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Ottawa, Ontario

Alberta SuperNet is closing the digital divide now

The world's most extensive fiber-optic and wireless network systems will shake things up, inspiring the knowledge economy, health care, education, and just about everything else. Yet Alberta SuperNet will not disturb the province's peaceful plains and breathtaking badlands.

Speaking at the Broadband Canada Conference in Ottawa today, Victor Doerksen, Minister of Alberta Innovation and Science stressed the Alberta government is taking decisive action with Alberta SuperNet to address the technological infrastructure needs of the 21st century.

"We are closing the digital divide between urban and rural Alberta," Doerksen said. The \$295 million dollar SuperNet investment is not only addressing provincial disparities in the provision of a growing number of essential technological services, "it begins to bridge a growing national digital divide," Doerksen added.

"This project will revolutionize Alberta. I am reminded of the Tennessee Valley Authority project that introduced electricity to the Appalachians in the 1930's and how that changed the Eastern (United) States," said Ray Patterson, a newly arrived associate professor at the University of Alberta's School of Business, who moved his family here from Texas because of Alberta SuperNet and the province's growing reputation for innovation.

Alberta SuperNet is rapidly accelerating the development of the province's knowledge economy, which has already been attracting top-minds from other provinces, the United States, and around the world. "(From) the businesses that will come here, the existing businesses that will reinvent themselves (and) the creativity of the private sector given this opportunity, I expect great things. There's no telling what will happen," Patterson continued, "and in Alberta we won't have to guess what could have been. We're going to find out."

One of the first businesses to seize the SuperNet enhanced Alberta Advantage is IBM Canada, which recently named Edmonton as the location for its new world-class, high-tech Centre for E-Business Innovation, scheduled to open in February. "Alberta SuperNet represents precisely the type of innovation that firms are looking for," said Ed Kilroy, President, IBM Canada Ltd. "Technology has real business impacts and the Alberta government is generating a lot of energy with their technology leadership. There's obviously a commitment here."

In his presentation, Doerksen emphasized the good business sense in SuperNet's 12,000 plus kilometers of end-to-end connectivity. "With SuperNet, Internet Service Providers and network-based businesses will compete for customers. The Alberta government is creating opportunities for businesses," said Doerksen, "and through our innovative SuperNet contract, Alberta is ensuring open competition."

"In Alberta, we are growing our knowledge economy, and creating new possibilities for service delivery," said Doerksen, "and this all contributes to the sustainable prosperity of the province and an even higher

quality of life for Albertans. SuperNet sounds futuristic, and it is, but we are moving forward because it will have real benefits. This project will make us a world-leader in the new economy and it is not something Alberta can wait for."

In partnership with Bell Intrigna and Axia NetMedia, the Alberta government will spend the next three years connecting schools, hospitals, libraries and provincial government buildings, permitting 4,700 facilities in 422 communities access to high-speed broadband Internet and network services. Likewise, rural Albertans will be able to purchase high-speed broadband Internet services previously unavailable, and at a price comparable to urban users.

Additional information on Alberta SuperNet is available on-line at www.albertasupernet.ca or by contacting Alberta Innovation and Science at (780) 427-0285.

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