Technology reshaping rural communities

by Ron Wirtz

Having waited longer than their city cousins for electricity, phone service and decent roads, rural residents are now anxiously awaiting the full benefits of the latest revolution—advanced telecommunications and the information superhighway. "I believe that [advanced telecommunications capacity] is as critical an infrastructure issue as highways and electricity," says Bill Cobb, a former US West executive in Minnesota, and now CEO of Infinitec Communications, Inc. Based in Tulsa, Infinitec is helping small exchange carriers in North Dakota and Minnesota find economical ways to deliver enhanced telecom services.

Minnesota state Sen. Steve Kelley (DFL-Hopkins) has been a leading advocate for expanding telecommunications capacity throughout the state. "Telecom is the only force I can see that has the potential of stabilizing or reversing the long-term trend of the depopulation of rural areas," Kelley says, adding that use of advanced telecom "could happen faster in rural areas because there is such a strong desire to be fully engaged with the world (and) to overcome isolation."

Much is already happening in rural areas. Four years ago, Blackfoot Telephone Cooperative in Missoula, Mont., began offering Internet service to its customers. They hoped to eventually convince 10 percent of their customers to go online, but already have over 15 percent of their customers on dial-up accounts and close to 50 percent of school clients on dedicated Internet lines.

Now the company is getting four or five calls a month for ISDN lines and other digital lines, according to Nina Duncan, member services representative for Blackfoot.

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Districts must report income, expenses by school

by Ted Kolderie

Thanks to the '99 legislative session, parents, the press, policymakers and the public in Minnesota are all going to know a lot more about where the money goes in public education and about how money relates to performance.

Beginning this coming school year, districts will have to report the amount of revenue brought to each school by the students enrolled there. Everyone will now be able to see (a) where the revenue is, by school; (b) where the expenditures are, by school and (c) how students perform, by school.

The changes this year build on legislation in '97 and '98 that required "compensatory" revenue—the extra revenue originally voted in 1971 for low-income students—actually to be allocated to the schools those students attend. The Department of Children, Families and Learning is also beginning now to require the reporting of expenditures, including actual salary expenditures, by school.

Congestion, sprawl area's chief problem

by David O'Hara and Carol Bormann Young

Twin Citians view traffic congestion and urban sprawl as the chief problem facing the metropolitan area, surpassing crime for the first time since they've been asked over the past four years. There is widespread support for land-use policies to manage development in the metropolitan area, as well as for the use of "photocops" to monitor intersections and carpool lanes. "There are three key findings of the fourth annual Metropolitan State University Civic Confidence Survey, which seeks opinions of residents of the seven-county metropolitan area on key regional and local issues.

Traffic congestion was cited by 24 percent of area residents and the related problem of urban sprawl by nine percent. Crime, mentioned by 27 percent of Twin Citians, is still a widespread concern, but citizens view traffic congestion and urban sprawl together as the biggest challenge for policymakers.

In 1996, traffic congestion was mentioned by only eight percent of Twin City residents and urban sprawl was rarely mentioned. By 1998, traffic congestion was mentioned by 10 percent of residents and urban sprawl by six percent. During this time, the percentage of respondents choosing crime as the chief problem has dropped from 71 percent in 1996 to 27 percent in 1999.

Lack of affordable housing is starting to become an issue. Only one percent named this problem in 1998; this year almost six percent mentioned this issue, indicating a growing problem, or, at least, a growing perception of the problem.
Another view: How can youth feel part of community?

Does "adolescence" need rethink- ing? Yes! (See "Does confu- sion about what is "adolescence" need rethink- ing?" in May 18 Minnesota Journal.)

I agree that the urge in youth is aggregation, not separation, in society. How can one feel a con- nection to a larger, intergenera- tional community when you're not wanted in it?

My grandson is 14. Skateboarding is his kinesthetic life; school is his intellectual life; home is the battle- field. And he stays away from community because he finds it tedious. And he's not interested in "A's" and is well-mannered, kind and respectful (most of the time, except when he's not).

