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**Photo Provided**

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### **Surf Internet Connects First Next Level Connections Grant Customer in La Porte County**

LA PORTE, Ind. (September 15, 2023) - Rural areas within La Porte County, Ind., now have access to high-speed fiber-optic internet, thanks to the collaborative efforts of Surf Internet<sup>SM</sup> and the Indiana Next Level Connections (NLC) Broadband Grant Program. The first resident to benefit from this initiative is new customer Robert Wolford, who represents one of 953 NLC-funded addresses now eligible to join Surf's network. The project was made possible, in part, through a \$4.5 million NLC grant awarded to Surf for La Porte County in which Surf matched with a \$2 million private investment. Surf committed an additional \$2 million to reach an additional 2,017 residents, and added 30 more addresses through funding from the Indiana Connectivity Program.

"We love our new fiber internet, it's unbelievably faster than our previous connection," said Wolford, Surf Internet's first NLC customer. "We are saving a lot of money as we have disconnected our DirecTV completely and are now streaming all our TVs for half of the price, with twice as many channels. We love the faster speed of fiber internet."

All told, Surf was awarded \$6.075 million as part of Indiana's NLC Broadband Grant Program to build a 250-mile fiber-optic broadband network. Grant dollars, along with \$3.6 million in matching funds from Surf, have been earmarked for fiber-optic broadband projects in La Porte, Elkhart, and Newton counties that are scheduled to be completed by April 2024. To reach even more underserved communities in Indiana, Surf intends to apply for round four of the NLC Grant Program, being awarded next year, as well as Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD) grant money.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for high-speed internet everywhere, as families relied on internet connections for virtual learning, at the same time parents found themselves working remotely. "Many school kids in La Porte had no access to the internet and were forced to find a hot spot such as libraries or parking lots where a business would have internet they could access," said La Porte County Commissioner Rich Mrozinski. "Today the internet is a necessity, and it is incumbent on us as county leaders to do everything we can to make the internet available to all citizens.

Connie Gramarossa, president of the La Porte County Board of Commissioners, praised the initiative, saying, "With this connection, we are not only laying the foundation for transformative development opportunities within our county, but also ensuring that individuals in our rural areas have the vital access they need. Together, we're forging a brighter and more connected future for La Porte County, and I couldn't be more thrilled to witness this historic moment."

The work was done in cooperation with La Porte County's Economic Development Department and the Broadband Task Force. Randy Novak, Broadband Task Force Liaison on the La Porte County Council, added that "The hard work and dedication of our Broadband Task Force is now bearing fruit as we bridge the digital divide in La Porte County. We're just getting started, and I'm excited to see the positive impact this project will have on our community."

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## About Surf Internet

Surf Internet is an innovative fiber-optic internet company that serves as the essential gateway to connectivity across the Great Lakes region of Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois. The company is building a bridge to the wide-open future by delivering high-speed, reliable internet to homes and businesses in underserved, rural communities. Surf's 170-plus person team is local, giving them an edge when it comes to customer care and advocacy for the region. Headquartered in Elkhart, Ind., Surf also has offices in La Porte, Ind., Byron Center and Fowlerville, Mich., and Coal City and Rock Falls, Ill. Learn more at <https://surfinternet.com>.

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CAPTION: Robert Wolford (center) poses for a photo as the first customer to connect to Surf Internet's network that now reaches 953 rural La Porte County homes thanks to funding from Indiana's Next Level Connections Broadband Grant Program. He is joined (from left to right) by Scott Franko, director of business development at Surf, La Porte County Commissioner Joe Haney, Surf CEO Gene Crusie, and Carlton Bishop, business retention for the Office of Economic Development.