

BIZ BEAT

Do you have a need for speed?

MARGOT C. LESTER

If you’ve been hanging around Facebook or listening to WCHL, you’ve probably heard that Google’s looking for a town (or maybe more) to test-drive its über-high-speed Internet. Google will offer networks via an “open access” model, meaning that customers have access to several service providers. The initial stage of the program will run the super-fast service only to homes.

Since most of us have migrated off dial-up (haven’t we?), you may be asking yourself, do we need faster Internet? Yes, says local broadband activist Brian Russell, who started a Facebook group to encourage the Chapel Hill and Carrboro town governments to submit a request for information to be considered for the pilot program. Besides making it faster and easier to watch YouTube videos of cats playing the piano or to catch up on the Olympics you’ve missed while actually showing up at your job and working, there could be business applications once the service is extended for commercial use.

“This speed of bandwidth would do a lot to attract companies to our county,” Russell asserts. “Fiber is an infrastructure incentive that can’t be lost or taken [away] when a company fails.”

Molly Ingersoll has an even grander view. She’s a product manager on Google’s alternative access team.

“In the same way that the transition from dial-up to broadband made possible the emergence of online video and countless other applications, ultra high-speed bandwidth will lead to new innovations – including streaming high-definition video content, remote data storage, distance learning, telemedicine, real-time multimedia collaboration and others that we cannot yet imagine,” Ingersoll said via

email. “If the Internet has taught us anything, it’s that the most important innovations are often those we least expect.”

Perhaps the biggest immediate benefit of winning the bid would be a cost savings for local governments.

“Fiber to the home requires the installation of cable in public right-of-ways,” Russell says. “This is already being done in our community right now. It’s the most expensive part of an end-to-end fiber network. Attracting a big company like Google to finance it would be a major win, both in innovation potential and money saved.”

Chapel Hill and Carrboro officials have indicated an interest in pursuing the project.

“The type of service described by Google is a great opportunity for the Town to help facilitate the delivery of technological services to its residents,” said Carrboro’s information and technology manager Andy Vogel via email. “It is well within the scope of what we currently do and could easily co-exist alongside of our current fiber network.”

Carolina Fitness expands

Carolina Fitness quietly opened a new facility on Elliott Road last month. Owner David Gillespie expects more hoopla any day now when the final five pieces of a fat-busting, muscle-building Matrix system have been installed – as early as month’s end. The new club will be the first on the East Coast to have the new circuit training apparatuses.

“It’s better than anything I’ve ever seen,” Gillespie says. Lest Carrberians feel left out, Gillespie says he’s going to revamp the gym’s Carrboro location too. “We’ll be putting in 50 new pieces of cardio and doing a total facelift. We want to have the two

best clubs in the area.”

Despite the down economy, the gym business has thrived.

“People need stress relief,” Gillespie says. “There are a lot of business people and upper management in Chapel Hill and Carrboro who know the importance of fitness. They’ll make the financial adjustments to keep their gym memberships.” Besides, Gillespie continues, Carolina Fitness is a good deal. “Monthly membership’s only \$29.95. That gives you the best club in town at a very affordable rate.”

Chapel Hill’s office vacancy up

Last week, Chapel Hill Mayor Mark Kleinschmidt and others attended a presentation by office market consultant Ernie Bleinberger. The news was mixed. About 300,000 square feet of the total 2.2-million-square-foot office inventory is vacant, with 450,000 more square feet approved but unbuilt and another 200,000 in the planning stages.

“Our vacancy rate has grown when compared to previous years, but we have added close to 200,000 square feet in the last year and an additional 70,000 in the last two years,” says Dwight Bassett, the town’s economic development officer.

Chapel Hill’s absorption rate, the change in occupied office inventory, is 80,000 square feet annually. A higher absorption rate indicates that more space is leased than vacated.

“Our goal is to grow our absorption rate and thus our overall office market,” Bassett says.

Goodmon Awards nominations still open

Give some props to a local business or partnership that’s made the Triangle a better place to live by nominating them for a Goodmon Award. Sponsored by Leadership Triangle and named



after business and community icon Jim Goodmon, the awards recognize outstanding achievement in improving the quality of life in our region. Nomination forms can be downloaded at leadershiptriangle.org. Entries must be received by Feb. 23.

