

INTERNET

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doors, said CEO Dave Wolf. A neighborhood spokesperson worked with Gardonville engineers to apply for the state's Border to Border Broadband Development Grant.

"It's probably one of the better success stories around the area as far as broadband goes," Wolf said. "If people are frustrated with their current situation, I would encourage them to call our office and get on a list so we can start cultivating their neighborhood."

Rural telecoms expanding

In response to demand from neighborhoods, the rural telecommunications groups are pushing beyond their traditional boundaries to extend premium internet access to nearby communities, especially when internet giants like CenturyLink turn down local requests.

When a handful of organizers knocked on doors near Holmes City, they gathered about 200 households that wanted service, and Runestone agreed to deliver. It won a Border to Border grant and now provides high-speed internet there as well as to Blackwell Lake, both within CenturyLink's service area.

"That was just a grassroots effort from those customers," said Kent Hedstrom, Runestone manager. "They approached us about premium service. It's very expensive to deploy this fiber so it takes a group to make it pay."

Customers on Lake Andrew, also in CenturyLink's territory, also began clamoring for service from Runestone. They were hoping to land a Border to Border grant last year and have fiber optic installed this year, but then-Gov. Mark Dayton ended up vetoing the spending package it was part of, stalling Lake Andrew's effort.



Mackenzie



Wolf

Now Gov. Tim Walz is asking the Minnesota Legislature for \$70 million over two years to provide high-speed access in unserved and underserved areas throughout Minnesota. And legislators have indicated their willingness to go along with the project, albeit at differing dollar amounts. The Minnesota House has agreed to the full amount; the Minnesota Senate is willing to spend \$30 million over two years.

"If there's Border to Border funding again, we're going to apply," Hedstrom said.

If they do and they get a grant, Lake Andrew residents might get fiber optic in 2020.

One Blackwell Lake resident, Tim Philbrick, said he and several neighbors approached Runestone about better service several years ago and Hedstrom told them about the Border to Border grants.

"This was late July, early August; the deadline for applications was like mid-September," Philbrick recalled. "He told us we would be very happy to put an application in but said, 'We're going to need you guys to do some legwork to help us.'"

What Runestone needed, Philbrick said, was for the neighbors to canvass local homeowners to determine how many people would sign up for service, so the company could decide if it made business sense.

A couple ladies took on the task, Philbrick said.

"They did some serious legwork running around. They went door to door," he said. "They got ultimately 70 percent of the homes in this coverage



Karen Tolkinen / Echo Press

This jumble of utility boxes is where fiber optic internet service ends for Runestone Telecom Association. Lake Andrew residents are hoping Runestone can bring it to their neighborhoods.

area signed up and are taking the service."

Now Philbrick, who grew up in Pakistan to missionary parents, is able to look up Pakistani food and relive some of the sights and sounds of his formative years.

"Any kind of video, I'm not waiting for this buffering business anymore," he said. "When I click on a website, it's instantaneous."

It's not always 'Yes'

At least one neighborhood in Douglas County, the Bluffs Road NW loop near Lake Carlos, has met with defeat time and again after trying to convince CenturyLink to upgrade their internet service, two neighbors said.

Kevin Rankl, an applications engineer who works from home, said every few months, neighbors along their loop call the Louisiana-based company to ask for better service.

Rochelle Telander, who lives down the road from Rankl, said that when her son streams Netflix, nobody can do anything else online. Plus, when their internet access goes down, their TVs don't work either, she said. She last called CenturyLink about

four months ago, she said.

"They tell us this is the best we can get," Telander said. "Nobody has really gotten anywhere. We'd all like better access because it's really stinky out here."

CenturyLink confirmed to the Echo Press that while it has brought more than 60,000 Minnesota households online since 2016, including some locally, it has no immediate plans to expand in Douglas County.

"Deploying broadband in rural areas is costly and we must consider our ability to recover those costs in our deployment decisions," Andrew Schriener, director of public policy at CenturyLink in Minnesota, said in a statement released by the company. "We will continue to evaluate additional locations for future broadband expansion. However, at this time there are no plans for additional deployments within Douglas County."

He indicated that the company needs additional government help to expand.

"CenturyLink will continue to work with other providers and our local, state and federal lead-

ers on policies and funding that would support the expansion of broadband in costly rural markets," he said.

Neighborhoods whose internet providers say no to future upgrades need to change tactics, said Danna MacKenzie, executive director of Minnesota's Office of Broadband Development. They might have better success contacting her office instead. In the past, the state has connected nearby providers with neighborhoods, she said.

MacKenzie said the state's Border to Border program is designed to be responsive to those who ask for service.

In Douglas County, service maps indicate those speaking up have mostly been lakeshore owners and nearby communities. In other counties, the farmers spoke up, MacKenzie said. In Big Stone County, everyone got service.

