

Seaside Committed to 100% Connectivity



Rev. Don MacQueen (right), George Millard and Robert Glencross (left to right) chat with Adam Contour of Seaside High-Speed Internet after the community meeting in Debert on Nov. 5th. (Harrington Photo)



Colchester County District 10 Councilor Tom Taggart (centre) attended the Seaside High-Speed Internet community meeting in Economy on Nov. 4th and asked questions of Seaside General Manager, Jim DeWolfe(left) and Seaside Communications Director, Adam Contour(right). (Harrington Photo)

By Linda Harrington

Providing updated information to potential customers was the main reason behind two community meetings held by Seaside High-Speed Internet during the first week of November. One meeting was held at the Economy Rec Centre on Nov. 4th and one at the Royal Canadian Legion in Debert on Nov. 5th.

About forty people came out to the meetings to listen to the presentation put on by Jim DeWolfe, Seaside General Manager, and Adam Contour, Seaside Communications Director.

Mr. DeWolfe told the audiences that back in 2007 the Province of Nova Scotia awarded a contract to Seaside High-speed Internet to provide internet service to some 38,000 residents and businesses in Nova Scotia who might otherwise not be served. He said the challenges were huge, as they embarked on a project that was the first of its type in North America.

He described the equipment as "state of the art" and says he is excited to offer rural students the same access as students in the urban centres and farmers the opportunity to do their internet business from their farms.

The internet service is briefly represented as towers set up in a network across the province. These towers must be able to see each other, in order to pass on the communication. The main lines of cable come into the province from New Brunswick and

extend to Cape North. The signals sent out from the main towers to other towers must have a direct line of sight. "It would be easy if we were doing this project in Saskatchewan," said Adam Contour. "But we must deal with a variety of terrain in Nova Scotia."

The information sessions explained to area residents some of the problems the company has encountered while trying to reach every home and business in Nova Scotia.

First on the list was the terrain, and the problems associated with bouncing a signal around the changes in topography. Mr. Contour explained why high ground is not always the best choice for an internet tower, as is often the case for cell phone coverage. "If the site is too high the coverage area will not be as great, because of the way the signal is sent out and we must be able to get power into the area, as well."

Second was the remote locations of some homes, which Adam said has provided some unique challenges. Seaside is trying to solve each one on a case by case basis. Maria Forman of Debert reported that other internet providers laughed when they saw her home was located down in a hole, and one wouldn't even get out of the car. Adam told her, "We will get to you; it just won't be right away."

The overall process was the third challenge for the

project. The stakeholders do not own the land where the towers need to be placed. "We need the co-operation of land owners and some want no part of the project," said Mr. Contour. "We have to find a location where we have support, and this can be time consuming." He also said things like having the power connected and working with their other partners has meant some procedures have been out of their immediate control.

The company tried using generators to provide power to towers that were not yet hooked up electrically, but after many were stolen, they had learned an expensive lesson. "Now we do not fire up a tower until it is wired by Nova Scotia Power," said Adam.

A question was asked in Economy about how many towers they want to have installed and Mr. Contour replied, "Our goal is as few as possible. The coverage area has been designed, taking into account the topography, but in reality we must add on as we go."

Economy resident Anita McLellan mentioned she has found her internet service affected by the local tides. Mr. DeWolfe said they knew there were issues with the signal caused by refraction off of water but this was the first they had heard of any issues with the tides. He made a note to have the problem looked into by the company.

Fourth on the list was the aesthetic appearance of their towers and equipment. Seaside has taken great lengths to try and blend in with surroundings and get input from communities as to the locations of the towers.

The final item discussed was service. "We had to make the decision whether to build the entire network all at once and not tell anyone or let the customers come online as the towers became available," said Mr. Contour. "The decision to offer service as we progress has meant some potential customers, in available areas, are still without service."

A question in Debert was asked about the commitment to serving a single customer. Mr. Contour joked that if he had his way, he would move them all (referring to the fact it would often be easier and more economical than trying to find a way to get to particular homes). "I am committed to serving one as I am to serving all the ones located under a tower," says Adam. "The question is WHEN I will be able to get to you. Certain customers will require a great deal more resources but I am committed to 100%."

There are what the presenters called "signal holes" throughout the area. The plan

is to first finish the overall network and then go back and try and fix the smaller areas without signal.

"In the past 15 weeks, we have erected 61 new poles. There are now over 140 structures", says Mr. Contour. The communities served or to be served include Carrs Brook, Cove Road, Five Islands, Little Bass River, Lower Five Islands, Montrose, New Britain, Portapique, Economy, Belmont, Clifton, Debert, East Folly Mtn, East Mines, East Mines Station, East Village, Folly Lake, Folly Mtn, Fort Belcher, Glenholme, Great Village, Little Dyke, Londonderry, Londonderry, Lower Debert, Lower Onslow, Masstown, Old Barns, Onslow and Scrabble Hill.

