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The city of Chanute is one of only two Kansas towns to build its own fiber-optic communications

The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual. ~ Vince Lombardi

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fiber networks

Chanute Utilities Director Larry Gates, referring to the acronym for a computerized monitoring system that records data from multiple remote locations and tells equipment how to operate.

In 2001, when the system needed upgrading, they decided to overbuild it, Gates said. "We have an awful lot of city services – lift stations, water intake, water treatment, sewer treatment, even Wi-Fi in the parks," he said. "Those are all connected by fiber optic. We also do a lot of security monitoring, with cameras in key locations." "The routes we took are where we put junction boxes," he said. "We did it next to the schools and junior college and the hospital. For the simple reason we started talking about getting them onto our fiber optic network is how we got started being an ISP (internet service provider.)"

That was 2005. Since then, Gates said, "we've expanded that quite a bit," offering it to businesses within the community. "It's something we did not have here – ultra-high-speed bandwidth – and it's

network open to businesses in its community.

While unique for Kansas, a quick search of the internet shows it's not at all unique in the U.S., with municipally run broadband at locales from Florida to California. It's also an idea some Hutchinson community leaders believe should be explored as a way to promote economic development here.

In Chanute, the city first began using fiber optics back in 1984 to support the city's electric utility operations. "We had three locations we were trying to keep track of, but without SCADA it was a nightmare," said

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highly reliable," he said. "Once you're connected to the city of Chanute network, you don't have issues anymore."

The city has built its system, which now encompasses about 50 miles of cable, "one piece at a time," Gates said, noting it's the most expensive way to do it but was "pay as you go." While not created for that purpose, it has served as an economic development tool, he believes. For example, a drive-through restaurant in town wasn't able to take debit or credit cards because its connection was inadequate and unreliable, "and they were losing a lot of customers," Gates said. "It's a plastic world. People use cards to buy stuff."

Others use the system for voice-over-internet, which "is very popular," Gates said. "The network provider was having real issues with reliability, continuously having calls drop." The city was exploring building a city-wide system, to offer service to residential customers, when it became a political issue during a city election. The proposal was to bond the project, adding about another 140 miles of line. "Some people ran (for City Council) on the basis of fiber optics, putting it to a vote of the people," he said. "We were two weeks away from authorizing a bond issue to do fiber-to-home for everyone on the electrical system when it was stopped." That was in April 2015. "We're still waiting on that public vote," he said.

Most of Chanute's lines are strung from poles and not buried, "but we have our own utilities" so that's not an added expense and a significant benefit for running its own system. "We're a full-service city," Gates said. "We have electric, with our own electric generators. We have water, sewer, even our own gas. We have city trash routes and a landfill. We don't have telephone or cable TV."

The community is served by AT&T, which "is reliable," Gates said, but charges more than the city for internet service. They also have a cable provider, which Gates said is "not good service." Being a small community, "I don't think we'll ever see 5G networks." "I don't know that by itself it's an economic development tool," Gates said. "But if you don't have that information highway, you won't see economic development. Everyone is demanding it. ... I think it's a big leveling item for our community. It allows us to compete."

Hutchinson city officials had a brief discussion about the city building a fiber-optic system about five years ago, said City Manager John Deardoff, but it never went further than that. "We looked at the possibility of doing something like Chanute was doing, but at that time, there was huge up-front money," Deardoff said. "Certainly the payoff was there, but we didn't look into it far enough to see what it would look like." At least one City Council member has expressed an interest in the issue, the city manager said, but "we haven't gotten into any serious conversations about a city utility." "It would take a lot of investigation," he said. "A lot of information would have to be gathered."

