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Two years after the launch of Lackawanna County's wireless network, 18 properties are connected and the public can access the Internet for free at any county building or park. The upfront \$2.8 million paid for 24 large microwave radios that replaced the county's existing fiber-optic and copper-wire systems. The wireless network now connects every part of county government, saving money in telecommunications bills, chief information officer Jeff Mando said.

The Times-Tribune recently reported that nearly 30 percent of Scranton residents and 27 percent of county residents have no Internet access at home. Mr. Mando last week offered an update on the network's progress two years after its launch in 2013. Today, 26 county buildings, the county 911 and disaster recovery system, all county parks, Jessup's Station Park and Memorial Field, Dunmore's McHale Park and the Dunmore Community Center, Moffat Estate in Covington Twp., and Felter Field in Moosic rely on the network for service, Mr. Mando said. Lakeland School District and the 10 county libraries also use the network.

This kind of wireless network is not like the small WiFi networks people set up using their home router. That's what's known as a "last-mile" portion of a network, which connects customers to a larger network. This is one step above, akin to the services provided by companies like Comcast or Verizon. "We offer fiber-quality service without the expensive cost of running fiber, and our entire county is covered," Mr. Mando said in an email. "We will identify line-of-sight to one of our many tower locations and verify that we can connect the customer prior to any commitment...This alone keeps the cost down."

While the network does not provide direct home Internet access, it enables people who cannot pay those bills to use free WiFi at county buildings, parks and libraries, said Alex Kelly, co-owner of ICON Technologies Inc., one of the network's private customers. "If you've got somebody in a jam, they can go there and connect on a tablet or something like that," he said. At the county's McDade Park, the network-



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enabled free WiFi is popular with visitors and employees alike, lifeguard Paul Emiliani said, holding his smartphone. "As soon as you try to access the Internet, a prompt will come up on your screen and say you need to accept these terms," he said. "As soon as you do that, it usually just connects right away and we never have any problems with it."

Mr. Emiliani and his

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fellow lifeguards spend 40 hours a week at the pool. The WiFi network offers something to do during their lunch break and the little down-time they get when not cleaning, he said. "There are really good reviews from the patrons who come around and say, 'Oh, you guys have WiFi here,'" he said. "You're able to use it, it's free, a lot of people seem to like it as well." For Mr. Kelly, the service has helped him keep his business in Carbondale, saving him gas money and keeping him near his family. "For me as a high-tech business owner, it's been a big boost in terms of quality of life," he said.

Since 1992, his company has provided networking, software development, Internet access and Web design for local customers. But because of his location at the county's northern end, he could not get the bandwidth he needed from a commercial service provider. "Because of where we're located, there's just not the infrastructure," he said.

The county approached him to switch over and offered a "very reasonable" price competitive with commercial providers, he said. Though he plans to keep using some commercial services for redundancy, he is pleased with the network's up-time and reliability, as well as the customer service. "Beyond the network, the people at the county and also their vendor have been excellent," he said. He expects to rely on the wireless network more and more as his existing contracts expire, he said.

Two other private users rely on the system, TekRidge Center in Jessup and the Scranton Enterprise Center, both projects of the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce. "Jeff and his team have been great to work with," the chamber's facilities manager Aaron Whitney said. "Our needs have been met if not exceeded." Before the county's network, Scranton Enterprise Center relied on service from commercial providers, Mr. Whitney said. They found service on the county's comparable after making the switch.

During development of TekRidge, broadband service was not available from commercial providers to their location at Valley View Business Park, he said, making the county's network crucial for the new technology incubator. "The wireless aspect of the Lackawanna County Internet has come in really handy for us because of the remote location," he said. The county built the network mainly to bring service to areas with limited or even no Internet selections, Mr. Mando said in an email. "It's all about presenting the opportunity to get service into those areas, he said.

While the network brings in \$150,000 in annual revenue, its purpose was economic and community development, Mr. Mando said. The investment also eliminated \$475,000 in the county's annual bills for telecommunications services, saving the county money. Through the wireless network, local institutions can also access a statewide fiber-optic cable network created by the Keystone Initiative for Network Based Education and Research, he said. Most of those connected are colleges, health systems and universities. Locally, the county is the only institution connected besides the University of Scranton. "Since the Lackawanna County Wireless network was built for our community, we are open to suggestions from the taxpayers as to how the network can be best used," Mr. Mando said. — **Scranton Times-Tribune**

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There is an adage in American politics: Campaigns don't start until the first commercial appears on television. Despite the enormous growth of online campaigning, that half-century of tradition is proving a difficult habit to break.

Candidates and outside groups are expected to spend \$1.1 billion on digital advertising in 2016, up almost 700% from \$162 million in the 2012 elections, according to Borrell Associates, an advisory firm that tracks media trends. But TV remains far and away the dominant platform for groups trying to reach the biggest-possible audience of voters. "No one ever lost a campaign because they were on TV," said Dave Carney, a Republican strategist. "They've lost campaigns because they weren't on TV."

