

PRESS RELEASE - For Newspaper Editing Only – Not for distribution.  
September 11, 2017

“Local Internet Provider wins Microsoft Grant”

Virginia Broadband, LLC “VABB”, a local wireless Internet provider headquartered in Culpeper, VA is one of 10 companies worldwide to win the Microsoft Affordable Access Initiative grant (MS-AAI). (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/affordable-access-initiative/winners>). The grant focuses on ways to deliver innovative Internet and energy access solutions to underserved communities around the World.

VABB’s winning proposal to Microsoft is a simple idea. “Help us plant a series of inexpensive stand-alone utility poles in remote areas so that we can relay our wireless Internet services deep into rural, isolated areas,” stated Joe Lenig Director of Sales and Marketing for VABB.

Dubbed “Microspots”, these mini-towers will help VABB reach small pockets of rural homes situated in thick trees, or in a hollow, or maybe behind a hill. And, unlike large cellular towers, VABB’s Microspots are only 50 to 80 feet tall and barely clear the treetops, making them almost unnoticeable.

VABB is a Fixed Wireless Internet Service Provider (WISP) offering high-speed Internet in Central and Eastern Virginia since 2003. VABB provides wireless Internet service through radio frequency technology to hundreds of homes and businesses in its primary markets of Culpeper, Orange, and Madison counties as well as the Northern Neck region of Virginia. In order to get close to its customer base and deliver the fast speeds demanded by today’s Internet consumers, VABB typically uses commercial cell towers and other tall structures like silos, barns, house roofs, and now Microspot poles to broadcast their unique wireless Internet service.

By broadcasting a radio signal from tall, vertical structures nearby, VABB customers are only one to five miles (as the crow fly’s) from the World-Wide-Web.

---

“Your Internet traffic wirelessly goes from your rooftop to a VABB tower then maybe another tower and then right into the Internet”, said Mr. Lenig, who helped establish the company in 2003.

“Unfortunately, many rural homes and businesses are not reachable due to the hills, hollows, and trees,” Lenig added. “The terrain in our region is our biggest obstacle and that’s where Microsoft’s grant comes in.

“We have over 30 of these utility poles scattered throughout our network,” said Garrett Shankle, VABB’s chief technician. “Getting close to our customers means better reception of our Non-Line-Of-Sight (NLOS) radio technology. The fewer trees we need to pass through, the faster the speeds. And, if a customer can literally see our broadcast structure from their home or business property, they can experience speeds well above the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) guidelines of 25mb/s downloading.”

“Planting and equipping these Microspots is not expensive, around \$10,000 each,” said Robert Sullivan, CEO/President and an original founder of VABB. “That’s not including the various county zoning, building fees, and engineering fees that can add a couple more thousand to each Microspot. The reason we don’t already have these Microspots throughout the region is the low return on the build-out investment. Spending thousands of dollars on a Microspot, just to reach five remote homes where only two or four may want Internet, makes for a very challenging business model.”

“But we are keenly aware of the needs,” Sullivan added. “We hear it every day when potential customers call us desperately asking for service because their kids need to do their homework, or their only source of income is to work from home, or they have a sick family member who can benefit from remote telemedicine access.”

The Microsoft grant will help VABB fund nine Microspot poles in deep rural areas of Culpeper, Madison, and Orange counties. Along with the nine poles funded by the grant, several landowners throughout the area have offered their land and the funding to install more Microspots in their area. In exchange for helping VABB reach remote areas, these landowners receive free Internet and the honor of naming the pole. They also receive the opportunity to pay-it-forward by selecting one

---

customer per year to receive free Internet. “This could be a huge benefit for a low-income family with school children or someone on a fixed income who relies on the Internet for essential communications.” said Lenig.

VABB has already reached out to local companies and property owners that will provide assistance in finding and planting the utility poles and funding their own Microspots.

“Ted Landrum of L & L Fencing, Bill Price - CEO of Madison Wood Preservers, and Hill Top Excavation & Construction, all from Madison County, will not only find and plant these poles for us, they will pay for their own Microspot on their own properties,” continued Mr. Lenig.

VABB will begin this project as soon as it completes the zoning and building permits for each county. “We are working with the counties to ensure we follow their respective rules as they stand now, but we are also working with them to remove or reduce some barriers, as recommended in both the Design Nine Broadband Recommendations report for Culpeper County (funded in 2016 by a grant from the Commonwealth of Virginia) and the Center for Innovative Technology’s (CIT) 2016 report to Madison County,” said Lenig. “Making the process of deploying Microspots more cost effectively in low density areas will go a long way to enhancing rural living and provide a stronger economic base for the counties.”

“The verdict is in” concludes Mr. Sullivan, “rural Virginians want high-speed Internet. VABB’s goal is to continue to make that happen.”

To learn more about VABB and see if you are within their upgraded coverage area or in a future Microspot area, you can call 540-829-1700 or go to [www.vabb.com](http://www.vabb.com) and check out their coverage map. VABB’s Headquarters are at 14115 Lovers Lane, Suite 135, Culpeper, VA 22701. Remote offices are located in White Stone, VA and Gordonsville, VA.