It is expected once towers at Castlereagh, Londonderry and East Walton are up and running there will still be about 20 homes/businesses in the Economy area with a signal hole. It will take more time to get the signals to these areas.

The Provincial contract runs out at the end of 2009. Seaside is entering into contract renegotiations with the government to try and extend the original deadline, so these areas with signal holes can be reached.

County Councilor Tom Taggart inquired at the Economy meeting whether the three new towers about to come online will cause issues with other internet service providers, as had happened in the past.

Mr. Contour and Mr. DeWolfe said their company had met with other providers to try and prevent any future problems. They will give them notice when new towers are turned on and have suggested equipment upgrades to these companies. "We are not designed to compete, only to provide coverage," said Mr. Contour.

He said Seaside submitted an option to the government, where they would give up certain territories to the smaller providers, but the province declined this offer. "The providers who are not government contracted can choose who they serve. Seaside must serve all," said Mr. Contour.

Seaside expects to have provided over 93% coverage by the end of 2009, leaving them unable to reach about 2500 locations before the end of their contract.

"Our commitment is to get to 100% and we hope we can work with the government to finish the project," said Mr. Contour. "The last 7% will simply require more time."

Kathryn Polak mentioned at the Economy meeting she had tried to get internet service from two other providers but was told she could not have access. "I did not want to pay the \$99 installation fee for Seaside but the installation



It takes many hands and many pounds of apples to make 270 pies. Aubrey Gamble, Bob MacInnes, Doug Anthony and Ellen Hamilton (front to back) were busy peeling and slicing apple filling on Nov. 7th at Lower Onslow United Church to fill orders for their annual Pie Sale. (Harrington Photo)



Gail Morrow, Stella Anthony, Ethel MacKinnon and Margaret Fiddes were a few of the many volunteers helping in the pie assemble line at Lower Onslow United Church on Nov. 7th. The busy crew made 270 pies in about four hours. (Harrington Photo)

guys were fantastic and they were able to get me service. I was frustrated when I lost service for a couple days, so I am not sure yet if it is reliable enough to do business from home but maybe in the future it will become more reliable." The presenters explained how internet outages will occur when new towers are hooked up in the area, but they hope to keep the down time to a minimum and notify customers in advance when this will occur.

Maria Forman asked about issues with weather and was told that they should be minimal and that the signal is more robust than satellite. Another question was asked about trees blocking the signal. Installation technicians will assess each individual situation.

Judy Gay, of Carrs Brook, is on dial-up internet and she is hoping when the East Walton tower comes into service she may be able to get high-speed internet service from Seaside.

"It will be great if it happens, otherwise the project will not have made much of a difference for me."

Robert Glencross, a retired Telecommunications Engineer living in Little Dyke, asked many technical questions at the meeting in Debert. He said he was encouraged by what he heard at the meeting and he felt the company had essentially set up the network as best they could. "I have tried all the other smaller internet providers in my area. They each have their pluses and minuses but I like Seaside's commitment to customer service. I hope to give them a try very shortly," he said.

The meetings wrapped up with Mr. Contour thanking everyone for coming out and he encouraged anyone with further questions to call Seaside High-Speed Internet at 1-888-965-5511. Service rates are \$44.95/month with free installation on a 3 year contract.



DON TURNER

and
2341323 Nova Scotia Ltd.

Excavating Dozer Backhoe Culverts
QP2 Septic installer Driveway gravel, fill, topsoil
Snow removal, sand and salt - Truck mounted spreading

662-2699, 662-2419 Belmont

Quality Steel Roofing

Choose from 12 Colours



COMMUNITY METAL & QUALITY BUILT MINI BARNS

- METAL ROOFING
- SIDING
- ACCESSORIES

662-2815 1541 PLAINS ROAD, DEBERT

Community Metals & Quality Built Metal Barns

1541 Plains Rd, Debert, NS 902-662-2815



Quality Built Mini-Barns



Horse and Cattle Round Bale Feeders AND Fencing Gates from 4 to 20 feet



Onslow-Automotive

12876 Hwy # 2,
Lower Onslow, NS
B6L 5E8
Tel: (902) 893-1529
Email: onslowauto@bellaliant.com

- Licensed technicians
- Major and minor repairs
- Engine diagnostics
- Foreign and domestic
- Global coast to coast warranty centre

Bruce Ernest
OWNER