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Rural Development

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Release No.: 09302003-2

Contact: Holly L. Martien, (318) 473-7917
holly.martien@la.usda.gov

Alisa Harrison (202) 720-4623
Tim McNeilly (202) 690-0498

USDA AWARDS \$32.4 MILLION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS FOR EDUCATION AND MEDICAL SERVICE

LaSalle Parish Hospital District 2 to Receive \$262,000 for Critical Life-Saving Technology

WASHINGTON, September 30, 2003— Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced the selection of 84 Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) grants totaling more than \$32 million, providing greater educational opportunities and medical service to rural citizens in 41 states.

“The Bush Administration recognizes the importance of technology in bringing new resources to rural America,” said Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman. “These grants will help expand the availability of state of the art health care and educational resources to rural families.”

LaSalle Parish Hospital Service District 2 will receive a \$262,000 telemedicine grant to fund distance radiology diagnostic services. “This grant will enable the residents of LaSalle Parish to receive a timely diagnosis from a physician at a major hospital without leaving LaSalle Parish,” said Mary Moffett, Administrator for Hospital Service District 2 of LaSalle Parish. “This service will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week—and immediate diagnostic services will be available for emergency patients.”

LaSalle General Hospital faced a dilemma that many rural hospitals face when the hospital’s radiologist retired. “Rural communities have difficulty recruiting specialized medical personnel,” said Moffett. “There are not always financial resources available to compete with larger hospitals to attract new personnel—telemedicine breaks down these barriers.”

USDA Rural Development Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants are competitive grants open to rural communities. “Telemedicine is having a profound effect on the quality of life for rural Louisiana,” said Michael B. Taylor, USDA Rural Development State Director. “Geographic barriers are disappearing, and people who would have to travel hours to see a specialist can now visit one immediately using telemedicine technology.”

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Benefits of the LaSalle telemedicine grant are far-reaching. LaSalle Parish is located between two medically-underserved parishes—Catahoula and Grant. “LaSalle General Hospital is now able to offer critical, life-saving diagnostic assistance to people in a three-parish area,” said Taylor. “The USDA Rural Development grant, as well as a substantial investment by LaSalle General Hospital, will pay long-lasting dividends to the residents of these parishes.”

In total, 57 distance education grants for \$23.5 million, and 27 telemedicine grants for more than \$ 8.9 million were selected for funding. The education projects will help 556 schools provide students with educational tools to better equip them for the global digital economy. Additionally, rural residents will have access to better, faster and more modern health care through 190 medical service facilities. A complete list of the selected grant recipients can be found at the USDA Rural Development web site at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>

“Information technology is critical to rural Americans. It significantly improves the quality of their health care and their ability to receive access to educational programs that prepare them for a competitive future,” said Agriculture Under Secretary for Rural Development Thomas C. Dorr.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA's web site at www.rurdev.usda.gov.

The Louisiana Rural Development State Office is located at 3727 Government Street, Alexandria, Louisiana 71302, and the telephone number is (318) 473-7921. There are four area offices located throughout the state to serve Louisiana residents.

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