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In the 1970s, as the oil crisis spurred an increase in mining, Victor Justice taught people in eastern Kentucky how to mine coal. Forty years later, his son is teaching them how to write code to build websites.

As the coal industry disappears across Appalachia, politicians and entrepreneurs have been trying to find something to replace it. On Monday, hundreds of people gathered in Hazard to hear one solution: A 3,400-mile network of fiber optic cables that state and private sector officials say will create one of the country's fastest networks in one of the nation's worst areas for access to high speed Internet service. "We're betting our future on the coming of this dark fiber," Rusty Justice said of his company, Bit Source, which builds websites.

State and federal officials christened the network Monday, the product of about three years of negotiation that spanned political and geographic rivalries in a state that has plenty of each. The network will cost about \$324 million to build. Taxpayers will pay about \$53.5 million, with the rest coming from private investors. Kentucky will own the network, which will begin in eastern Kentucky but eventually reach into all of the state's 120 counties. But the Australian-based investment firm Macquarie Group and its partners will build the network and operate it for the next 30 years.

On Monday, a packed auditorium watched as the CEO of a technology company demonstrated how he can build networks that can download video in less "five milliseconds." And in an area that has a shortage of OB-GYNs, people watched a pregnant woman lay down on an exam table while a doctor in Lexington, about 100 miles away, gave her an ultrasound with telemedicine technology. It's the kind of benefits officials say the broadband network can bring to eastern Kentucky, which has suffered for years with little cellphone service and limited access to high-speed Internet.

"Broadband is not just about Facebook or HD Netflix," said Jared Arnett, executive director of the Saving Our Appalachian Region, a group charged with transitioning eastern Kentucky's economy. "This is about economic opportunity." Construction will begin this year and is scheduled to be finished by the middle of 2016 in eastern Kentucky. Other parts of the states will take longer to build. Republican U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers and Democratic Gov. Steve Beshear called it the most important infrastructure project in the state's history, more so than the Interstate highway system. But they cautioned that the network will only help if people use it. The network is just a means for information to travel. Businesses, school districts, hospitals, local governments and others have to build the products that would make the network worthwhile.

Earlier this month, Beshear created a governing board to oversee the construction of the network. And his state finance cabinet has put together a fiber planning guide for local communities to use as they prepare for how to use the network. "We know that broadband is not a silver bullet. There is

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none. But it levels the playing field. It gives us a chance," Rogers said. "It takes away the historic barriers to better jobs: the difficult terrain, the isolation that we've endured these generations."

Bit Source is based in Pikeville, the center of what was once the state's largest coal producing county. It's the same county where, 40 years ago, Rusty Justice's father worked for the Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program to train people how to operate heavy machinery and other skills needed in the coal industry. Now Justice said he is seeing those same workers ask him for a job. Justice offered to hire 10 people, preferably out-of-work coal industry workers, and train them how to code. He got 974 applications. The company opened in March and, after 22 weeks of training, has been building websites for companies and local governments. "We now have a small, embryonic tech sector alive and well in Pikeville," he said. – **Associated Press**

Entertainment executives in Hollywood have held talks with Apple Inc. about producing exclusive shows for Apple TV, according to a person with knowledge of the matter.

Apple has discussed investing in original series, said the person, who asked not to be identified because the discussions were private. The company hasn't decided whether to proceed, the person said. With original programming, Apple would make the leap from being one of the top retailers of entertainment to its wealthiest producer, and obtain premium content for a live TV service it's said to be planning. Next week, the Cupertino, California-based maker of iPhones and Mac computers is expected to unveil a new version of its Apple TV set-top box, along with the latest iteration of the popular mobile phone.

The move would pose another threat to the pay-TV industry, which has suffered subscriber losses as young consumers watch video using online services like Netflix Inc. and Google Inc.'s YouTube and older viewers pare their spending. Tom Neumayr, an Apple spokesman, declined to comment. Variety reported on Apple's plans on Monday.

It would also represent a challenge to established online streaming companies like Netflix, Amazon.com Inc. and Hulu. Those three services are bedrock offerings in the current Apple TV set-top box. Apple would want to fund a number of high-profile series, the person said, rather than start with one or two. The company attempted to work with the stars of hit BBC series "Top Gear" after they left the show, according to Variety.

Analysts and executives have long speculated Apple might fund programming or buy a movie studio. Up to now, the company has stuck with producing phones, tablets and computers -- businesses with higher profit margins than content production. The company has been taking steps into video production. Apple's new music app, for example, includes some exclusive, behind-the-scenes clips. Artists often welcome videographers and photographers into the studio with them, and Apple has hired executives to help shoot and produce video from recording sessions with willing musicians. – **Bloomberg**



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