

Business looks to expand WiFi bubble

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Manchester - With free wireless Internet service already available in a chunk of downtown, a Manchester company is launching an effort to beam free WiFi connections throughout the city.

If it succeeds, Manchester could vault to the forefront of cities across the country that provide free WiFi connections, said Brad Goodwin, who is heading up the effort for Dynamic Network Services, a Manchester-based Internet networking company.

Dubbed DynWiFi, the effort has the backing of Mayor Frank Guinta, who has written downtown business owners to ask them to participate. All that's needed is for a business or resident to pay a \$50 refundable deposit for a signal repeater and plug it into an outlet, where it will burn about 26 cents of electricity a month.

The repeater creates a node that bounces the WiFi signal a little bit farther along, creating a mesh that could eventually cover the city. So far, 20 people have signed on, and a seven-block area of downtown has enjoyed free WiFi since October.

The more people who plug in a repeater, which is about the size of a juice box, the farther the network extends. Information and on-line signup are available at www.dynwifi.com

"It's not that often that Manchester is as cutting edge as San Francisco, but this time we are," said Graham Chenoweth, general counsel for Dynamic. "It's perfect for New Hampshire - it's private; it's community-based; everyone lends a hand, or a plug."

DynWiFi provides a connection of 512 kilobits per user, enough capacity to stream a U-tube video, listen to music or check e-mail, Chenoweth said. DynWiFi has the ability to block users who eat up too much capacity, Goodwin said.

The company makes no money off the network and is donating bandwidth and staff time.

Dynamic launched the effort after Dynamic President Tom Daly was having lunch at Bridge Street Cafe, got a telephone call about a problem and was unable to go on-line to fix it, Daly said.

While walking back to the office, he and his employees started thinking about a way to make wireless available in Manchester.

"It was worth trying. We encourage tinkering and understanding what technology does," he said.

Previous efforts - launched with fanfare in cities such as Philadelphia, Seattle and Manchester - relied on a single antenna to provide wireless to a limited area, such as downtown.

In Manchester, a pilot project launched by the Chamber of Commerce and a wireless company lasted for about six months in 2004. It had its drawbacks. Users had to pay after an hour, and weak signals and dead spots plagued the project, said Mike Skelton, director of economic development for the Greater Manchester chamber of Commerce.

The chamber is solidly behind DynWiFi and has a node in its boardroom, he said. He thinks it will be well suited to downtown, parks and the Millyard. "It's going to go to wherever the community wants it," Skelton said.

Goodwin said the range of an unobstructed signal is about 1,500 meters, but buildings and other factors can limit the range. And the repeaters can leapfrog throughout the city.

People outside of the downtown network can create their own free WiFi area by plugging the repeaters into their broadband connection, which can funnel the wireless traffic directly to DynWiFi.

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