



Pownal selected for e-Vermont project

By Keith Whitcomb Jr.

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POWNAL, Vt. -- Pownal is one of 12 communities statewide chosen to be a part of the e-Vermont Project, which is funded by money from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act through the Vermont Council on Rural Development, James Boutin, chairman of the Pownal Communications and Image Committee said Monday.

One of the first things the community will see from participation in the project will be 50 Dell Netbooks assigned to the third- and fourth-graders at Pownal Elementary School.

Boutin said he spent about a week getting Pownal's application together on behalf of the community. There were 40 other applicants for the project.

"It's not a monetary award," Boutin said. "It's an award for assistance and service they will provide, as well as equipment and software."

The plan is to get the Netbooks to students by October, he said, adding that it's better to wait and make sure teachers, students and parents are comfortable with their use before signing them out. He said students will be able to take the Netbooks home with them, and they can be loaded with

district-owned software. The devices are essentially small laptop computers with rubberized casings, touch screens and water resistant keyboards.

"They're designed for student use," Boutin said. "The kids are going to love them, there's no doubt in my mind."

The school will not be the only recipient of

the project's benefits, he said. Town administrators, the library and businesses will also be able to capitalize. Boutin said the owners of the Southern Vermont Energy Park have expressed interest in becoming involved, and so has the Solomon Wright Public Library. He said there will be a meeting at the library on June 22 at 7 p.m. involving members of the communications committee, e-Vermont Community Director Phil Petty and other interested parties. He said it will be an informational meeting in which needs will be identified and what can be provided will be discussed.

Boutin said business owners may be interested in a service that will let them post news about their endeavors to the Internet and let people submit questions and discuss related topics. He said the idea is similar to one the communications committee has already implemented with the Pownal Wiki, a site modeled after Wikipedia.com, a website that lets users post and edit information.

He said the new sites would be more interactive and have more of a social media slant. As for the library, he said, some ideas have been to offer classes to senior citizens and other members of the community on computer and Internet use. He said the program allows for teachers through the Vermont State College system to offer instruction to members of the community in much the same way training will be given to teachers at the school. One idea that had

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been mentioned has been a class on how to prepare an income tax return.

The grant period is for two years, Boutin said. Part of the planning will be on how to sustain the initiatives, possibly by applying for more grants. Boutin is also the technology director at the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union, but he will retire on July 1. He said his work with e-Vermont has been as a community member, not as a district employee.

Once he's retired, he said, he will devote more time to implementing the initiative. Other communities accepted into e-Vermont are Brighton, Bristol, Canaan, Cambridge, Grand Isle County, Ludlow, Middlesex, Newport, Poultney, Sunderland and West Rutland.

A number of agencies and companies are involved, including Digital Wish of Manchester, which is responsible for the Netbooks coming to Pownal.

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