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**“CONNECT MANISTEE COUNTY”
EMBRACES INTERNET SERVICE COMPANIES**

Manistee, Michigan - With a vision to connect all of Manistee County with high speed internet, the “Connect Manistee County” team is embracing providers of “middle mile” and “last mile” broadband, buoyed by an announcement of a \$33.3 million grant that will help develop the internet backbone for achieving the vision.

The grant to Merit Network, Inc. of Ann Arbor, Michigan was recently announced under the first phase of broadband funding through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). It will support the development of 955 miles of middle mile network fiber in Michigan that will run through Manistee County. Merit will have the middle mile project completed in three years. Connect Manistee County team efforts are focused on supporting the Merit Network installation and on working with other providers to seek Round Two ARRA funding to branch off the middle mile network to encompass the entire County and achieve last mile status.

Under ARRA, \$7.2 billion is available for two rounds of funding for “Last Mile” and “Middle Mile” broadband projects (broadband is defined as a fast connection to the internet that is always “on”). Last mile, the vision for all of Manistee County, is defined as internet service for end users. Middle mile is internet service to “anchor institutions” in communities such as schools, libraries, colleges and universities, health care providers and community support organizations.

In keeping with the collaborative goals of “Connect Manistee County,” everyone in Manistee County -- including governments, businesses, nonprofits and individuals -- is asked to confirm their support for county-wide high speed internet and provide details about how they might use a high-speed internet system.

“We want to make it as easy and cost effective as possible for Merit Network, Inc. as well as other internet service providers interested in ARRA Round 2 funding to achieve last mile service in Manistee County,” said Connect Manistee County co-chair Tim Ervin. “To help do that, we’re asking everyone to contact the AES so that we can document their support for county-wide broadband and develop a data base about types and volumes of internet use to help providers understand what to anticipate. Since the ARRA Round Two application is due March 15, we need to compile that information now and share it with service providers.”

Ervin said that the AES has a simple form to document internet support and useage (see attachment to this news release). It is available by going to www.allianceforeconomicsuccess.com or by picking up the form at the AES office at 1361 US 31 South (next to Peebles) or by contacting the AES at 231-723-4325. Several organizations, including the Manistee Intermediate School District, West Shore Medical Center, the City of Manistee, the Manistee County Courthouse/Sheriff operations, the Manistee County Library, the Alliance for Economic Success and others have provided information to help quantify the internet demand in the County.

“Thanks to the foresight of the Manistee Intermediate School District and that of our school districts, we are uniquely positioned with a high speed internet network that serves our students and schools that will be a catalyst for extending middle mile and last mile broadband to the entire county,” said Cyndy Fuller, Executive Director of the Alliance for Economic Success (AES). “Since our County-wide visioning effort in 2006, Envision Manistee County, virtually every plan and strategy that has to do with Manistee County has reinforced the importance of county-wide high speed internet

service. The significance of high speed broadband - for our schools and businesses, city, townships and villages and residents and families cannot be overstated. It is our connection with the rest of the world. We strongly encourage everyone to contact the AES so that we can include your support and internet needs in our efforts to document support for Round Two ARRA funding to service providers.”

Following a request from the Manistee County Board of Commissioners, the AES formed the “Connect Manistee County” leadership team that includes representation from the County, City of Manistee, West Shore Community College, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, West Shore Medical Center, townships, business and others. The team solidified the “last mile” vision for the County, met with all known providers of high speed internet, and inventoried resources such as the existing ISD broadband fiber, water towers and other assets that could be used to support a county-wide internet system. Anyone can become a team member by contacting the AES at 231-723-4325.

Merit Network, Inc. was founded as a nonprofit organization in 1966 by Michigan State University, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University to facilitate computer networking for education and research. With over four decades of experience, Merit is Michigan’s most experienced network provider.

“With the grant award to Merit, we want to invite providers of last mile internet service to include Manistee County in their plans for ARRA Round 2 funding,” said Roy Anciso who co-chairs the Connect Manistee County partnership. “We have talked with one potential provider, Agri-Valley, Inc., that we hope will apply for Round 2 in partnership with our Connect Manistee County team. We will be seeking grant application support letters for Agri-Valley and any other bonafide last mile internet service provider that includes Manistee County in their plans. We also welcome the collaboration and partnership of neighboring counties and regions since this is truly a project that transcends political borders.”

