



RICHARD JESSEE PHOTO

▲ **Wise County Geographic Information Science coordinator Jessica Swinney, Ninth District U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher and Board of Supervisors Chairman Ronnie Shortt toy with an electronic device capable of picking up signals from the town's wireless Internet system during its unveiling ceremony Wednesday.**

Wi-Fi up and running in Wise

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WISE — As you read this, many residents of the town are probably logging onto the Internet from their lawn chairs or front porches.

A new wireless fidelity, or Wi-Fi, system was unveiled yesterday during a ceremony on the county courthouse lawn.

Wi-Fi allows people using any electronic device with a wireless card to pick up a free Internet signal.

Although the wireless signal is strongest when someone is outside, it can also be picked up if someone is sitting near a window or has an antenna outside his or her home, Ninth District U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher told the crowd.

Unveiling the Wi-Fi system is a step forward for Wise County, Board of Supervisors Chairman Ronnie Shortt said. People have been waiting for this, he said.

"We're truly committed to this," Shortt said.

Talk of having Wi-Fi available to the town started with Circuit Court Clerk Jack Kennedy in December 2005, according to Shortt.

This project costs about \$20,000, Boucher said. The costs are covered by Virginia-Kentucky Communications, Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology and the county, he said.

Maintenance is expected to cost about \$500 per month.



HOW IT WORKS

Wi-Fi is available at no cost to anyone in the Wise area who can pick up a signal, according to Boucher.

Some Wi-Fi connections require a one-time fee, Boucher said. That is not the case with this connection, he said.

Wise has a large coverage area because several routers have been placed throughout the town, Boucher said.

A router at the courthouse serves the downtown area. Another placed near the former Wise hospital targets that section of town. Another router on the University of Virginia's College at Wise campus will target the students, and one in

► Wi-Fi

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the Lonesome Pine Business and Technology Park will serve the tech park and Lonesome Pine Airport, according to Boucher.

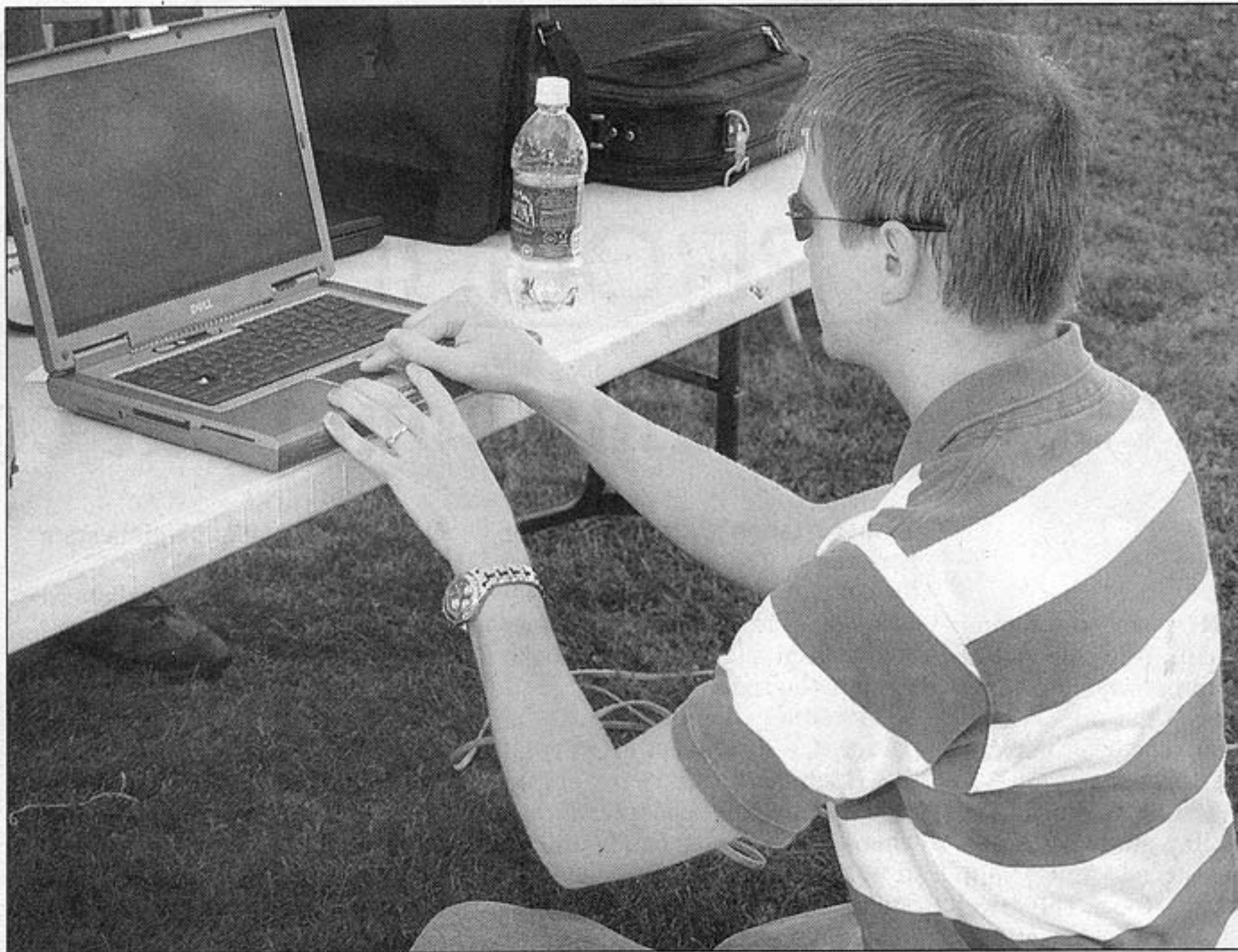
Computers will automatically detect the network's signal and ask a user to join. If a user decides to do so, he or she will be sent to a Wise Wi-Fi home page to agree to terms and conditions.

If an external Wi-Fi antenna is needed to join the network, they can be purchased for roughly \$50, Virginia-Kentucky Communications President Steve Blankenbecler said.

Wi-Fi connections won't be contained to Wise for too long.

Big Stone Gap will likely be the next town to receive Wi-Fi, according to county Geographic Information Science coordinator Jessica Swinney.

Wi-Fi will move to other towns as quickly as possible, Shortt said.



THE PERKS

The Wi-Fi connection is roughly five times faster than a dial-up connection, Blankenbecler said.

Having Wi-Fi in the town will make a tremendous impression on anyone considering putting a business in the area, Boucher said. It will be a driving force in attracting new technology jobs to the area, he said.

Wireless Internet availability puts out the message that this town is committed to technological advances, according to Boucher.

UVa-Wise students who do not already live on campus will benefit from the free connection, Boucher said. Access to the Internet will help with their classroom performance, he said.

Emergency first responders will also benefit from Wi-Fi, according to Boucher. Using the county's geographic information system, firefighters will be able to locate exactly where a fire hydrant is or know the kind of material a structure is made of before arriving on scene.

Not only will Wi-Fi draw in new businesses, Swinney said, it will increase real estate values.

If a residence is in an area where the signal can be picked up, she said, the price of rent could be increased to reflect higher value.

Swinney acknowledged that some people may opt to cancel their current Internet connections and log onto the free account. ▲



▲ Geographic Information Science coordinator Jessica Swinney showed the crowd a 'tablet' personal computer which is capable of picking up the town's Wi-Fi signal.