

Umbarger visits to discuss ICAN with Chanute officials

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As chairman of the Ways and Means committee, Kansas Senator Dwayne Umbarger (R - Thayer) is interested in seeing the results of Kan-ed grant funding. He was able to do so Monday morning when he visited Chanute.

The primary reason for his visit was to tour the city facilities that house ICAN - the Integrated Community-Access Network - which provides a fiber network for city offices and buildings, USD 413 facilities and both Neosho County Community College campuses. Several corporations are also on board, including Ash Grove, Tri-Valley Developmental Services, Kustom Signal, Chanute Manufacturing and Midwest Connections.

Larry Gates, power plant superintendent for City of Chanute, led the tour and answered questions about the system. Gates said when the system is finished, it could save taxpayers around \$100,000 annually. Grants have paid for a good deal of the network infrastructure.

"Kan-ed provided grant money and routing equipment in upwards of \$50,000 to NCCC, USD 413 and the library," he said. "They also pay for connectivity to Midwest Connections."

ICAN is now operational and most participants are in different phases of completing implementation. The most recent addition to the network is a shared email server.

Umbarger was clearly impressed and noted the importance of the network on a variety of levels.

"This idea is very forward thinking, to bring this many entities together, and it's important when it comes to homeland security, health care, safety of our citizens," he said. "It's impressive when you get that collaborative effort."

Neosho Memorial Regional Medical Center has yet to take advantage of offers to join ICAN, something that Umbarger and Sam Budreau, director of public safety, both feel is crucial to the effectiveness of the network in emergency operations. Gates noted that Ash Grove's cooperation has been instrumental in that aspect.

"Ash Grove has allowed us to go up on top of their stack (to connect) wirelessly to Erie 911 center for support of the backup Emergency Operations Center (in Chanute)," he said. "Ash Grove has shown to be a huge corporate citizen on these wireless projects ... to support education and the health and safety of our community."

Umbarger agreed, "(It is) an asset Chanute should be thankful for, very progressive in their thinking and very community minded."

Ben Smith, NCCC dean of planning and operations, has been very involved with the project, one that he said is entirely unique.

"We really are the only community in the nation doing this, and we've looked for others, they're just not out there," Smith said. "There are other communities where two entities might be trying to collaborate, but there is nowhere where several entities are co-locating network operations into one centralized location."

Projects that Gates expects to complete this summer include adding WiFi spots to parks and to build fiber to all water towers and the Industrial Park.

"We are hoping this will have a big impact on economic development," he said. "We have had several industrial and commercial businesses show a lot of interest in getting connected."

Kan-ed is a program created by the Kansas Legislature and administered through the Kansas Board of Regents. The purpose of the program is to expand the collaboration capabilities of Kan-ed's member institutions, specifically K-12 schools, higher education, libraries and hospitals. Homeland Security provided partial funding for the EOC.

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