

Broadband arrives in rural King Township

By **Brian Lockhart**

A partnership between government and business has brought high-speed Internet to rural areas of King Township with the initial installation of around 30 km of fibre optic cable.

Internet provider Vianet Inc. provided the first hook-up of a residential home on the 19th Sideroad after completing the groundwork of laying the cable including a section that feeds through a tunnel under Highway 400.

The service will eventually accommodate around 1,000 homes and businesses in the area.

Homeowners, Bob and Joan Balziel, were the first to hook up to the service.

"We couldn't get internet out here, only an internet turbo stick. After you go through one gigabyte you have to pay more and you can go through that pretty fast. I even had satellite people come in and they said we had too many trees in the area," Mr. Balziel explained. "Vianet came down here in June and let me know they were going to make a little noise and they put a pipe through here under the 400. It told them when they get it in I want it right away so I signed up with them."

Funding for the project was boosted by the Ontario government's Small Communities Infrastructure Program. Member of Parliament for King-Vaughan, Deb Schulte, said the money will be well spent to assist rural areas for many reasons.

"It's transformational for residents and the community. When I was knocking on doors campaigning in the area I heard it from lots of people. King is under-served when it comes to broadband so it was one of my big pushes when I moved to federal government to say we need to push for broadband in rural communities and then we came up with that massive \$500 million in funding. The program is in the business and economic development side of the federal government. We know how important it is - it's good for education and it's good so people can do business - it's good for the economy. We funded \$825,000 just for this area and Vianet put in \$1.65 million to bring the service to these people," Schulte explained.

The new service will have a huge impact on local business.

"It's very important from a business perspective," said Councillor, Debbie Schaefer. "We've got business that can't connect easily to do their invoicing or receiving information. And for children for education purposes and adults who want to do on-line training - all of those things will now be possible when living remotely."

The project has been in the planning stage for a couple of years.

"We started this project in the planning and submission stage to the government back in 2015," explained Brian McCullagh, Vianet's director of business. "It was approved in 2016. We started planning and getting the permits to put the fibre in the ground in early 2017. We've been working diligently over the past four or five months. We've done around 30 kilometres already and we're just starting to hook up customers now. It was funded 50 per cent by the two levels of government - 25 percent from the provincial and 25 from the federal and Vianet contributed the other 50 per cent of the project."

"This is a great example of the provincial and federal levels of government working with the private sector to connect more residents and businesses to high-speed internet," said King Township Mayor Steve Pellegrini. "It means students can finish their homework assignments at home and home-based businesses will be able to better serve their customers. It's a tremendous benefit for King Township."

"All of us at Vianet are proud to be an integral part of this milestone event. This initial end user fibre optic connection is a product of the efforts of many parties - the visionary support of the mayor and council of King Township, the financial support of the Ontario and Canadian governments and the hard work of Vianet staff and contractors. A special thank you to King Township municipal staff who have helped us throughout the startup process. This may be the first connection, but many others will follow. The project is on time and on budget - Vianet looks forward to bringing the ultimate in fibre optic connectivity to as many rural King Township residents as possible over the two years of this project," said Vianet's Will Gasteiger.

Vianet is based out of Sudbury with satellite offices around Ontario. Locally they have an office on Highway 9, in Schomberg. Once the project is completed local residents can finally receive the high-speed internet service that so far has been available in more densely populated areas.