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**BUSINESSES PARTNERING WITH THE STATE OF VERMONT TO ADDRESS
RURAL BROADBAND GAP**

Montpelier, Vt. – Governor Phil Scott and the Department of Public Service today announced an innovative collaboration with several partners that will increase internet access by means of public Wi-Fi hotspots for dozens of rural towns in Vermont. Deployment is already underway with installation of devices which began Saturday, April 11, starting at the Wheelock Town Offices (see full list of locations below).

“Broadband remains a critical resource for Vermonters in rural areas to stay connected and work and learn remotely during our Stay Home, Stay Safe period,” said Governor Scott. “We are grateful to our partners at Microsoft, RTO Wireless and Up And Running I.T. for their assistance in providing this important service.”

“Microsoft approached RTO Wireless about teaming up on deploying free public Wi-Fi at venues located in rural communities that lack sufficient broadband coverage,” said RTO’s CEO Steve Hubbard. “Microsoft offered to fund the purchase and installation of the hotspot devices.”

RTO said their first call was to the team at the Department of Public Service. Justin McCoart’s Bethel- based company, Up And Running I.T., will assist with the local installations. Public host institutions need to have existing broadband service and agree to host the equipment. RTO Wireless, on behalf of Microsoft, contracted with Up And Running I.T. to procure and install the Cisco Meraki equipment.

“Government and business are trying to help, working together, to build in high traffic and in rural areas,” said McCoart. He further stressed how committed the tech sector is to helping keep people connected, adding: “Everyone is working 12 to 16 hours a day to keep everyone connected to each other. None of this would have been possible 12 years ago. The Cisco Meraki equipment is a Cloud Managed Wireless Solution which is managed through an online dashboard and this is the tool that makes all of this possible.”

“The broadband gap already disproportionately impacts Americans who reside in rural areas. COVID-19 has only exacerbated this problem, preventing many people in rural communities from accessing online learning, telework, telemedicine and other necessary parts of life during this crisis,” said Shelley McKinley, Microsoft vice president general manager of technology and corporate responsibility. “Microsoft Airband is working with companies and governments like those in Vermont to bridge the broadband gap amid the crisis and help ensure that rural communities aren’t left behind.”

Launched in 2017, the Microsoft Airband Initiative is partnering with internet service providers and others to extend broadband access to three million people who reside in unserved rural areas.

At the outset of the COVID-19 emergency, the Department published a [public Wi-Fi hotspot map](#) on its [website](#) to assist Vermonters with internet access for information, remote work and learning. The map identifies places where people can access free public Wi-Fi options from a car to maintain appropriate social distancing. A review of that data found that 38 small towns and gores across the state had no identified suitably socially distant and publicly available Wi-Fi. The Department reached out to public schools, libraries and town halls about partnering to have public Wi-Fi installed for their communities. Over 50 communities have reached out to the Department thus far.

Public Wi-Fi spots available through this initiative are being offered at:

Town of Wheelock
Isle La Motte Elementary
Ferrisburgh Central School
Folsom Ed and Community Center
Concord School
Lyndon Town School
Danby Town Offices
Belvidere Central School
Morgan Country Store (town clerk, post office etc.)
Charleston Elementary School
Coventry Elementary School
Jay Westfield Joint Elementary School
Waltham Town Offices
Walden School
Waterford School
Barre City - City Hall/Merchants Way Extension
Office of Unified Towns and Gore
Norton Town Office
Ira Town Offices
East Haven Community Building
North Hero Town Office and School
Craftsbury Common
Highgate Town Office Complex
Wardsboro Town Hall & Library
Readsboro Town Office and School
Sandgate Town Hall
Greensboro Offices
Sunderland Town Office Building
Train Station Depot, North Bennington
Athens Town Office
Albany Methodist Church

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