There's also the issue, he said, of the "free enterprise thing." The city this month is looking at its wide-area network plan, Deardoff said, linking city facilities without relying on an outside provider, "but that's about how far we've gone in terms of building our own." That plan, said Hutchinson IT Director Todd Davis, actually involves very little fiber optics but mostly point-to-point communication using wireless radios, called "air-fiber." Building fiber-optic cables from just City Hall to the Public Works building, he said, would cost in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Hutchinson lawmaker Jason Probst, however, believes developing some type of high-speed fiber-optic system for Hutchinson is important for economic development. "This is like any other infrastructure," said Probst, D-102nd District. "We build highways to move goods and services and treat them as tools of economic development. I believe the way to continue to move goods and services in the future is through high-capacity internet connections.

If the community is not investing in that, and leaving it to private industry, it's subject to pricing mechanisms of the market, which is even more concerning now with what the FCC has done on internet neutrality." "This is like the railroad," Probst said. "If the railroad came to town, the town grew. If it didn't, it died or started to decline. The same thing with highways. If we don't start thinking for the next 50 or 100 years and don't treat internet capacity as a means of economic development, we'll see the same fate as those communities."

Noting how internet technology expanded in a relatively short time "from when I was in high school and you had a 2400 baud modem that could only send text" to today's online international marketing that is reshaping retail trade, Probst suggested "we ought to step up to leverage that and take advantage, to make our community a part of it." "I haven't had the chance to research it thoroughly, but I think a community like Hutchinson ought to start looking at what it would cost to build its own infrastructure, to bring in a company like IdeaTek, to use their expertise and maybe work with them under contract," he said. "We need to explore how much those things cost and what good can be gained."

Even something like a fiber system just along Main Street, available at low or no cost to entrepreneurs and retailers downtown or for the public using a coffee shop, could be a potential economic boon, helping draw businesses in to fill empty storefronts. "I think at the state level, something could be looked at in terms of creating economic incentive, some assistive legislation that would help communities finance this, whether through a bonding mechanism or helping leverage locally raised money to pay for high-capacity infrastructure," Probst said. "We never seem to have a problem coming up with the money if a big corporate firm is looking to come to Kansas. This could be used to develop local talent and skills. To recruit high technological industries into the state, you need high-speed internet."

The Minnesota Legislature last year allocated \$20 million in state funds for a "Border-to-Border Broadband" grant program, with a focus on assisting new and existing providers to invest in building infrastructure into unserved and underserved areas of the state. The grants can provide up to half of project development costs, with a grant cap of \$5 million. And in October 2017, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker announced a second round of broadband grants for that state, awarding up to \$7.5 million from funds previously approved in the state budget. Kansas briefly had a Statewide Broadband Initiative, managed by the Department of Commerce. When federal funds for the program ran out in 2014, however, the program ended also. – *Hutchinson (KS) News*

A tussle this week between [prominent investors and Apple Inc. over iPhone use](#) by young people comes amid a nascent re-evaluation of the smartphone's social consequences within the industry that spawned it. The smartphone has fueled much of Silicon Valley's soaring profits over the past decade, enriching companies in sectors from social media to gaming to payments. But over the past year or so, a number of prominent industry figures have voiced concerns about the downsides of the technology's ubiquity.

They include Apple executives who helped create the iPhone and now express misgivings about how smartphones monopolize attention, as well as early investors and executives in Facebook Inc. who worry about social media's tendency to consume ever more user time, in part by pushing controversial content. Those are the kinds of concerns spotlighted in [a letter to Apple on Saturday](#) from Jana Partners LLC and the California State Teachers' Retirement System, or Calstrs, which control about \$2 billion of Apple shares. The letter urged the tech giant to develop new software tools that would help parents control and limit phone use more easily, and to study the impact of overuse on mental health.

On Monday, Tony Fadell, a former senior Apple hardware executive involved in the iPhone's creation, also called on Apple to do more, saying on Twitter that adults are struggling just as much as children with smartphone overuse. Mr. Fadell, who started publicly voicing concerns about smartphones last spring, said Apple and Alphabet Inc.'s Google should add features to their mobile-phone operating systems to allow people to track device usage. "Just like we need a scale for our weight we need a scale for our digital lives," Mr. Fadell said in an interview. He said he became concerned about the issue in recent years as he saw families at resorts spending time with devices rather than each other, or couples taking selfies on ski slopes rather than enjoying the views.