Splinter Group announces new projects

Carrboro-based advertising, marketing and design firm The Splinter Group announced a handful of new clients and projects recently. The firm landed the Burlington Aviation account and will create a new brand identity, ad campaign and website for the Alamance County flight-training company. The Group also is redesigning the website for carolinaperformingarts.org, creating a new site for The Crunkleton and developing a name and logo for a new beer that Carolina Brewery is crafting for the Durham Bulls. The firm recently completed branding and opening marketing for two new businesses in Chapel Hill: The Chocolate Door and Flyleaf Books.

Chatham Development Briefing scheduled for March 9

On Tuesday, March 9 from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m., the Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Chatham Chambers of Commerce; Greater Chapel Hill Association of Realtors; and the Home Builders Association of Durham, Orange and Chatham Counties will host the fourth annual breakfast briefing at the Governors Club. Admission is \$25 for chamber members and \$35 for non-members. Register online at carolina-chamber.org or by calling Laura Morrison at 357-9989.

Business Briefs

Gaming company on FB

Chapel Hill-based Merscom Games (merscom.com) has developed a social-media game for Facebook, the company announced this month. The Crazies, a tower-defense game the company developed for the social-media site, is based on the movie of the same name.

Merscom also recently announced a game based on the movie *Shutter Island*.

Business after hours

The ArtsCenter will host the Chapel Hill Carrboro-Chamber of Commerce’s Business After Hours networking event Thursday, Feb. 18 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

The event is free and open to all chamber members.

Sustainability event rescheduled

A look at innovation’s role in the future of green building at UNC’s Kenan-Flagler Business School that was canceled due to inclement weather has been rescheduled for March 19.

Kenan-Flagler’s Center for Sustainable Enterprise will present Rob Watson, a pioneer of the modern green-building movement, and Dennis Quaintance, owner of Proximity Hotel in Greensboro, in “Wanted: Radical Confidence: Why the Future is in Our Hands Today” at 5:30 p.m. in Koury Auditorium. The event is part of the center’s Leaders in Sustainability series and is co-hosted and co-sponsored by the N.C. Triangle Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Watson is considered a founding father of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), the recognized international standard by which green buildings are measured worldwide. He is chairman, chief executive officer and chief scientist of the EcoTech International Group, which provides green-building technologies and services in China, India and the United States.

A reception will follow the free event. Please respond to cse@unc.edu if you plan to attend. Parking will be available in the business school parking deck. For more information, call 962-1499.

Chatham development in focus

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce is holding its annual Chatham County Development Briefing on Tuesday, March 9 from 8 to 10 a.m.

Confirmed speakers include Sally Kost, chair of the Chatham County Commissioners; Dianne Reid, president of the Chatham Economic Development Corporation; and Bill Whitmore, president of the Greater Chapel Hill Association of REALTORS. There will also be a panel of Chatham County residential developers who will provide an update on their projects and local sales trends. Registration is \$25 for members of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Chatham chambers, HBA or GCHAR and \$35 for non-members. Registration includes a full breakfast and event materials.

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Robert C. Poitras, Owner/Operator, Carolina Brewery
Chairman, NC Restaurant & Lodging Association

Here’s what others have to say:

“Harrington Bank did a terrific job for us: our mortgage was processed efficiently and pleasantly. Everyone on their team worked hard so our plans could come together. Plus, the personalized service is outstanding!”

Barry Leffler
CEO and Managing Partner at 1360 WCHL

“The Harrington Bank team is exceptional at what they do. I have worked with them on many of my business and personal banking needs. Their customized deposit products and experienced mortgage lending team continues to impress me with each new opportunity. They set the precedent for community banking.”

Rick Rosenberg

“I have been doing commercial business with Harrington Bank for a number of years. Their innovation and customer service is above expectations. Because of this, I am happy to say my wife and I have moved both our personal savings and checking accounts to Harrington.”

Vince Grace, Accountant
Christ United Methodist Church

“We had been frustrated in the past with poor customer service at our bank and our inability to reach a point person. Now that we work with Harrington, we have a banker who helps us to meet the demands of our busy businesses. We do all of our business and personal banking with Harrington Bank because it has a small town feel with big town benefits.”

Harriet Hansell, Owner
Hansell Painting Company



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