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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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Captions: ALLAMAKEE-CLAYTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE SECURES \$4.5 MILLION GRANT THROUGH THE STATE OF IOWA

“We just really need better internet,” said Hollee McCormick, Executive Vice President/General Manager of Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative. “This is a sentiment we have heard time and time again; it has become persistent and loud since last March of 2020.” With students learning from home, parents working from home, and simply more time spent at home, reliable internet is necessary.

The Cooperative’s AC Skyways division has expanded to over 1,000 subscribers and is still growing. These subscribers are served with mostly wireless broadband and some satellite too. When it comes to high-speed internet, fiber is truly the gold standard. “We know this, but up until now, the cost has been a prohibitive factor.” With an average density of four members per mile of line in our rural areas, the economics to deploy fiber have not been there.

Recently, the need for improved rural (and urban in many instances) internet is front and center. The challenges of the pandemic have certainly put this center stage. Federal and State grant opportunities are becoming more readily available, and we have been paying close attention and responding. Fortunately for the Co-op, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission has been an excellent partner in seeking out, streamlining, writing, and administering grants on our behalf. “I believe Rachelle Howe and her talented staff fully understand what we are trying to do here at ACEC and have become an exceptional resource for the Cooperative,” said McCormick. ACEC has had another successful grant application through the State of Iowa. This grant is the third successful grant application ACEC has been awarded through the Office of the Chief Information Officer of the State of Iowa (OCIO). Allamakee-Clayton was awarded a \$4.5 million grant to deploy fiber in northern Allamakee county around mid-March. This grant pays for 75% of the project cost, while we will be responsible for the remaining 25%. We will deploy roughly 200 miles of fiber to portions of Union Prairie, Makee, Hanover, French Creek, and Lansing townships. An exact route is being engineered now. The Cooperative’s contractors will bury as much fiber as possible underground. In particularly rocky and challenging terrain, we will be utilizing our existing electric infrastructure to hang aerial fiber as well. We will pass about 500 potential subscribers! This project is slated to start in August, and ACEC will utilize contractors to do the fiber work.

This \$4.5 million grant was the largest awarded to any applicant. We know we have a big job ahead of us, and we know there are still many areas out there that need better service and that there are potentially more grant dollars to secure. One question we are often asked is, “when are you coming to my area?” We must follow the guidelines and apply to serve areas deemed Targeted Service Areas or TSA’s. Additionally, we are always looking at other provider’s plans; we do not want to deploy fiber where another entity has existing plans to do so soon. Our goal is to go where connectivity is needed while being a good neighbor to other telecommunications businesses and making economically sensible decisions. With those ideas in mind, we intend to keep moving forward and seek opportunities to improve our area's connectivity.

We are constantly hearing from members and non-members alike that they need better internet. Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative is making every effort to fill those gaps and move that needle. In the coming weeks, we will have a specific fiber route and will be able to answer the question of “am I getting fiber?” As plans progress, the Co-op will be sure to keep communicating.

** This project was supported by federal funds made available through the CARES Act and State of Iowa, acting by and through the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). Points of view expressed herein are those of the author or speaker and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the United States Government or State of Iowa or endorsement of the project. AC Skyways division has expanded to over 1,000 subscribers and is still growing. These subscribers are served with mostly wireless broadband and some satellite too. When it comes to high-speed internet, fiber is truly the gold standard. We know this, but up until now, the cost has been a prohibitive factor. With an average density of four members per mile of line in our rural areas, the economics to deploy fiber have not been there.*

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