Apple late Monday issued a statement defending its parental controls and other protections for children who use its iPhones, noting that it started offering some of them as early as 2008. It said many of those tools can be found in the settings section of its devices. Mr. Fadell's comments echoed similar remarks last year by venture capitalists affiliated with Facebook, including Chamath Palihapitiya and Roger McNamee. Mr. Palihapitiya, a former Facebook executive, and Mr. McNamee, an early investor and adviser, have raised concerns about social media's tendency to encourage users through emails and notifications to open an app, causing people to live in front of their screens.

Facebook last year acknowledged for the first time the negative consequences of time spent on its service, noting that passively consuming information on Facebook leads many users to report "feeling worse." And [Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg pledged](#) to spend this year working to address misuse of its products in part by "making sure time spent on Facebook is time well spent." "There's a dawning realization of the effects these companies have had on us and a sense that we should no longer just go along with it," said Roger Kay, an analyst with Endpoint Technologies Associates.

The smartphone has transformed society unlike any previous device. Its ability to substitute for the radio, TV, computer and gaming console has made it so powerful that U.S. consumers now spend more than three hours a day on average on their mobile devices, according to research firm eMarketer. That is an increase of more than a one hour from 2013. A handful of developers have responded to rising smartphone use by introducing apps designed to help curtail time on devices,

including Checky, which tracks how often users unlock a device, and Mental, which provides a scorecard for device usage. Alex Markowetz, who co-founded Mental, said Apple should already offer a similar time-spent measurement on the iPhone because customers increasingly want to protect their most important assets—time and intellect. “That’s the one resource you should be willing to pay for to look after,” Mr. Markowetz said.

Mr. Fadell, who helped develop the iPhone’s hardware, said he has broken “out sometimes in cold sweats” thinking about the device’s social impact. Speaking at the Computer History Museum last May, Mr. Fadell compared creating the device to Steve Martin’s movie “The Jerk.” In the movie, Mr. Martin portrays an inventor who creates a bridge to hold glasses on people’s nose. The bridge sells well until people go cross-eyed and sue Mr. Martin’s company. “I think about that and when the kids are looking at the digital screen and different pictures are coming up and there’s grandpa, me—am I going to be hated by them for what we created? Or are we going to be like Alexander Graham Bell?” Mr. Fadell said. – *Wall Street Journal*

State House Speaker Mike Turzai has called special elections for May 15, same day as the primary, to fill two vacant legislative seats in eastern and western Pennsylvania. One vacancy is for the 178th District, covering the New Hope and Richland sections of southern Bucks County. The vacancy was created by the resignation of Republican **Rep. Scott Petri**. He resigned to become executive director of the Philadelphia Parking Authority.

The other vacancy is the 48th District in Washington and Allegheny counties. It was held by Democrat **Brandon Neuman** until he was elected a Washington County judge. The timing of the special elections should save taxpayers money because the voting machines don’t have to be set up twice, once for a special election and once for the primary. But the one-day even could cause confusion in the ballot box for voters. The winner of the special election will serve until Nov. 30. The winner of the primary will be sworn in in December to a full two-year term.

The counties’ Democratic and Republican parties will select the candidates who will run in the primary election and appear on that ballot. That means the candidates for special election could be the same or different from the candidates who are running in the regular primary election on the same day. Adding to the confusion, is how the special election will be open to all registered voters (Democrat, Republican, Independent, etc), who can pick a candidate regardless of party label. But on the primary ballot, voters will only be able to select among candidates listed on their party’s ticket. So take your time and read the instructions carefully.

On Jan. 28, another special election will be held for a vacancy in the 35th district, which covers Allegheny County. That seat was most recently held by Democrat **Marc Gergely**. He resigned for his involvement in a local gambling ring and was sentenced to 18 months of house arrest. The vacancies leave the House with 120 Republicans and 80 Democrats. – *Allentown Morning Call*

