

Middle Rio Grande Pueblo Tribal Consortium

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Middle Rio Grande Pueblo Tribal Consortium Broadband Connectivity Fiber Optic Groundbreaking Set for 10:30 am on Monday 12/18

Tribally-Owned Fiber Optic Network to Serve Tribal Libraries: Pueblos of Cochiti, San Felipe, Santa Ana and Santo Domingo

Santa Ana Pueblo, NM, December 14, 2017- The Middle Rio Grande Pueblo Tribal Consortium (MRGPTC or “Consortium”) is excited to announce its fiber optic network groundbreaking on Monday, December 18, 2017, at San Felipe Pueblo. The Consortium is a partnership of four Pueblo libraries: Cochiti, San Felipe, Santa Ana and Santo Domingo.

Please join the Tribal communities to celebrate “*Tribes Connecting Tribes*” at the groundbreaking site and luncheon. (See below for directions.)

Governor Robert B. Coriz, Pueblo of Santo Domingo, credited the Tribes’ commitment to exercising Tribal sovereignty with making the E-rate project a reality. “The Tribes now hold the distinct recognition of being the first in a multi-Tribal collaborative project to empower its people with broadened educational opportunities,” said Governor Coriz.

Governor Lawrence Montoya, Pueblo of Santa Ana, similarly praised the power of Tribal collaboration to help end the digital divide. “The efforts of our Tribal consortium to bring critical infrastructure to our four Pueblos is proof that rural Tribal communities can successfully connect [and excel] by working together and exercising self-determination to improve community well-being,” remarked Governor Montoya.

The E-rate Program, established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), allocates \$3.9 billion each year to bring broadband to schools and libraries across the United States. AMERIND Risk’s experienced AMERIND Critical Infrastructure (ACI) team helps Indian Country acquire E-rate funding to deploy high-speed Internet.

“Tribal schools and libraries have been going at it alone to increase their access to broadband Internet — with limited and varied success. The new E-rate opportunities allowed the Tribal consortium in New Mexico to address connectivity issues together by aggregating demand and working with our Tribal neighbors, to create a Tribally-owned network that is exponentially faster at a fraction of the cost,” said **Derek Valdo, AMERIND Risk CEO**.

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“This successful E-rate application and historic groundbreaking is a testament to the incredible vision and hard work of the Middle Rio Grande Pueblo Tribal Consortium. The successful efforts of Santa Ana, San Felipe, Santo Domingo/Kewa, and Cochiti Pueblos to bring broadband to their communities will form a critical foundation for future success,” **Senator Tom Udall** said. “High speed broadband is a necessity in today’s world — to research a homework assignment, fill out a job application, sign up for health insurance, find housing, and stay informed. Everyone should have access — but approximately 64 percent of Tribal members don’t have adequate broadband. I’ll keep fighting for investments in nationwide broadband, to make sure Tribes’ digital needs are fully met.”

About the Middle Rio Grande Pueblo Tribal Consortium Broadband Connectivity Project

The MRGPTC includes the four Tribal libraries in the Pueblos of Santa Ana, San Felipe, Santo Domingo and Cochiti. Awarded in March of 2017, the \$4.2 million project will receive a FCC Schools and Libraries E-rate subsidy of \$3.9 million. It was the largest E-rate award in the state of New Mexico in 2016 and the first Tribal project of its kind nationally since the launch of E-rate modernization.

The construction of a Tribally-owned 60-mile fiber optic network will increase current speeds from 3 Mbps in two of the Pueblos to 100 Mbps. It will also reduce the monthly recurring Internet costs from the group average of \$106/Mbps to \$7/Mbps. The internet speed will initially increase over 350% while the cost of services will decrease to less than 10% of the current monthly costs. The network will be operational in the spring of 2018.

About E-rate (FCC Schools and Libraries Program)

The FCC Schools and Libraries Program, known as E-rate, provides discounts to assist most schools and libraries to obtain high-speed internet access and telecommunications. While most of the nation’s public libraries have received E-rate support, only an estimated 15 percent of Tribal libraries receive E-rate funds.

“I congratulate the Middle Rio Grande Pueblo Tribal Consortium for creating this successful and innovative approach to close the digital divide in Indian Country,” said **Senator Martin Heinrich**. “I am proud to have worked with the Consortium to introduce the Tribal Connect Act to steer much-needed federal investments to Indian Country through the E-rate Program to allow Tribal communities to expand access to high-speed internet.”

Tribal Impact

Broadband access will level the playing field for students, entrepreneurs and all people across Indian Country. “The broadband connectivity brings new distance learning potential to the

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Pueblos, including peering with the University of New Mexico for higher education opportunities and with our Pueblo schools, such as the Santa Fe Indian School, who use technology for Native language revitalization,” stated **Kevin Lewis, Education Director, Pueblo de Cochiti**.

The Pueblo of San Felipe has expanded its library to meet the needs of Tribal youth – with computer use at the top of that list. “Broadband Internet access is an essential part of the educational experience,” said **Alissa Chavez-Lowe, Education Director, Pueblo of San Felipe**. “We have students waiting to be able to take on-line classes as well as those who have attempted but quit in frustration when the Internet was too slow undermining their efforts.”

Santo Domingo Pueblo Tribal Library lies in the heart of the Pueblo, serving as a critical computing center when homes often lack computers, let alone affordable Internet access. “Connecting the library is the conduit to meeting the digital needs of the community,” stated **Cynthia Aguilar, Librarian, Pueblo of Santo Domingo**. “Every member needs digital tools, including our many artisans who need to submit high-resolution photos for shows. Without the library, many cannot scan or submit their images, compromising their economic security.”

Groundbreaking at San Felipe Pueblo:

Exit 252 off I-25 and commence west 3 miles. Follow signage to the groundbreaking site. Celebration luncheon will follow the groundbreaking at the Black Mesa Casino Showroom. Contact Kimball Sekaquaptewa at KSekaquaptewa@amerindrisk.org or (505) 795-1303 for event information.