Television spending on the 2016 presidential race was up almost 900% through mid-August from the same point in 2012, according to Federal Communications Commission filings. Candidates and their outside allies have already reserved more than \$47 million ads for the race ahead, almost three times the amount at this point four years ago, the filings show. The money set aside for TV spots in Iowa is double what it was in 2012 and five times greater in New Hampshire.

Kantar Media, which tracks TV advertising, predicts overall spending for the 2016 elections will be about \$4.4 billion, up roughly 16% from the \$3.8 billion candidates and outside groups laid out for cable and broadcast ads in 2012. "TV remains the best way to reach passive voters who are not necessarily looking for information," said Elizabeth Wilner, who oversees Kantar's Campaign Media Analysis Group.

But the role of digital is rising even faster. The report from Borrell Associates suggests spending online could jump to \$3.3 billion in the 2020 presidential election, taking a major chunk from TV. "The TV folks are still ahead of digital folks in terms of having the biggest voice and budgets in campaigns, but that gap is narrowing," said Brent McGoldrick, chief executive of Deep Root Analytics, which helps Republicans target voters.

The 2016 election, more than any before it, will see TV broadcasters competing for spending with Google Inc., Facebook Inc. and other digital concerns. This jockeying over the political ad market is just a microcosm of the much bigger struggle for global ad revenue of all sorts. Digital advertising rose from about 22% of the total U.S. ad market in U.S. in 2012 to 28% in 2014, according to numbers compiled by eMarketer, a market-research firm that specializes in media and digital marketing. Digital is expected to account for 34% of the market in 2016.

For 50 years, campaign strategists planned almost their entire budget around TV ads. But now there are many factors working against television, including time spent on smartphones and other mobile devices, an increasingly splintered viewership, and set-top boxes that allow people to record or stream shows and skip the ads. Many younger Americans are turning their back on conventional TV entirely. "Even the most conservative campaign managers have to notice that folks are not watching scheduled TV like they used to," said Kip Cassino, executive vice president of Borrell Associates.

Campaign TV advertising can also be extremely inefficient. Consider Davenport, Iowa. Presidential candidates from both parties will pour millions of dollars into the state's third-largest media market ahead of next year's first-in-the-nation caucuses. But 53% of adult TV viewers live across the Mississippi River in Illinois, according to media-tracking firm Rentrak Corp. The waste doesn't stop there. On the Iowa side of the Davenport market, registered voters account for 60% of viewership, with registered Republicans accounting for just 20% of the households. That means GOP candidates could burn roughly 90 cents of every dollar they spend at the Davenport station beaming commercials to people who either won't support them or can't attend Iowa caucuses.

Running TV ads is particularly wasteful in congressional campaigns, which are based on districts drawn to maximize partisan advantage and not on media markets. In a district just north of Chicago, candidates wasted 97 cents of every dollar spent because the commercials aired outside their district or were seen by viewers with no prospect of supporting them, according to a study by Google and Targeted Victory, an online ad firm that helps Republicans.

Facebook, Google and other digital providers say their tools give campaigns more ability to target specific voters, as they work to capture a bigger slice of political ads. "This level of precision doesn't exist with TV, and it comes at a fraction of the cost," said Annie Lewis, who manages Republican advertising clients for Facebook. Lee Dunn, a member of Google's elections team, said the company is trying to help political clients use tools, such as YouTube and the Google search engine, like corporate clients do. "I do think you'll see an increase in digital advertising this cycle," she said. "There is such a big market to capture these voters' attention."

Still, Americans spend far more time watching TV than being online. Adults watch, on average, 36 hours of TV a week, compared with 16 hours spent on smartphones, tablets and computers, according to a recent study by Nielsen, the TV-ratings firm. TV is an even bigger draw for older people, who tend to turn out more reliably on Election Day than younger generations. Americans 50 and older watch more than 47 hours a week, Nielsen says. The trade association that represents local TV broadcasters commissioned a survey last year that said their news programs tend to drive more conversations about politics than any other medium. "More people spend more time watching TV than any other medium out there," said Steve Lanzano, president of TVB, the main industry trade group for nearly 700 stations. "Candidates want to be on the medium that works, and they know TV wins elections."

The 2012 Obama campaign transformed how candidates and operatives think about spending money by pioneering new methods online and on television, in particular to use cable TV to reach voters at a much lower cost than broadcast. But even that campaign spent only 15% of its media budget, or \$74.5 million, to reach voters online, over e-mail or through social media.

In the years since, firms have sprouted up to help candidates and outside groups of both parties to spend money more efficiently, using the kind of statistical analysis made famous in the Michael Lewis book "Moneyball," which chronicles the use of data in building the Oakland A's baseball team. "In a small turnout caucus like Iowa, campaigns would be foolish not to target likely voters online in a highly efficient way," said Isaac Baker, a partner at AKPD Message and Media who worked on President Barack Obama's advertising team in 2012. Despite those tools, 85% of TV ad-spending in the 2014 midterms went to spots on broadcast TV, according to Borrell Associates. "The problem is that everyone talks about 'Moneyball,' but then they behave like they are all the New York Yankees," said Zac Moffatt, co-founder of Targeted Victory, referring to the habit of spending money aggressively on the most expensive medium, broadcast TV. — *Wall Street Journal*



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