



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT JOINS BASSETT HEALTHCARE TO PROMOTE TELEMEDICINE AND BROADBAND NETWORKS

Event Highlights Telecommunications Program's 60th Anniversary and Breast Cancer Awareness

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y., Oct. 27, 2009 – USDA Rural Development Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager today demonstrated at Bassett Healthcare the life-saving potential of rural broadband networks as he highlighted how USDA is helping fund cutting-edge medical technology.

“USDA has provided cutting-edge technological support for Rural America since the 1930s, when we first brought electricity to the most isolated areas of our nation,” Tonsager said. “There is no better way to celebrate the 60th anniversary of our Telecommunications Program than by highlighting the life-saving technology USDA Rural Development has helped fund. Today, rural America needs robust broadband networks to support medicine, education and business. President Obama and I are committed to ensuring that these networks are built and made accessible to everyone who needs them.”

Bassett demonstrated a digital mammography unit that uses a broadband network to connect the Cooperstown facility with three remote sites and a mobile mammography unit. Digital breast screening images are relayed instantly through the network, enabling oncology experts to consult with patients and other health care providers in real time. Digital mammography images also are superior to photographic images, allowing doctors to detect breast cancer much earlier, which is crucial to curing the disease and saving lives. The demonstration also highlighted Breast Cancer Awareness Month, which ends this week.

In 2006, USDA Rural Development awarded Bassett a \$500,000 telemedicine grant to help purchase digital mammography equipment at four sites, purchase a 40-foot-long mobile mammography unit and build a broadband network. The system connects Bassett's Cooperstown site to sites in Herkimer, Sidney and Oneonta and to the mobile unit. The mobile unit also has greatly improved access to mammography screening for women living in Bassett's rural 8,000-square-mile service area.

USDA Rural Development's Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program was started in 1993 and has provided 37 grants worth more than \$12.2 million to 24 New York organizations. Since its inception, the Telecommunications Program has invested more than \$212 million in rural New York. This vast majority of the funding has been provided through telecommunications and broadband loans, with smaller amounts provided through digital television and weather radio grants.

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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 fosters growth in homeownership, finances business development and supports the creation of critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available by calling the state office at (315) 477-6400 or by visiting USDA Rural Development's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ny>.

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