



Committed to the future of rural communities.

*USDA Rural Development: Telecommunications Program;*

*Community Connect Grant Program and Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP)—Oklahoma*

**@Link Services, LLC**

**Need:**

@Link Services is an Oklahoma based Internet Service Provider that is dedicated to providing high-speed Internet service in unserved and underserved areas throughout Oklahoma. @Link needed assistance in providing broadband to several small towns in Oklahoma, including Lima, Kildare, New Lima, and Shamrock. Before @Link came along, several of these small towns had no access to broadband and their economies, schools, and residents were falling behind.

**How Rural Development Helped:**

In 2008, @Link Services, LLC received a Community Connect Grant for \$544,164 to provide broadband services to the community of Lima, Oklahoma. Many town institutions were expected to benefit from this grant, including the new town volunteer fire department, the K-12 school, and the Community Center that is opening thanks to the grant funds.

In addition, @Link Services received a Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) award in 2010. They received a \$5,897,676 grant and a \$2,649,681 loan. With the award, they planned to build Broadband Infrastructure for the unserved which would deliver advanced tornado warnings and provide options for Federal and State assistance during natural disasters. The project also includes infrastructure for high speed access to over 1,500 households, as well as key businesses and anchor institutions.

**Results:**

Thanks to the Community Connect and BIP funds, several Community Centers with computer access have been opened by @Link in the area. These centers have benefitted several of the surrounding small towns.



*Above: New Lima Community Connects Computer Center ribbon cutting September 22, 2011.*

For example, the New Lima Community Connect Computer Center is located in a former weight room on the New Lima Public School campus. This center is home to twenty desktop computers and serves fifteen to twenty people daily. The center offers many school programs such as an A+ Class; this class is designed to help students that have fallen behind for various reasons advance to the next grade. The center even caters to students trying to earn credits from online university classes. Currently, three students (one senior citizen and two young adults) use the Center to facilitate on-line university level classes.

At the newly constructed Community Center in Kildare, in addition to the new computers and broadband Internet connections available, visitors will have access to printers and a trained staff on hand to assist with any questions or problems. The center also offers free weekly computer training classes which are available to the public.

In Kildare, the public elementary school was in danger of closing before @Link Services and the Kildare

School Board signed an agreement for their new Community Center to be housed in a classroom at the elementary school. Revenues from the lease will allow the school to continue educating Kindergarten through sixth grade students in the area.

Another small town in Oklahoma, Shamrock, has benefitted immensely through the construction of a Community Center. Area residents, who have had Internet access only through slow dial-up service or pricey satellite-based broadband, now can get it for free at the community center or by buying competitively priced broadband service through @Link. Shamrock's City Hall had lain empty until

@Link decided to set up the computer center there, and the town had long been in danger of becoming insolvent. The center opened in late 2011 and has brought hope to the town that businesses and jobs will finally come to the area.

Businesses are already gaining from the technology advances. Because of the Broadband network in the area, Star Home Services in Seminole, OK is benefiting by selling high-speed home Internet service in the Wewoka, Seminole and Lima areas.