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Photos Provided

**Starke County Residents Seize High-Speed Internet
Opportunity Through Indiana Connectivity Program**

KNOX, Ind. (January 24, 2024) – On January 18, 2024, residents of Starke County gathered at the Henry F. Schricker Public Library in Knox, Ind., taking a significant step towards bringing high-speed internet to their communities. Hosted by the Starke County Economic Development Foundation (SCEDF) in collaboration with Surf Internet, the event aimed to educate residents about the opportunities offered by the Indiana Connectivity Program (ICP) and guide them through the application process.

The statewide Indiana Connectivity Program is working to connect residents and businesses that lack access to broadband internet service with service providers, and assist in the expense of extending broadband to those locations. Residents are required to apply to the program individually so that the ICP can verify eligibility and assess each address on a case-by-case basis.

Gene Crusie, Surf Internet CEO, was at the event to lend his support and enthusiasm, saying “One of the best ways for communities to get access to high-speed internet is by making their voices heard. Applying to the ICP is a powerful way to directly communicate with the state and high-speed internet providers, ensuring their communities can bring home this transformational technology.”

Indiana residents and businesses without access to internet services, or those with service speeds less than 100 Mbps download, 20 Mbps upload, are eligible to apply. Internet service providers, including Surf Internet, will later have the opportunity to bid on state Next Level Connections Broadband Grant funds to help provide high-speed internet to communities in need.

Bass Lake resident Rose Scott attended the event and applied for the ICP on one of the library's computers. “I’ve lived in this area for 31 years and I love it here,” she said. “I don’t want to move but I do want reliable internet service. What we have now prevents me from using all of my internet-connected devices. I even had to cancel my Netflix subscription because I couldn’t watch movies all the way through!”

Despite her frustrations, Rose expressed optimism, stating, “I’m glad I came out tonight and will be encouraging all of my neighbors and friends to apply to the ICP, too!”

Surf is familiar with the grant process, having successfully applied for and won grants through the ICP, including funding for addresses within the town of Knox, Ind. where the event was held. The regional ISP is planning on applying to Next Level Connections Round 4 of funding as well.

Surf Internet team members were on hand to address questions and walk attendees through the application process at six different computer stations within the library. All told, 55 households applied to the ICP during the event.

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Also in attendance were Mary Perren, Interim Executive Director of the SCEDF, and Gerry White, Northwest Community Liaison for the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, which oversees the ICP.

“We recognize the importance of reliable, high-speed internet to our entire county, and we are excited to work with partners like Surf Internet and the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs to deploy services into our rural areas,” Perren said. “Broadband is to the 21st century what rural electrification was to the 20th century. Starke County officials realized this when they sought and received a Broadband Ready designation from the state, and SCEDF is thrilled to be part of the ongoing effort to bring broadband to our residents.”

Surf Internet is working to help underserved residents apply to this unique opportunity and they have created a dedicated page on their website for Indiana residents to begin the application process. Visit <https://surfinternet.com/icp> to get started.

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 200-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>.

About SCEDF

The Starke County Economic Development Foundation is a nonprofit local economic development organization (LEDO) providing economic development opportunities on behalf of Starke County, Indiana, the City of Knox, and the Towns of North Judson and Hamlet through the development of industrial parks, rail spurs, greenfield sites, shovel-ready sites, infrastructure, and workforce development. For more information regarding the Starke County Economic Development Foundation, visit www.scedf.biz.

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Photo Caption: (Left) Residents learn more about the Indiana Connectivity Program, and how to apply. (Center) Scott Franko, Director of Business Development and Community Relations for Surf Internet, assists residents in applying to the ICP. (Right) Mary Perren, Interim Executive Director of the SCEDF and Gene Crusie, CEO of Surf Internet, pose in front of a Surf coverage map at the event.