He'll make it, but he has lots of privileges working for him—two concepts he's not familiar with. He's learned to support extended family, good friends and his family. Yet, there's so much he could be better- educated and more a part of the values mainstream. Community service, being wanted, knowing you are needed is important if he ever gets into his daily life. And he's one of the lucky ones. Lots of kids get much less.

When he first got his skateboard, he and his friends played in the city park and talked to the police and told them. They saw him and why and why, and they said, "You can't do that, it's illegal."

He was puzzled. He was the same yesterday. What happened?

The Minnesota Journal

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This issue features articles by: "On Balance: Red Wing Republican Eagle (June 7) taxpayers should not have to pay for student athletes' "play" when it is the Governor's tour". How about theности of those who feel no such sense of make it work.

We need to be mindful of a ne few principles:

- First, housing and development patterns are slow moving. It may take 30 to 50 years to turn around the patterns in the region, so we need to have strong commitment and continuity.
- Second, city form is largely shaped by the dominant transportation mod- el of the day. We are in a city with 98 percent of trips by car, with nothing in sight to move that but a fusion or so. How do we build a livable city around that reality?
- Third, quality of life and quality of public services and amenities are going to be a competi- tiveness issue in the United States and globally, as we compete to maintain a place in the new economy. Businesses and citizens understand that with their feet rather quickly if we full too far behind.

With these principles in mind, what are some concrete steps we can take?

Urban sprawl is hot. Vice President Al Gore is making it a centerpiece of his presidential run and maga- zine stories have cast a spotlight on the issue. And we are being asked in this country. The Citizens League has long advocated careful urban growth management and in its 1997 report It Takes A Region to Build Livable Neighborhoods sug- gested a large menu of items for redirecting growth to the core and to less-compact development in the newly developing areas.

With a newly appointed Metropoli- tan Council chair and some rare opportunities to move an agenda toward a more compact and efficient region, there are dangers, too. If we are not careful, we can turn the urban sprawl debate into a polarizing dia- logue of the deaf. Most Americans live in suburbs and do not see that there are dangers, too. If we are not careful, we can turn the urban sprawl debate into a polarizing dia- logue of the deaf. Most Americans live in suburbs and do not see

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Poll
Continued from page 1

In a reasoning show of support, over 72 percent of Twin Citians favor the imposition of local zoning and local parking policies in the metropolitan area. Another popular measure is to regulate the length of driving times (sometimes called "time-out") to monitor interactions and collisions between drivers and pedestrians. Sixty-five of the Twin Citians residents support using these areas to ticket people for traffic violations.

When asked to identify the biggest transportation-related problem, 31 percent chose traffic congestion; 27 percent, traffic bottlenecks; 26 percent, the driving habits of others; such as libraries, 25 percent, federal services. When asked which level of government Twin Citians trust to do what right about their local schools, only 32 percent of Minneapolis residents have no confidence in or very much confidence in city schools, while only 17 percent of suburban residents lack confidence in their schools.

In terms of satisfaction, 26 percent of the Twin Cities residents are either dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the quality of services provided by city, county, and school boards, while only 17 percent of suburban residents report the same level of dissatisfaction with local school districts.

The most noticeable change in the satisfaction with administration of welfare programs, which has improved each year since 1996. In 1996, 52 percent were either satisfied or very satisfied, compared to 56 percent in 1997, 53 percent in 1998 and 56 percent in 1999.

Crime
The perceptions of citizens' safety has declined for the fourth consecutive year. In 1996, 56 percent believed they were as honest or more honest than average Minnesotans. In 1998, perhaps due to the arrest of the Twin Cities serial killer, 49 percent believed they were as honest or more honest than average Minnesotans. In 1999, 48 percent believed they were as honest or more honest than average Minnesotans. In 1999, 48 percent believed they were as honest or more honest than average Minnesotans.

Women are more concerned with crime than men. Twenty-nine percent of women said it was the region's biggest problem, compared to 24 percent of men. Even more significant is the fear of crime increasing in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Women say there are places inside one mile of their home where they would be afraid to be alone; 12 percent of women fear this compared to 9 percent of men.

