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### **Jim Pressell**

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### **Mike Schultz**

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### **Mark Scarborough**

LaPorte County Farm Bureau

## **For Immediate Release:**

### **LaPorte County Community & Economic Development**

### **LaPorte County, Indiana**

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**Tony Rodriguez, EDFP., Director**

## **“Third Time is the Charm”: Transformational Next Level Connections Grants awarded to three broadband firms in LaPorte County, Indiana.**

Today, Governor Eric J. Holcomb, announced three competitive grants, being awarded by the State of Indiana NLC Phase 3 Broadband Connectivity representing our third LaPorte County team effort to seek this highly sought-after funding from the Next Level Connect Broadband Grant Program.

“First and foremost, I offer my sincere thanks to Governor Holcomb, Lt. Governor Crouch and the Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) for their confidence and commitment to ensure that LaPorte County’s unserved and underserved can now anticipate digital connectivity that will allow them access to highspeed broadband. This award of nearly \$7million dollars in state NLC grant funding is transformational for our county and is the result of tremendous hard work from so many! Broadband is essential to education and e-learning, to access remote telehealth and electronic banking, and for work- from- home opportunities as well as to ensure our county’s agriculture businesses can remain competitive. In order for all of our residents and businesses to participate in our high-tech economy, we simply must have equity in access to competitive broadband speeds,” stated Sheila Matias, President of the LaPorte County Board of Commissioners, and founder of the Rural Broadband Task Force.

“I couldn’t be more pleased for our county residents who currently suffer from a complete lack of any connectivity or have poor connectivity. This is a significant accomplishment for our county,” stated Randy Novak, LaPorte County Council President and Task Force Member.

“We are committed to ensuring communities in our area have dependable internet and underserved Hoosiers and businesses can stay connected,” State Representative Jim Pressel said. “Hoosiers rely on having strong internet access for education, health services and

work, and investing these funds into expanding and improving our broadband is a much-needed step in the right direction. A lot of teamwork went into figuring out the plans for these funds and the perseverance was greatly rewarded," concluded Representative Pressel, District 20.

"This NLC grant award to these three private broadband providers is monumental for LaPorte County to grow its data infrastructure, support economic development and our digital-ready future," added Senator Michael Bohacek, Indiana District 8.

"Specifically, we are announcing that Surf Broadband Solutions was awarded \$4.467MM in Next Level Connect Phase 3 grant funds; Comcast was awarded \$241,000, and Mercury Wireless was awarded an estimated \$1,100,000. These critical last mile grants from the State of Indiana will enhance all neighborhoods and rural LaPorte County can now have connectivity where none previously existed," stated Tony Rodriguez, EDFP., Director of the Community and Economic Development Department, LaPorte County and co-chair of the LaPorte County Rural Broadband Task Force.

Gene Cruise, President of Surf Broadband, stated, "Surf Broadband will use its grant funds to provide service to more than 1000 homes and then will contribute an additional \$2M in company investment to complete the network which will serve a large section of rural LaPorte county bringing the total investment for our company to over \$6.4 million."

Cruise continued," Fiber optic broadband is a transformational technology that we believe will fuel innovation in our region including new broadband intensive applications such as Internet of Things (IOT), telehealth, remote work, gaming, autonomous vehicles, etc. Surf is thrilled to leverage this grant along with our own increased investment to bring this technology to our friends and neighbors in a larger area of LaPorte County," continued Cruise.

"This grant compliments Surf's existing investment in providing fiber optic broadband services to thousands of residents in the cities of LaPorte, Wanatah and Westville. Surf's fiber optic broadband services start at \$35 per month for symmetrical bandwidth, requires no contract

and has a guaranteed price for life,” concluded Gene Cruise, President of Surf Broadband Solutions.

“We are thankful for the effort of so many, including the hundreds of support letters. from community members who wrote testimonials highlighting what it is like to live without any connectivity options,” added Fonda Owens, Director of LaPorte County Public Library and member of the LaPorte County Rural Broadband Task Force. “This Phase 3 NLC Grant is the result of the solid support from the LaPorte County Commission, the LaPorte County Council, our state legislative team with Representative Jim Pressel, State Senator Michael Bohacek and State Representative Pat Boy, support from the Healthcare Foundation of LaPorte, Unity Foundation, LaPorte County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the dedicated members of the Broadband Task Force, all of whom were instrumental in writing letters of support along with regularly attending meetings of the LaPorte County Rural Broadband Task Force. It really does take a village,” concluded Owens.

“Agricultural connectivity is critical to LaPorte County’s future. The investment being made by the state and these three firms through the NLC competitive grant award, mentioned here and the significant KVREMC Fiber investments certainly bode well for rural LaPorte County,” stated Mark Scarborough, LaPorte County Farm Bureau board member and member of the Rural Broadband Task Force.

“Third time is a Charm” is what the LaPorte County Community and Economic Development Director Tony Rodriguez told the County Commissioners and the County Council to earn their support and confidence that this vital Infrastructure project was simply too important to fail and could only have happened with their support and the tireless efforts of county staff especially county GIS staff Mike Ordjewski, County Planner Mitch Bishop, and our private sector partners who are committed to ensuring that these monumental changes positively affect for our county’s digital future.

“Each and every additional last mile of fiber optic connectivity brings us that much closer to participating fully in “the Technology Corridor” that is being developed in greater Northwest Indiana. This is a game changer for our county,” concluded Sheila Matias, Commission President and Chairwoman of the LPC Broadband Task Force.



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