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### **Editorial: Faster Internet Opens Ritzville's doors**

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By Editorial Board, Columbia Basin Herald

Ritzville, Adams County's seat, is expected to have some new opportunities with the completion of a high-speed Internet expansion.

The work was brought about by the nonprofit Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet). What it means is there's now high-speed Internet service for libraries, schools and medical centers in Ritzville. From there, local providers can connect to other businesses and homes. The project, along with a broadband build-out to other communities in Washington state, was part of a statewide \$140 million funding package.

The money came from two federal stimulus grants to reach the far corners of Washington state. Matching funds from member public utility districts and other communities totaled \$45 million to add to the stimulus funds. In this case, the City of Ritzville didn't have to contribute funds, according to Angela Bennick, a NoaNet spokesperson.

With the expanded technology, time and distance limitations will be reduced for Ritzville residents. The rural agricultural community of about 1,673 people is located about halfway between Moses Lake and Spokane along Interstate 90.

Bennick, of NoaNet, explains the grants focused on "anchor institutions" such as libraries, schools and medical centers.

Other communities included in the grant include Walla Walla, Clarkston, Odessa, Warden and Davenport, which are areas that haven't had a lot of opportunity for broadband, she said. Already, NoaNet worked with hospitals in rural communities to access cutting edge technology and doctors in metropolitan centers through a process called "Telemedicine."

Connecting small clinics with large hospitals is the goal.

For example, having a radiologist read a large X-ray file online at another facility is more cost efficient, she said.

Quick online access to other health information and test results are also among broadband's benefits. Public libraries are able to offer individuals access to education services by downloading different classes online and providing an application for people to search for jobs.

Expanding Internet capacity is helpful because it allows more people to work online simultaneously without the time lag of slower service.

Bennick sums it up well by pointing out the importance of access and availability, and having the same opportunities in rural Washington as those offered in the Interstate 5 corridor.

We are pleased Ritzville has this service and hope more educational, job and business opportunities abound for the area.

We hope the project helps even the playing field for people living in the rural communities of the Columbia Basin.

Doing so could mean we have more family wage jobs and opportunities for our youth.

- Editorial Board

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