“We hold up the collaborative, deliberate process that Manistee County is using to others as a formula for success,” said George Boersma, Director of the Technology Partnerships in the Michigan Department of Information Technology. “Manistee County has unified interests around a vision of last mile broadband and is focused on building partnerships with middle mile and last mile providers. In the process, they are sending a strong message to all sectors about their desire to collaborate to bring this transformational infrastructure to all four corners of their largely rural County.”

Broadband Quick Facts

- 36% of Americans have limited access to internet and 23% do not have internet at all.
- The U.S. is 15th among developed countries in broadband deployment per 100 people.
- Michigan is ranked 24th in the U.S. in the growth rate of broadband
- Based on a recent study, a statewide broadband system in Michigan would result in an increase in Michigan’s gross state product of \$440 billion over the next 10 years that would result in 437,000 new jobs over that same time period
- 65% of adults who visited a library for problem solving said that access to computers was the reason they visited the library.

Attached to this news release are:

A) News announcement from Merit Network concerning their ARRA grant for broadband

B) Map showing the general location of the broadband fiber that will be established in the Manistee County area by Merit Network under the ARRA grant and in partnership with project collaborators

C) Connect Manistee County Support form

Attachment A: Merit Network, Inc. Receives Stimulus Funding for Broadband

Merit Network, Inc. has received an award of federal stimulus funding to build a 955-mile extension of the research and education provider's fiber-optic backbone. The fiber will extend critical broadband service to rural and underserved communities across 32 Michigan counties. The project named REACH-3MC (Rural, Education, Anchor, Community and Healthcare – Michigan Middle Mile Collaborative, will connect anchor institutions with national points of presence in Chicago, Southfield and Cleveland, as well as two geographically diverse 10G paths to Internet2. With Merit's existing fiber path across the Mackinac Bridge, for the first time in Michigan's history, the research and education communities in the Upper and Lower Peninsulas will be interconnected.

"Merit has sought ways of reaching institutions in these rural communities with fiber for the majority of the past decade," said Merit President and CEO, Don Welch. "Anchor institutions in these areas providing essential services to the public will have access to leading-edge infrastructure. The fiber will deliver connectivity that will enhance quality of life and bolster economic development"

In the context of today's award, Merit will have created a comprehensive footprint that spans nearly all of Michigan, and the connection across its famous waterway is emblematic of the ways in which Merit's project is designed to bridge the State's digital divide.

Merit Network will share fiber strands with Michigan commercial providers - ACD.net; The Iserv Company, LLC; LYNX Network Group, LLC; and TC3Net - to accomplish a public-private partnership that will impact every sector of society. The new infrastructure will have a positive impact on anchor institutions, homes and businesses in the service area.

REACH-3MC will immediately connect 44 anchor institutions and was designed to enable access to 378 more over time. In addition, the fiber will avail service to 886,147 households and 45,875 businesses.

Merit's portion of the fiber will allow state and local governments, schools, libraries, healthcare facilities and other anchor institutions to connect to Merit's private, high-performance network, enabling them to lower costs, consolidate services and provide more to Michigan's citizens.

In keeping with the objective of the stimulus package to revitalize communities, REACH-3MC will stimulate the demand for broadband, spur economic growth, and create jobs. "Broadband access is a critical component for economic development, and the REACH-3MC will deliver high-performance connectivity to businesses and homes in regions where it is currently unavailable", stated Don Welch.