Those concerned with a significant difference between central city and suburban residents. Sixty-seven percent of the city residents were satisfied or somewhat satisfied, while only 59 percent of suburban residents were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of services provided, by the city. The situation was the same for the complaint of local units generally about the new rules of the Government.

Significantly, residents of Minnesota are less trusting of the federal government. The Twin Citians Board, that compliance would be "too costly".

Thewhat reporting involves, in fact, is simply counting the school board and identifying each by the dollar-amounts she brings: so much for an elementary school, so much more for secondary, so much more for ESL (English as a Second Language), so much more if eligible for free/ reduced lunch, etc., add multiply, that would make it a total for school boards officials would be embarrassed to say this is beyond their capacity.

Nothing in the new law restricts the board of education's power to raise and spend that revenue in whatever way and for whatever purpose it wishes. The law does not enact "e-management." A board, if it wants, can simply pass a resolution that makes a school district funded, for example by the state or federal government. Likewise, fear of crime was greatest in Minneapolis, less so in St. Paul and much less so in the suburbs.

Economy
People continue to feel confident about the Twin City's econ- omy and the future. Fifty-six per- cent of Twin Citians said the region was headed in the right direction, compared with 52 percent last year and 47 percent two years ago.

Eighty-three percent say they are either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their own lives, an increase from 78 percent in 1998. Fifty-nine percent say they have a good job, versus a con- fidence in the Twin City's econ- omy and the future.

David O'Harra is associate profes- sor of economics and Carol Bar- novich Young is associate professor of management, both at Metropoli- tan State University. The name for the newly merged teachers' union, "Education Minnesota," was chosen after a long and painful process that, many believe, is far from over. The process was finally settled out of court or withdrawn. The suits must be tried, settled out of court or withdrawn.

The state really does mean to have more money spent on the low- income and low-performing stu- dents, not simply given to districts because they have low-income students. The Legislature is now trying to say nicely to boards, as is now the norm, that they can simply pass a resolution that makes a school district funded, for example by the state or federal government. Likewise, fear of crime was greatest in Minneapolis, less so in St. Paul and much less so in the suburbs.

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The Upper Peninsula Telecommunications Network (UPTN) is that “patients are able to video conference sites and 10 satellite receiver sites. In Minnesota, the State of North Dakota, there are just about 100 telemedicine sites. The Upper Peninsula Telehealth Network has only about 10.*

\*Patient transport is a problem to make a teleconference possible, according to Bowers.

The Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRB) recently unfurled a “do Information Technology?” asks Joel L. Durocher, IRRB’s director, who wants to convince 25 of the nation’s top 1,000 high-tech companies to set up shop or open a satellite office in the Iron Range of northern Minnesota.

“If the program is successful, it will transform the entire economic fabric of the Iron Range. We will enjoy a diversified economy that is less dependent on mining,” says Jim Gustafson, until recently commissioner with the IRRB. While still in its infancy, the program already boasts a few success stories.

Underpinning the “do LTI” effort are over 20 partnerships with private and public organizations. For example, MiniTelCom (a subsidiary of Minnesota Power) invested $2 million to wire the Iron Range with a high-speed fiber optic network, linking seven counties.

Quality of life
Along with a more diverse business base, advanced telecommunications offers rural residents better access to such fundamental things as education, entertainment, and health care. Distance learning is now common at all levels of education. Virtually all high-technology offices have email lines or video conference classes. Minnesota’s chief economist, Steven Kelley, noted that rural K-12 schools are lagging behind their urban counterparts among the first to embrace interac- tive education on high-speed access opportunities for students.

But an effective distance-learning program is more than fancy technology, according to Paul Bowers, a member of the Minnesota Legislature’s Committee on Rural Rebirth and Repopulation. “Distance learning, when done well, is a balance between need and cost,” Bowers says. The hallmark of a good distance-learning program is the willingness of local residents who could not otherwise be reached, as well as completely or even at all. That’s where a well-planned distance-learning program comes into play.

Along with educational needs, rural areas are particularly acute for good health care. The Upper Peninsula of Michigan (U.P.) has an average density of just 19 people per square mile and only 50 miles of interstate (all on the southern end). Long, severe winters greatly reduce people’s mobility.