While groups such as the Farm Bureau and the Minnesota Farmers Union have sought more funding for farmers as a whole, it's not clear whether anyone is paying attention to the rate at which farms are actually being reached. More spread apart than lakeshore owners, it might prove more difficult for farmers to organize at the neighborhood level.

Bruce Miller, membership and outreach director for the Minnesota Farmers Union, said his organization has had staff turnover and that he is trying to get up to speed on all the issues.

"We want to leave no farmer behind when it comes to high speed internet," he said.

MacKenzie said everyone who wants high-quality internet access must speak up.

"This program is designed to listen to the community," she said. "We're seeing the communities who get organized and help people understand the need and speak up, they are the ones making the most progress. That is very clear."

SHOOTING

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confirms that Schmidtbauer raised the barrel of the shotgun prior to the deputy discharging his service weapon.

Douglas County Sheriff Troy Wolbersen said he fully supports Larson's findings.

"I want the community to know Deputy Herzberg is back on active duty, as is Deputy Nicole Swanson, who was also at the scene that morning," Wolbersen said. "We have full confidence in their skills and decision-making as deputy sheriffs."

"This has been a challenging time for the deputies, our staff, Douglas County and the family of Tyler Schmidtbauer," Wolbersen added. "County Attorney Chad Larson and I have met personally with members of the Schmidtbauer family and reviewed his decision with them."

The investigation

Larson's decision was based on the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension's investigation into the officer-involved shooting.

According to the investigation:

At about 5:15 a.m. on Feb. 26, Schmidtbauer's father called 911 from his neighbor's residence in Miltona and reported that his son was "out of control."

Deputies Herzberg and Swanson were dispatched to the location. Herzberg was familiar with Schmidtbauer from previous contacts under similar circumstances, and requested additional assistance from the Alexandria Police Department because of Schmidtbauer's aggressive tendencies in the past.

Upon arriving, Herzberg knocked on the door of the residence while Swanson took a position at a window near the entryway.

After not hearing any noises coming from inside the residence, Herzberg knocked on the door and announced his presence. Schmidtbauer then opened the door with his left hand while holding a shotgun in his right hand. The barrel of the shotgun was pointed toward the floor.

From the body camera, Schmidtbauer's mother can be seen standing

behind him. Schmidtbauer stated, "What's up?" and immediately began to move behind the open door and away from his mother.

Herzberg drew his handgun and ordered Schmidtbauer to drop the gun. The deputy then ordered Schmidtbauer to drop the gun a second time.

Schmidtbauer didn't drop the gun and moved to conceal himself behind the door. As he moved behind the door, the barrel of the gun began to rise as he placed it in both hands.

At that time, Herzberg discharged his service weapon through the door. Schmidtbauer was hit with multiple rounds and died immediately. Swanson did not fire her service weapon.

Interviews

When authorities later interviewed Schmidtbauer's father, he said that his son had been drinking and acting "weird" on the eve-

ning prior to the shooting. The father stated that he had gotten up in the middle of the night and found his son dressed in winter clothes.

Schmidtbauer reportedly came in and out of the house several times that night. In the morning, he was upset and smashed a chair, head-butted a wall, and smashed his father's cell phone. While his father was laying in bed in the morning, Schmidtbauer came into the room and bit his face. He then brought the broken chair into the bedroom and threatened to hit his father with it.

Schmidtbauer then went to a closet, brought out the shotgun, and began looking for ammunition. A few minutes later, his father called 911.

When Schmidtbauer's mother was interviewed, she said she woke up around 5 a.m. and could hear her son ranting and raving, breaking things, and he appeared to be

under the influence.

When officers arrived, she told him not to answer the door, but he opened it anyway. She stated that he was holding the shotgun and the officer told him repeatedly to put the gun down. She said she believed her son wanted to die. However, she criticized the deputy for shooting him rather than trying to reason with him.

When Herzberg was interviewed, he said he had previously been dispatched to the same residence last summer. On that occasion, Schmidtbauer answered the door and "postured-up" as if he wanted to fight the deputy.

For that reason, the deputy had requested additional assistance for this call. Herzberg said he had his Taser drawn when Schmidtbauer opened the door. When Herzberg saw that Schmidtbauer was holding a shotgun, he drew his gun and ordered

him to drop the shotgun.

Herzberg then pointed his gun at Schmidtbauer and began to retreat backward and to his right. Herzberg said that as Schmidtbauer moved behind the door, he could see the barrel of the shotgun rise as Schmidtbauer grabbed it with his other hand.

Herzberg said he

believed that Schmidtbauer was going to shoot him. He ordered Schmidtbauer to drop the shotgun again and then fired approximately eight rounds through the door with his 9mm pistol. He stated that he could see a portion of Schmidtbauer, but fired through the door to hit him "center mass" to stop the threat.

Aisha Rush, MD, Amanda Zehrer, MD, Sarah Feierabend, CNM, Anne Gilbertson, CNM

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