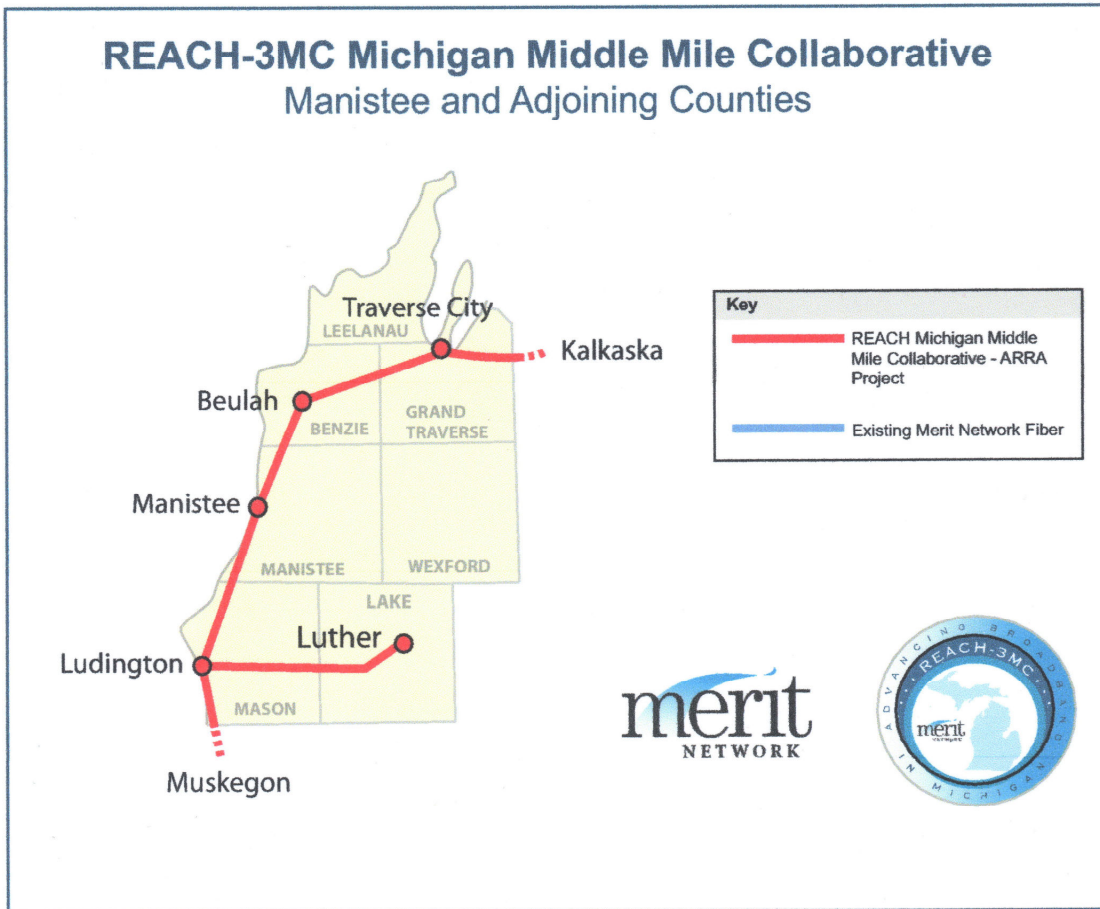
The design of the REACH-3MC network was done using an open access model. This design will enable any provider to access the fiber at reasonable rates and terms. The design supports legacy technologies common in smaller providers as well as providing for a smooth transition to advanced technologies as well.

REACH-3MC is scalable and accommodates future growth, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the network. Michigan will have an infrastructure that supports a breadth of technologies like fiber strands, wave services and IP services of today and tomorrow. Engineering and permitting will begin immediately, with groundbreaking for construction slated for May 2010.

About Merit Network

Merit Network Inc., a nonprofit corporation owned and governed by Michigan's public universities, owns and operates America's longest-running regional research and education network. In 1966, Michigan's public universities created Merit as a resource to help meet their common need for networking assistance. Since its formation, Merit Network has remained on the forefront of research and education networking expertise and services. Merit provides high-performance networking solutions to public universities, colleges, K-12 organizations, libraries, state government, healthcare, and other non-profit organizations.

Attachment B: Map showing the general location of the broadband fiber that will be established in the Manistee County area by Merit Network under the ARRA grant and in partnership with project collaborators



C) Connect Manistee County Support form

Connect Manistee County

To achieve "last mile" high speed internet capacity for all of Manistee County

Partnership Agreement. We support last mile broadband capability for Manistee County and want to collaborate with the Connect Manistee County Leadership Team and service providers to attain that goal. Subject to a more detailed understanding of the practical, technical and financial matters involving a new county-wide broadband system, we intend to make full use of a new county-wide broadband system.

Your Name Printed: _____

Signature: _____

Name of Organization: _____

Address: _____

Date: _____ / _____ / _____

Projected System Usage. Assuming our full participation in using a new county-wide broadband system, our usage is estimated to be as follows (quantify as much as possible - please see examples):

Service Type	Yes/No	Volume	Example
Local & long distance calling	_____	_____	Annual phone bill
Internet access	_____	_____	Current annual fee
Website and Server hosting	_____	_____	Current annual fee
Offsite storage	_____	_____	
Cellular services (Voice & data)	_____	_____	# of phones, current annual fee
Video services (Conventional & video Conferencing)	_____	_____	
Interfacility Communications	_____	_____	

Question. What can you tell us about your "data rate" or ideal speed for internet and inter-facility capacity? _____

Assets/Resources

Our organization has the following assets/resources that could support the development and implementation of county-wide broadband (see examples):

Example: Water towers, radio towers, existing internet cable, etc.

Participation. _____ I'd like to participate on the Connect Manistee County Leadership Team
_____ I don't have time to participate on the Leadership Team but please keep me informed