

News



Petersen-McCarroll honored for 50 years as a REALTOR

Nancy Petersen-McCarroll of Nancy Petersen Real Estate in Estherville is celebrating 50 years as a REALTOR®. Nancy is pictured here being presented with a plaque from the Iowa Great Lakes Board of REALTORS® Board of Directors. Front from left are Nancy Petersen-McCarroll, Angela Bousquet-Hinn, Amanda Lippon; back row: Max Carlson, Cristy Jones, Leah Hilpiper, Gretchen Lolis, Matt Lippon.

Photo submitted

Rocky start hasn't dented Estherville Communications construction

BY AMY H. PETERSON
STAFF WRITER

A year ago, officials from Estherville Communications rolled out their plan to build infrastructure for advanced fiber optic broadband throughout the Estherville area. The company is, with property owner permission, installing the infrastructure up to businesses and homes that will allow the company to install the fiber optic broadband. Installation does not obligate the owner to sign up for the company's service.

This week, Ryan Boone, CEO of Estherville Communications, told the story of the past year.

In July, 2022, a ribbon cutting for the Estherville Communications downtown location on First Avenue South celebrated the progress of the business district installation. Numerous businesses on or near Highway 9 have been using Estherville Communications internet service. The summer and fall of 2022 had workers doing site surveys of residential addresses east of the Des Moines River (West Fork) and north of Highway 9. Boone said 200 residences had infrastructure installed over the summer and fall. The goal was to install fiber at 1,500 residences, but the effort hit a rocky point. That is, a lot of rocks as they dug through the ground to install the fiber, Boone said.

"We didn't get everything completed that we wanted to because we were battling with a lot of rocks and having to replace a lot of drill heads – so we faced a lot of things we hadn't anticipated," Boone said.

While in Boone's experience, fiber optics workers can gener-

ally get into and out of a neighborhood quickly, Estherville Communications trucks were in the streets and disrupted traffic flow for longer periods than the company had hoped.

"The rocks were our main obstacle, and we are appreciative of the residents in that area and the community. Other municipal utilities in town that dealt with multiple locate requests given the time it was taking, the fact that we were in the neighborhoods for longer periods than what we had hoped, we appreciate everyone's cooperation," Boone said.

The plan is to continue synchronously with Phase 2 – the northern city residences, and the rural phase – building in fiber to rural Estherville residences.

"We have a lot of the main facilities done; our main priority for this year, to start, is to at least get those remaining locations in town that we didn't get done last year," Boone said.

Workers will be back out in the field as soon as the snow is all melted and the ground has

some give. Boone said a state broadband grant provides the funding to install fiber optics in the rural areas of Estherville.

"That's roughly 600 locations all around the town of

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—Ryan Boone, CEO of Estherville Communications

Estherville, and we're investing about \$10 million there. Then our goal would be to finish up the southern portion of Estherville and west of the river in 2024," Boone said.

What does this look like for residential broadband customers?

If you're in one of the 200 locations that did get connected last year, expect a call or sign up for service any time, Boone said.

"For some of the locations that we weren't able to get hooked up or completed last year, we're actually in the process of reaching out to those homes and businesses to let them know that services are available to them today," Boone said.

Boone noted the timing of the overall project hasn't changed, just the amount of labor that will be done in 2023 to make up for the rocky portions of 2022.

"We're excited to keep going and seeing where this goes from here. We've actually hired a few local technicians,

and are potentially adding one more, so we'll have two to three local Estherville people right in the community to provide service to the residents, businesses. We're really, really excited to be part of this community," Boone said.

For those in the approximately 1,300 north Estherville locations remaining, Boone said they will likely have service available by the third quarter of 2023.

"We're really going to prioritize that area and make services available to all of them, and then the rural area. We're probably looking at the third quarter of 2023 to offer services to north/east Estherville, then fourth quarter of 2023 or first quarter of 2024 for those other areas," Boone said.

After infrastructure construction is completed, the company will hire splicers to connect all the different fibers from the home or business all the way to Estherville Communications offices, then test each one for functionality, which can take an additional month or two.

"We're really excited, because we will have one gig speeds available to the customers, high quality digital voice, a streaming video platform – you can watch videos on your Apple TV, Firestick, box you lease from us, or even your phone or iPad. So we're really excited about the services we can offer to the Estherville community and to get our \$22 million plus project completed by the end of 2024," Boone said.

UDMO housing program expanding services with additional \$1.4 million from the U.S. Department of HUD

The Upper Des Moines Opportunity, Inc. (UDMO) Housing Program, in collaboration with the Iowa Balance of State Continuum of Care (IA BoS/CoC), will be awarded \$1,491,339 over three years.

For a decade, the UDMO Housing Program has been effectively and efficiently leveraging Federal, State and Local funding to provide homelessness prevention and intervention services to residents across Northwest and North Central Iowa. Since 2013, more than \$2 million in rental assistance payments has been distributed across the UDMO Region to assist

over 3,200 individuals from nearly 1,300 households.

Housing Program Director Tanya Thelen shares that during the past six months, UDMO has assisted 340 individuals from 141 households and distributed \$348,378 in rental assistance payments to prevent families from experiencing homelessness. The additional \$1.4 million of increased funding from HUD over the next 3 years, "comprises a first-of-its-kind package of resources to help communities provide housing and supportive services to people in unsheltered settings, including in rural

areas."

UDMO will have dedicated Housing Program staff based in the Webster and Clay County Outreach offices. Tanya shares, "Clay and Webster counties have the greatest demonstrated need in our region, therefore, having dedicated Housing Program staff based in those counties will increase efficiencies and client access to housing assistance."

Visit the UDMO Housing Program website for more information: <https://www.udmo.com/programsservices/housing/>

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