Ruby Ranch goes high-speed

Neighborhood co-op launches its own DSL service for subscribers

By LU SNYDER
SUMMIT DAILY NEWS

SUMMIT COUNTY — Summit County is no Silicon Valley. But one local neighborhood has taken tech matters into its own hands.

Ruby Ranch, a neighborhood of 40 homes just north of Silverthorne, recently launched its own high-speed internet service.

Carl Oppedahl, a resident of Ruby Ranch who was involved in the engineering and technical design of the system, said it's taken more than a year to launch the service. He said the idea originated when several residents were unable to get the Internet connection necessary to work from home. About the same time, a local company which offered wireless high-speed Internet service filed for bankruptcy.

"When they filed for bankruptcy, it made some people in the neighborhood think about what we could do ourselves," Oppedahl said.

The residents of Ruby Ranch decided to set up their own digital subscriber line (DSL) service, by renting spare pairs of telephone lines from Qwest. They formed the Ruby Ranch Internet Cooperative Association, a non-profit corporation, to provide the service, Oppedahl said.

It cost approximately $12,000 to launch the service — most of which was loaned by neighborhood residents, Oppedahl said. The equipment to which subscriber's homes connect for service — called the DSLAM or DSL multiplexer — was installed inside a neighborhood horse barn.

Other neighborhoods considering such a venture need not fear the high launch costs, as equipment costs have dropped dramatically since the Ruby Ranch Coop purchased its equipment, Oppedahl said.

"A neighborhood might be

The Ruby Ranch Coop installed the equipment for DSL service in a neighborhood horse barn.

On the Net:

■ For more information on how to set up a DSL service in your neighborhood, visit the Ruby Ranch Coop page at www.rric.net.

able to launch service with equipment costing only $2,000 to $3,000," he said, explaining that because some DSL companies went out of business, their equipment can be found online: "Equipment we bought for $4,000, you can get on eBay for $900 now."

The neighborhood has 12 subscribers (more than 25 percent of residents), and each pays $60 per month for the service, Oppedahl said. "But after we cover our launch costs, we think we may be able to drop our cost to $35 or $40 a month."

Ruby Ranch has blazed a trail for neighborhoods that wish to do the same.

Oppedahl said service did not come without a battle — the co-op spent approximately 10 months in "bitter litigation" with Qwest, he said — but he believes neighborhoods following suit should not expect such a battle. Because the Ruby Ranch Coop signed an interconnection agreement with Qwest, other neighborhoods can "opt in to previously signed interconnec-

tion agreements," Oppedahl said.

"Suppose somebody wanted to do this in Mesa Cortina or Wildernest ... Qwest would be obligated to allow others to use the same agreement language as the language we negotiated," Oppedahl said.

High-speed internet or DSL service is not a guaranteed service in Summit County. Local company Netbeam offers wireless high-speed internet, but it requires the customer be in range (direct sight) of one of their towers, said Daniel Mauz, Netbeam's manager of customer service and manufacturing. Mauz said the company hopes to offer DSL service to its customers in the next few weeks.

It also offers T-1 lines, but according to Bernie Zurbriggen, president of the Summit County Telecommunications Consortium, T-1 service is "very expensive — you're talking hundreds of dollars a month."

Zurbriggen said another option is high-speed Internet via satellite. "It's pretty pricey and has a few drawbacks to it, but it is possible."

Because high-speed connection options are fairly limited in the area, Oppedahl said he hopes other neighborhoods also will launch their own service. He said the Ruby Ranch Coop has set up a Web site — www.rric.net — with the information necessary to do so.