

US cities vie to win Google's broadband favor

March 26 2010, by Chris Lefkow



A city in Kansas renamed itself "Google." A Florida mayor hopped into a tank full of sharks to impress the Internet titan. Baltimore named a "Google Czar" and scores of towns held "Google Days."

Why all the fuss over the Web search giant?

Because the California-based company has promised to build an experimental super-fast broadband [Internet network](#) and well over 100 towns and cities across the country are vying to become the test hub for the project.

Even Seattle, Washington, home of [Google](#) rival Microsoft, has gotten in on the act and submitted a bid for the "Google Fiber" network that would deliver Internet speeds 100 times faster than those of today.

Friday was the deadline for communities across the country to submit their applications and apply they did -- from Portland, Oregon, on the West coast to Portland, Maine on the East and dozens of cities in

between.

Google announced in February that the envisioned one-gigabit-per-second fiber-to-the-home network will be built in "one or more trial locations," serving at least 50,000 people and potentially as many as 500,000.

The winner will be announced later this year.

The city of Topeka, Kansas, jumped out to an early lead in the wackiness stakes by renaming itself "Google, Kansas -- the capital city of [fiber optics](#)" for the entire month of March.

Don Ness, the mayor of Duluth, Minnesota, upped the ante on Topeka, er Google, by posting a joke video on YouTube decreeing that first-born males in Duluth will be named "Google Fiber" and first-born females "Googlette Fiber."

Ness also jumped into the freezing waters of Lake Superior in shorts and a T-shirt and posted the exploit on Google-owned YouTube.

"I've laid down the gauntlet," Ness said after his plunge. "You other mayors if you want Google Fiber you jump in Lake Superior."

Dick Clapp, mayor of Sarasota, Florida, took up the challenge but in Florida-style by donning scuba gear and swimming in a glass tank full of hammerhead sharks.

Sarasota also took a page out of Topeka's book and renamed part of the city "Google Island." Its website, GoogleIsland.net, features a catchy song about the benefits that high-speed broadband would bring to the community.

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, the mayor of Baltimore, appointed Tom Loveland, a local technology entrepreneur, to be the Maryland city's "Google Czar" and help pilot its bid.

"Google Fiber is the spark, a game-changer that could turn Baltimore into a global innovation leader," Loveland said.

Like other towns and cities, Baltimore launched a website in support of its nomination as well as a Facebook page, a [YouTube](#) channel and a Twitter feed.

Boulder, Colorado, decided social media was the way to go urging residents to "create videos, tweet continuously, blog often and change your Facebook status hourly if you want crazy awesome Internet speeds in Boulder."

Asheville, North Carolina, turned to a local celebrity, Hollywood star and native daughter Andie MacDowell, to make its pitch for the Google project.

David Greiner, a partner at Steketee Greiner and Co., a Grand Rapids, Michigan, based digital marketing agency, tracked the "online conversation" about the bids and came up with a ranking of the contenders.

Duluth came out on top followed by Grand Rapids itself, Topeka, Fresno, California, and Sarasota, according to Steketee Greiner's findings.

A number of large US cities have thrown their hat into the ring in addition to Seattle including Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Memphis, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and Washington.

They may end up losing out to one of the smaller entrants, however. In announcing the broadband project, Google said it would focus on "underserved" communities or those that "have no service whatsoever."

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