Capital per the income in the U.P. is below the national average, and the percentage of people over age 65 is high—both of which typically lead to higher costs of living and usage. Nine of the 15 U.P. counties are federally designated as medically underserved, and 12 counties officially have a shortage of health professionals.

But thanks to advanced telecommunications, the U.P. is showing roadways to better health care for its residents. Telemedicine—health care provided via video and other “off-site” technology—is offering doctors the chance to give patients in rural communities access to long distances to hospitals that might be miles away.

The Upper Peninsula Telehealth Network (UPTN) is a network of 22 video conference sites and 10 telecommu- nications sites located throughout the U.P. Under the umbrella of UPTN is that “patients are able to consult with health-care providers without traveling over a 12-county region,” according to Sally Davis, UPTN project director.

Most states have invested in fiber optic telecommunications. What health-care providers earn money based on the number of times their lines are “rented” and each new customer makes the system more efficient. Wireless technology also has made competitive rates of return on capital investments in rural areas. Most experts spent $1.65 million on a “second last mile” of fiber to individual homes. Telemedicine-health care provider to rural residents better access to such fundamental things as education, entertainment, and health care. Distance learning is now common at all levels of education. Virtually all high-technology offices have email lines or video conference classes. Minnesota’s chief economist, Steven Kelley, noted that rural K-12 schools are lagging behind their urban counterparts among the first to embrace interactive education on high-speed access opportunities for students.

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Most states have invested in fiber optic telecommunications. What health-care providers earn money based on the number of times their lines are “rented” and each new customer makes the system more efficient. Wireless technology also has made competitive rates of return on capital investments in rural areas. Most experts spent $1.65 million on a “second last mile” of fiber to individual homes. Telemedicine-health care provider to rural residents better access to such fundamental things as education, entertainment, and health care. Distance learning is now common at all levels of education. Virtually all high-technology offices have email lines or video conference classes. Minnesota’s chief economist, Steven Kelley, noted that rural K-12 schools are lagging behind their urban counterparts among the first to embrace interactive education on high-speed access opportunities for students.

But an effective distance-learning program is more than fancy technology, according to Paul Bowers, a member of the Minnesota Legislature’s Committee on Rural Rebirth and Repopulation. “Distance learning, when done well, is a balance between need and cost,” Bowers says. The hallmark of a good distance-learning program is the willingness of local residents who could not otherwise be reached, as well as completely or even at all. That’s where a well-planned distance-learning program comes into play.
In 1997, the Legislature provided Metro Transit with a $4.7 million bonus if it produced 125 million rides during the latest two-year cycle. Metro Transit actually exceeded the goal by an additional 6 million riders—a total of about 12 million more than the previous biennium. So the extra $4.7 million helped increase ridership by an average of about 16,500 riders per day. That’s a pretty good return on investment. On the other hand, the region is poised to spend 100 times as much to build a rail line that is forecast to provide 22,000 daily rides, only 7,000 new riders. One has to wonder if the support for LRT indicated in recent polling would remain if alternatives, and return on investment, were adequately presented.—Phil Jenni.

Busing, European style: In northeastern Poland in the city of Olsztyn, a large fleet of minibuses charges the same fare as regular buses, but has a wider network of routes. These minibuses or jitneys also pick up excess passengers at regular-route bus stops during rush hours. In London, buses are quality certified for customer service and operations by the quality council. More one-step to board or “access friendly” buses are being put in place across London and the double-decked buses are becoming less common.—Lyle Wray.

Dan Wascoe’s report in the Star Tribune June 21 about the people-movers at the airport reinforces the conviction that fixed-guideway transit is appearing in our region in the form of shuttles/circulators within the developed area, linking parts of a major activity-center with each other. The Hiawatha Ave. light rail will really function as one of world’s most valuable transportation assets.

Construction has begun on the first shuttle, underground, between the south end of a new parking ramp and the main terminal. This could someday be extended to a “mirror-image” terminal proposed for the Mother Lake, northwest side of the airport. Later an above-ground shuttle will be built paralleling the to-be-extended-yet-further Green Concourse. Total cost: over $60 million.

