operations center in Hokes Bluff, Alabama, was selected to receive a \$49.2 million loan to construct a broadband over power line (BPL) network. The company will partner with 13 electric utilities to provide BPL service to their members in eight states to connect 41,386 subscribers. The states are Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin. In FY 2005, IBEC received a \$19.2 million loan from USDA Rural Development to provide a broadband over power line network through three electric utilities in Alabama, Virginia and Indiana to connect 20,757 subscribers.

CEO: Scott Lee (phone: 256-492-1000)
