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Village of Columbus celebrates broadband milestone at ribbon cutting

State-awarded infrastructure now serves more than 800 locations in Luna County

COLUMBUS, N.M. – State and local officials gathered today in the Village of Columbus to celebrate a broadband infrastructure project that has made high-speed fiber internet available to 822 homes and businesses in the Luna County border community.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony at Columbus Public Plaza marked a major milestone for the Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE), which awarded a \$3.7 million grant through the American Rescue Plan Act to Valley TeleCom Group for the project.

Valley TeleCom Group has installed nearly 50 miles of optic fiber since construction began in June 2024, with nearly 200 homes and businesses connected to the network so far. The internet service provider contributed matching funds to bring the total project cost to \$5.7 million.

“When construction started in June 2024, Columbus had virtually no broadband access, but today 822 locations have fiber at their doorstep and nearly 200 families and businesses are already connected,” said **Jeff Lopez**, director of OBAE. “This is what happens when federal investment meets local commitment — we deliver real infrastructure that changes lives.”

The project connects 724 previously unserved locations and 98 underserved locations. Unserved locations receive less than 25 megabits per second (Mbps) for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads, while underserved locations receive between 25 Mbps/3 Mbps and 100 Mbps download speeds with up to 20 Mbps uploads.

Today's ceremony included remarks from Lopez, state Rep. Jenifer Jones; Tim Bowlby, Valley TeleCom Group network manager; Philip Skinner, mayor of the Village of Columbus; and Luna County Commissioner Christie Ann Harvey.

"Valley TeleCom has invested more than \$5 million dollars to install high speed fiber, and we feel this is going to be a huge game changer for our community," said **Philip Skinner**, mayor of the Village of Columbus. "It will enable businesses, students and individuals to be more efficient and productive with their time. We feel very blessed."

"At Valley, we believe that connecting our rural communities to high-speed fiber is about more than technology—it's about empowering lives," said **Troy Judd**, CEO of Valley TeleCom Group. "This milestone reflects our commitment to honoring our members' roots while building a future full of opportunity and innovation."

The U.S. Treasury awarded New Mexico with \$117 million in grants through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to expand and deploy broadband to unserved and underserved areas.

OBAE has awarded grants to more than 20 entities, including Tribal communities, internet service providers and cooperatives.

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The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion is dedicated to serving New Mexico with a commitment to make high-speed broadband accessible to all New Mexicans. OBAE's mission is to expand and improve high-speed internet service with passionate leadership that drives bold, equitable, affordable and inclusive broadband solutions. OBAE seeks results that honor the state's rich heritage and elevate quality of life for all.