An interesting question arises: If the transit at the airport can be charged (as it is) to the benefitting users and property owners, might the cost of the Hiawatha Ave. shuttle linking those benefitting hotels, stores, convention centers, etc., appropriately be charged to them?—Ted Kolderie.

Paying for congestion: The Straits Times newspaper reported that the Singapore government reduced electronic road-pricing tolls starting this June based on a successful program of 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. road pricing. The system has been credited with a major reduction in congestion on the roadways and higher average speeds. Each car using the system is equipped at public expense with a transponder to provide automatic access to freeways and a dash-mounted unit to accept credit or debit cards for payment. Multi-passenger vehicles receive a discount.—L.W.

It’s reinventing government on a massive— and international— scale. At noon on Dec. 31, 1999, the United States will hand over the Panama Canal to the Republic of Panama, according to the terms of the 1977 treaty signed by President Jimmy Carter and Panama’s General Omar Torrijos. The treaty set in motion a carefully orchestrated plan to ensure a smooth transition and permanent neutrality for one of world’s most valuable transportation assets.

The U.S. government in 1996 converted the Panama Canal Commission—a federal government agency—to a wholly-owned U.S. corporation required to be financially self-supporting during the transition period. The Commission is now morphing into the Panama Canal Authority, an autonomous agency that will manage the Canal under Panamanian control after this year. Panama had earlier paved the way for the creation of the Authority with a 1994 constitutional amendment exempting the Authority from the country’s administrative and labor laws and allowing it to develop its own operating, procurement and employment rules. Think of it as a “charter canal.”

U.S. and Panamanian leaders are hoping the setup will allow the Canal Authority to focus on the competitive provision of maritime services. Already underway: a modernized vessel booking system, capital improvements to expand capacity, pricing changes, and increased emphasis on marketing and customer relations functions.

With 13,000 ships and $600 million in tolls passing through the Canal annually, a lot is at stake in this reinvention project.—Janet Dudrow.

With $80 million Americans online and 130 million, or half our total population, expected to be by the year 2030, it is not news that the Internet is a profitable, growing enterprise. But just how profitable? America Online (AOL), one of the major players in the Internet industry, yielded an $8 profit per customer last year. This year, they are expected to earn $45 per customer. Is that a lot? Well, compare it to the average of $5 per subscriber earned by traditional media companies. At one point last month, the market value of AOL’s stock was $114 billion. That is more than the value of Time Warner, Inc., Times Mirror Corp, the New York Times Co. and the Washington Post Co. combined.—Dana Schroeder.

"Take Note" contributors this month include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members and Janet Dudrow, policy analyst at Dorsey and Whitney.

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July 20, 1999
Eight directors elected to League board

The Citizens League Election Committee tallied ballots at the League office on Wednesday, June 30. There were 540 qualified ballots counted (sixty less than last year). About 28.7 percent of the membership voted, down from last year and slightly below the five-year average of 30.1 percent.

The following were elected to three-year terms:

- Andy Brown, partner, Dorsey & Whitney; Cal Clark, Economic Development Director, Utilicorp United in Minnesota;
- Gary Cunningham, Director of Planning and Development, Hennepin County; Kent Eklund, President, Cincinnatus, Inc.;
- Richard Forschler, partner, Faegre and Benson; Suzanne Fuller-Terrill, Pinnacle Associates Group; Matthew Ramadan, Executive Director, Northside Residents Redevelopment Council; and
- Kathleen Vellenga, Executive Director, St. Paul/Ramsey County Children's Initiative.

Cal Clark, Suzanne Fuller-Terrill and Matthew Ramadan were elected to a second consecutive three-year term. Brown and Cunningham are currently finishing one-year appointments.

Past president Kent Eklund returns to the Board after an absence of several years. Richard Forschler and Kathleen Vellenga are new-comers to the League Board of Directors.

