

**CONNECTING CUMBERLAND:
CREDA RECEIVES INDUSTRY CANADA FUNDING
FOR RURAL BROADBAND BUSINESS PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CUMBERLAND COUNTY – Industry Canada recently announced the recipients of business plan development funding in the first round of the Broadband for Rural and Northern Development Pilot Program (BRAND).

The Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association (CREDA), who had submitted an application on behalf of eight Cumberland County communities, will receive up to \$30,000 in funding to develop a business plan. The business plan will outline how broadband service could be implemented in each community covered in the proposal.

The underserved communities identified in the proposal are Advocate, Joggins, River Hebert, Parrsboro, Wallace, Malagash, Wentworth and Pugwash.

This announcement will help Canadian communities currently without broadband service develop a community-based strategy for implementing this innovative technology. Broadband refers to high-capacity Internet connections between users and suppliers. Broadband services can currently be delivered through cable, satellite and digital subscriber lines (DSL).

The BRAND program guidelines state that in order to be eligible for the funding competition, a 'community champion' would be required to submit an application on behalf of underserved communities. Government or legally incorporated, not-for-profit Canadian organizations would qualify as a community champion. Through community meetings held in Parrsboro and Amherst, CREDA was selected to act as the community champion and submit an application on behalf of interested communities in Cumberland County. A small committee was formed with the task of preparing the application within a very short timeline. The Cumberland BRAND committee consists of county council members, local IT business proprietors, community representatives, and CREDA staff.

"Lack of communication services for communities along both the Northumberland & Fundy Shores of Cumberland County is a major concern and deemed as a priority issue in CREDA's new Strategic Plan to be released in the Spring of 2003," states Rhonda Kelly, CREDA's Executive Director.

The funds were allocated as part of the \$105-million BRAND Program announced by Minister of Industry Allan Rock and Secretary of State Andy Mitchell on September 5, 2002. The deadline for submitting applications for the first round of funding was October 31, 2002. This program uses a competitive process to bring broadband services to Canadian communities that currently have no high-speed Internet service.

"Access to broadband services would undoubtedly have a positive social and economic impact on Parrsboro and the surrounding area," says Doug Robinson, Mayor of the Town of Parrsboro.

"This pilot program is a major step forward in bringing high-speed Internet service to rural communities in Cumberland County," said Rennie Bugley, CAO, Municipality of Cumberland County. "We applaud the efforts of CREDA and the BRAND committee for submitting a solid proposal on behalf of these underserved areas."

"Recognizing the challenges derived from the absence of affordable broadband services in the affected areas, community and government stakeholders have been very forthcoming with financial & in-kind support for this initiative. The residents, businesses, service groups and government agencies of Cumberland County have a strong tradition of supporting development and volunteer activities," said Paul Hopper, Business Development Officer with CREDA.

Additional sources of funding for the development of the business plan include contributions from the Municipality of Cumberland County, Town of Parrsboro, Pugwash Village Commission, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and the NS Office of Economic Development.

"Broadband Internet will mean a great deal to spark economic renewal and future development. This service will assist in attracting investment and immigration, industry and small businesses and allow existing enterprises to remain competitive and strengthen their position in the world market," states Hollis Bartlett, Secretary, River Hebert & Joggins Development Association.

Kyle Hebb of Hebb Micro in Parrsboro, is hoping to see high speed service implemented in rural Cumberland soon. "Our firm would find it most difficult to attract quality technical personnel to work with the limited services available in the immediate area. High speed internet is one of those services that must be offered in the lesser populated regions to help reverse this trend allowing people both the opportunity to enjoy a rural lifestyle yet pursue a challenging career in an advanced field, such as software development."

Ron MacNutt, a Technical Representative for the Sony Service & Engineering Division, who lives and works in Wallace faces technical capacity issues every day. "For the past 5 years I have been part of a "Virtual Team", consisting of six members located in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Wallace. We are connected via a VPN (Virtual Private Network) and perform the majority of our duties on-line. I am currently the only member of this team that does not have access to a broadband service. As technology evolves, and the need to transfer files of increasing size to and from other members grows, it is becoming more difficult to operate from this location."

He adds, "Having access to a broadband service will allow me to continue working from this area, enjoying a quality of life only available in a rural area. I have no doubt that other IT professionals would consider living here if the communications facilities existed to allow this. Companies are becoming open to the concept of having remote employees, and would certainly use this as a retention/recruiting tool."

Proposals selected for business plan development funding were chosen from 222 submissions from across Canada, based on recommendations by an arm's length National Selection Committee. There were 89 successful applicants, representing approximately 1149 communities, for a total of \$2,434,000 in funding.

Five proposals from Nova Scotia, representing 113 communities, were successful in the first round of the BRAND program.

Successful applicants will now use their funds to develop business plans to be submitted by May 22, 2003, to compete for implementation funding.

A backgrounder with information on the program is attached. For further program details, and a complete list of first round business plan development funding recipients, visit the Industry Canada broadband web site at <http://broadband.gc.ca>.

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