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Moving online, Faster

By Bangor Daily News Staff

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Friday, September 01, 2006 - Bangor Daily News << Back

A recent report on broadband access in Maine is a welcome primer on the state's option
other states expand opportunities for residents (and potential residents) to do business,
computer files and generally stay connected to the rest of the world. As Maine continues
this area it should emphasize the demands of business use, rather than home use, to en
stays current in the changing economy.

The statistic of interest in "High Speed Internet: A Requisite Rural Development Strategy
the Maine Center for Economic Policy, is that broadband - high-speed Internet access -
21 percent of the nation, but in Maine the figure is only 15 percent. The Pew Internet & A
Project, affiliated with Pew Charitable Trusts, found in February that broadband access i
in rural areas and 39 percent in urban nationally, with the gap narrowing. Among rural w
Internet access, 72 percent used a high-speed connection, compared with 75 percent in

The challenge for rural areas is partly explained by the MCEP report, written by Suzanne
Cervone. "With rising fuel costs and the increasing cost of building and maintaining trans
infrastructure," they write, "high speed Internet can provide a vital and cost effective way
connect with the rest of the world."

One of the questions to Internet users in the Pew survey was whether they had access t
line - 26 percent in the cities and 39 percent of rural residents didn't know, which sugges
solution to the problem.

Maine increasingly will connect through high-speed links because the world expects it to
that cannot send a large graphic presentation now is the company that will lose more bid
afford. So while home use of high-speed connections is a quality-of-life issue, for busine
a matter of survival.

Reducing the scope of this question to businesses also makes it more likely Maine will b
it - by, for instance, expanding and upgrading its School and Library Network, which run
rural Maine and offers high-speed access, by encouraging more competition, particularly
small Internet service providers in Maine, and by using more of the fiber-optic cable insta
but not connected.

Coincidental to the MCEP report this week, the ConnectMe Authority met for the first tim
is a five-member board of Maine residents with expertise in broadband issues who are r
keeping the state at the forefront of broadband and cellular technology. The authority is
attempt to make Maine as technologically inviting as any place in the country.

The more residents know about the condition of Maine's current Internet connections, th
authority will be able to do its job. A way for residents to start is by learning about the ch

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explained in the MCEP report.

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