The newly elected members join returning Board members: John S. Adams, Mike Christenson, Sally Evert, Lani Kawamura, Gene Merriam, Tony Morley, Emily Anne Tuttle and Jane Vanderpoel whose terms expire in 2000. And the class of 2001: Marcia Avner, Jean Harris, Susan Heegaard, Steve Keefe, George Latimer, David Olson, Robert Vanasek and Lee Pao Xiong.

Citizens League bylaws stipulate that the 24 elected Board members may appoint up to 10 additional directors plus four officers.

The officers and additional directors for 1999-2000 will (continued on other side)
Thanks to this year’s Election and Nominating Committees

The Citizens League Board of Directors election couldn’t happen without the work of two very important committees. The Nominating Committee is chaired by the immediate past president and is made up of two members of the board whose terms are not expiring and three people who are not members of the Board. The committee recommends and recruits candidates to run for the Board and ensures that ballots are mailed to all League members at least five weeks before the election.

Members of this year’s Nominating Committee were: Mary Anderson, chair; Kent Eklund, Steve Keefe, Marina Lyon, Rafael Ortega and Lee Pao Xiong.

The Election Committee takes over after all the ballots have been received by the League office. In recent years, the League office has taken on a festive atmosphere on election day as a core group of regulars renew old friendships and catch up with the staff. Last year’s veterans, Ruth Hass, Larry Kelley, Jack Parsons, Bill Tarbell and Gertrude Ulrich were joined by Mary Ann McCoy.

Thanks to all who participated in the 1999 Board election.

Board election (continued)

be appointed at the annual Transitional Board Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, August 31 at noon at Macalester College.

While the League welcomes new directors every year, we also regretfully say goodbye to others.

Members completing their three-year term are: Mary Anderson, Pam Neary, Peter Gove, Marie Grimm and Christine Roberts.

League bylaws limit Board terms to no more than six consecutive years. The members completing their terms have all served multiple years and according to League bylaws are ineligible for re-election, although all but Anderson could be appointed for a one-year term.

Appointed members whose terms expire this year but are eligible for reappointment are: Scott Brener, Bill Diaz, Linda Ewen, Laurel Feddema, Jim Dorsey, Bill Johnstone, Sean Kershaw, Barbara Lukermann and Orlan Thorbeck. Like Mary Anderson, Randy Peterson has run up against the League’s six-year term limit.

Don’t forget to check out the League’s web site to follow the work of the League study committees on seniors with disabilities and workforce training.

How I spent my summer vacation

by Lyle Wray

It’s been a busy month for Executive Director Lyle Wray. He has spent the first part of his summer in Poland and Singapore spreading the gospel of performance measurement as a way of leveraging change in public sector systems. He spent two weeks in Olsztyn Poland where he taught public financial management in an executive masters program in business and public management that is affiliated with the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute.

The course examined government revenue and expenditure systems with a special emphasis on local government. The class also included a discussion of the emergence of the roles of citizens in performance measurement.

After a brief two-day visit to the League office, Wray was off to Singapore to participate in a worldwide conference on performance measures for government sponsored by IQPC Worldwide Pte Ltd. He chaired the second day of the conference, gave a paper and a led a workshop. Presentations were given from around the globe, including speakers from the Britain’s Royal Air Force; PricewaterhouseCoopers, Hong Kong; Queensland and Brisbane, Australia, and the United States.

IQPC provides executives with an opportunity to network and to share cutting-edge solutions. Senior Conference Producer Delphine Ang had this to say about Lyle’s participation:

“Your participation had certainly contributed a meaningful exchange of knowledge and expertise. Based on the feedback gathered, we received very positive feedback for your sessions. In fact you were one of the highest rated speakers at the conference. The delegates found your presentations to be very interesting and insightful. Many delegates were impressed with your dynamism and enthusiasm in sharing your knowledge and experience with them. In addition, the delegates had highlighted that you did an excellent job in chairing the conference as you were able to draw the audience close to you.”

Lyle also managed to squeeze in time for some personal travel. He unwound after his Polish excursion with a few days in London. And he spent the Fourth of July holiday in Bangkok on his way home from the conference in Singapore. Quite a summer vacation; most of us are content with a week at the lake.