

For Immediate Release

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ValleyNet to Focus on Universal Broadband Advocacy

White River Junction, VT:

ValleyNet, a non-profit dedicated to internet advocacy, today announced that it was streamlining its mission to focus primarily on broadband advocacy, as well as the further development of its listservs in Upper Valley communities. "Because the internet is evolving so quickly, we find it necessary every so often to refocus on newer, more relevant initiatives and divest ourselves of older businesses in order to continue to provide the most innovative internet services to the Upper Valley," said Stan Williams, board chair.

"This has been a difficult decision for the ValleyNet board of directors to make. But in order to maximize the impact of ValleyNet's activities, the board has made the judgment to transfer less-important services and lay off employees associated with those services, in order to keep our broadband advocacy and listservs in place," stated Williams.

In the future, ValleyNet will focus primarily on broadband advocacy, particularly on the further development of the East Central Vermont Community Fiber Network ("ECFiber.") It will also seek to expand its community listservs and similar information services, which will be managed by volunteers and coordinated by a volunteer committee.

Domain Name Registration and Website Hosting Transferred to NHVT.net

ValleyNet currently hosts numerous non-profit and small business web sites. Beginning March 1, ValleyNet will transfer its domain name registration and website services to NHVT.net, a local internet service provider based in Lebanon, NH. "Customers should see no change in services and need take no action at this time. We are working closely with NHVT.net to assure a smooth transfer," said Williams. "Fifteen years ago, we began offering these services to customers because domain name registration and website hosting were not readily available in the area. Now, both these services are easily accessible both locally and on the internet."

Advocacy for Universal Fiber-to-the-Home ("FTTH")

"ValleyNet strongly believes that the right to universal public access to broadband is critical in today's society and should be equivalent to the present-day universal access to other vital infrastructure such as public roads, electric service, and telephone service. FTTH is clearly the only satisfactory technical solution (particularly in our mountainous region) that will provide future bandwidth requirements that will be measured in gigabits, not megabits per second. But despite much federal and state 'jawboning,' true broadband internet coverage in the US today is still similar to electric and telephone service in the 1920's – vitally important, but still unavailable in many rural areas. ValleyNet has invested a substantial sum in the startup of ECFiber (www.ECFiber.net), which has much in common with many of the

electrical coops* that were formed in the 1930's with the passage of the transformational Rural Electrification Act," said Williams. ValleyNet is also working with similar initiatives elsewhere in Vermont and in neighboring states. This sphere of activity will constitute the principal focus of ValleyNet's efforts in the coming period.

"We are pleased with the progress that ECFiber has made during a difficult financial environment in planning to provide universal, open access broadband service in its 22 member towns, where nearly one quarter of all households have already pre-registered for ECFiber service. Tim Nulty will continue to spearhead broadband as a consultant to ValleyNet," said Williams. "In fact, ValleyNet has received two Certificates of Public Good from the Vermont Public Service Board for the provision of cable TV and telecom services in the 22 ECFiber towns."

Although ECFiber's Round 1 stimulus application for a loan of over \$60M from the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Service ("RUS") was recently denied, it is planning to reapply in Round 2 as well as pursue its original plan for private, non-recourse financing, now that the market for municipal finance has begun to recover. Loreda Sola, ECFiber chairman, said, "ECFiber and its member towns are extremely grateful to ValleyNet for the financial and organizational assistance it continues to provide."

Listservs to be Managed by Volunteers and Expanded/Website Unchanged

ValleyNet's primary recent contributions to the Upper Valley's internet life have been its web page (which provides numerous informational services and links) and its listservs (<http://lists.valley.net/lists/lists> ,) which provide nine towns, several organizations, and over 2,000 subscribers an outlet for diverse but focused discussion and transactions.

ValleyNet will coordinate future volunteer management of these listservs through an advisory committee. The committee will seek volunteer managers from within the listserv subscribership to keep discussions civil and focused on the community in which they are based. ValleyNet will also endeavor to expand these listservs to communities which currently have no similar resource.

In some communities like Thetford, Strafford, and Norwich, over half of the households are subscribers and the town listservs have created vital "virtual communities" where subscribers opine on local politics, search for lost cats, give away baby strollers or keep people informed about community events, among other things. Most subscribers opt to receive the day's posts in a daily digest format, but subscribers can also receive posts as they are written.

ValleyNet's web site will continue to be a resource for useful information and ValleyNet and Vital Communities will collaborate to keep the website's Events Calendar (<http://calendar.theuppervalley.net/events/>) operational.

Recycling

ValleyNet will continue to offer its annual fall recycling program at the Montshire Museum in conjunction with the Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste District and Vital Communities.

Education

Bob Raiselis will continue to provide his well regarded educational workshops privately, in conjunction with local libraries. These workshops cover a diverse range of topics from introductory Excel to digital photography to eBay “how-to”.

Contact: Stan Williams, ValleyNet Board Chair (802) 359-4162

ValleyNet enhances the lives of those it serves by advocating for universal and effective Internet access, and providing services to facilitate Internet use and increase citizen community engagement. ValleyNet, a non-profit organization, serves the Upper Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont. www.valley.net

ECFiber is a group of 22 towns in east central Vermont that have voted to join into an Interlocal contract to provide universal, open-access, Fiber-to the-Home broadband services to its citizens and businesses. www.ECFiber.net

NHVT.net has been providing quality internet services since 1992. www.NHVT.net

Vital Communities, a non-profit based in White River Junction, serves the Upper Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont and “engages citizens, organizations, and communities in creating solutions to our region’s challenges.” www.vitalcommunities.org

*<http://www.nreca.org/AboutUs/Co-op101/CoopHistory.htm>