



Avista Launches Fiber Technology Grant Program

11/26/02

SPOKANE, Wash., Nov. 26 /PRNewswire/ -- Avista Corp. (NYSE: AVA) today announced a higher education technology grant program designed to jump-start technology-based economic development in the Inland Northwest.

(Photo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/19990629/AVALOGO>)

Known as the Virtual Possibilities Network Grants Project, the program will provide easy access to Avista Corp.'s fiber network over the next five years to a consortium of regional higher education institutions. Initial consortium participants include Eastern Washington University; Gonzaga University; North Idaho College; University of Idaho; Lewis-Clark State College; Washington State University; Spokane Intercollegiate Research and Technology Institute (SIRTI); University of Idaho, Research Park; Whitworth College; and Community Colleges of Spokane.

Scott Morris, Avista Corp. senior vice president and president of Avista Utilities, presented the in-kind donation at a news conference hosted by the Spokane Regional Chamber of Commerce and in conjunction with the chamber's Higher Education Leadership Group meeting.

"It is our privilege to provide this fiber infrastructure for special initiatives which will result in strengthening our region's economy in ways we can only now begin to imagine," Morris said. "This project is a natural extension of Avista Corp.'s long-standing commitment to support communities in which we live and work."

Avista's concept for the Virtual Possibilities Network grew out of the sale of its former telecommunications subsidiary. Avista retained a portion of the subsidiary's fiber network for its future needs and for the purpose of fostering economic development in the Inland Northwest.

Morris said development of the grant program is a collaborative effort between Avista Corp. and participating higher education institutions. In the coming weeks, a work group comprised of representatives from all the participating organizations will meet to develop the technical standards, selection criteria and grant application process. The work is targeted to be complete early next year.

In April 2003, the Virtual Possibilities Network Grants Project expects to begin accepting grant applications for projects that focus on incubation, education, and research and development.

"The mission of the Virtual Possibilities Network Grants Project is to contribute to regional economic development by facilitating the creation of and access to a durable high-speed communications network," Morris said. "The goal is to approve at least 12 projects in the first year of the program."

According to Morris, the fiber network creates a loop between Spokane and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, with a separate connection between Pullman, Wash., and Moscow, Idaho. The initial test for lighting fiber between SIRTI and Whitworth College will be completed in December with the rest of higher education institutions connecting to the fiber network during 2003.

Morris said Columbia Fiber Solutions, a Vancouver, Washington-based business that is acquiring most of Avista's fiber assets, is responsible for providing the necessary fiber links for the higher education institutions to access the Virtual Possibilities Network.

Avista Corp. is an energy company involved in the production, transmission and distribution of energy as well as other energy-related businesses. Avista Utilities is a company operating division that provides electric and natural gas service to customers in four western states. Avista's non-regulated affiliates include Avista Advantage, Avista Labs and Avista Energy. Avista Corp.'s stock is traded under the ticker symbol "AVA" and its Internet address is www.avistacorp.com.

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-0- 11/26/2002

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