

Comcast launches faster broadband, additional speed tiers in Gallup

FREE INTERNET SERVICE IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR LOW INCOME, TRIBAL LAND HOUSEHOLDS

By **Rachelle Nones**
Sun Correspondent

Due to Comcast's recent broadband upgrades, existing customers in Gallup can now access additional internet speed tiers, with speeds reaching up to 1.2 Gbps (1,200 Mbps).

"There's a digital divide and that is part of why we are focusing on offering the full speed tier in places like Gallup, to help close that digital divide," Comcast spokeswoman Julianne Phares told the *Sun*.

"One of the things we learned from the pandemic is that everyone needs access to broadband," Phares said. "Part of the reason we completed this upgrade as part of our planned upgrades across New Mexico,

is to make sure that everyone has access to speeds like this."

Along with broadband providers such as Ting Internet, Verizon Wireless, Straight Shot Wireless and more than a dozen other Gallup broadband providers, Comcast is currently participating in the FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit program. EBB is a limited-time program providing low-income households with a subsidized broadband connection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualified households include tribal-land households and any household receiving housing assistance, SNAP, SSI, or assistance from other qualifying government programs.

"Higher speed internet access is going to be helpful for those students who live in populated areas, but Comcast does not reach all of the students

in the county," Gallup-McKinley County Schools Superintendent Mike Hyatt said.

Gallup-McKinley County Schools is the largest school district in New Mexico. Students from multiple tribes, including the Navajo Nation, Zuni, and Pueblo tribal lands attend classes within the district.

"The problem is infrastructure in our area. You know, there's been significant issues with high-speed internet coming into all of McKinley County, especially the rural areas where approximately 1600 of our students don't even have cell service to be able to get the internet," Hyatt said. "There's zero cell service."

The federal government grants funding for GMCS to provide high-speed internet for

its schools, but that same funding cannot be used to pay for cell towers or landlines within the rest of the community.

"The tribal governments do get funding and we hope and wish that they would use that funding to provide for their cell towers or other infrastructure for their citizens," Hyatt said.

According to the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, "In a landmark 2018 decision, the court ruled in *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* that the state was violating New Mexico students' constitutional right to a sufficient education and that the state must invest in the programs and services necessary to close opportunity gaps and fix deep inequities for low-income, Native American, English Language Learner students, and students with



Gallup McKinley County Schools
Superintendent Mike Hyatt

disabilities."

"We appreciate that people are finally paying attention to our student's needs. Unfortunately, it took a lawsuit to get there," Hyatt said.

GMCS was one of six plaintiffs involved in the *Yazzie/*

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ELECTION CANVASS | FROM PAGE 4

BOARD	39%	TOTAL VOTES: 2,254	ALBERT L CHOPITO	TOTAL VOTES: 153
CARRIE LORRAINE WATTS	27 VOTES	ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER AT LARGE POSITION 2 UNM ADVISORY BOARD AT LARGE POSITION 2	100%	SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER POSITION 5 ZUNI SCHOOL BOARD
11%	TOTAL VOTES: 70	RALPH A RICHARDS	206 VOTES	MILDRED LEMENTINO
8 VOTES	ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER AT LARGE POSITION 1 UNM ADVISORY BOARD AT LARGE POSITION 1	100%	TOTAL VOTES: 206	56%
SHAWNA SARAH GRASSIE	CHRISTOPHER L VIAN	2,254 VOTES	SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER POSITION 3 ZUNI SCHOOL BOARD	120 VOTES
50%	100%	TOTAL VOTES: 2,254	JEROME HASKIE	KRISSY S LEEKITY
35 VOTES	2,254 VOTES	SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER POSITION 2 ZUNI SCHOOL BOARD	100%	44%
KATHERINE M LAMBSON			153 VOTES	93 VOTES
				TOTAL VOTES 213

CITY COUNCIL | FROM PAGE 6

Of that \$9,000, only a little over \$3,000 is left, which will not carry Animal Control through the rest of the fiscal year. The city requested an additional \$9,000, and the council approved the amount.

The city also requested

another \$4,000 to purchase a new animal control vehicle. The city initially estimated that a new vehicle would cost \$70,000, but it was soon realized that a larger truck would be needed and that the correct size would cost an additional \$4,000.

In total, the council approved a budget adjustment

of \$13,000 for Animal Control. The Octavia Fellin Public Library has recently received two grants. The city council approved the acceptance of both.

The first grant is from the American Library Association for the NASA @ Your Library program. The program presents astronomy

and its related fields in accessible and attainable ways and shows local youth, especially indigenous youth, potential career paths.

The \$16,000 will be used to purchase a telescope for the library and supplies for related STEAM activities, among other things.

The other grant is from

the State of New Mexico's Department of Cultural Affairs. It is supposed to support the library's collections, staff salaries and training and equipment. The total amount of that grant is almost \$14,600.

The council approved the acceptance of both of the grants.

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Martinez lawsuit.

"We were told by the state, after we sued the state and won, that they needed to provide us high-speed access,"

Hyatt said. "They did an assessment and realized that the problem was worse than they thought and that it's going to be

a long-term fix and not a short-term fix in our area, due to the lack of infrastructure."

Every GMCS student who attends class in person has been given a laptop or iPad device. However, in numerous student households, the lack of broadband infrastructure renders the devices useless when a student is working on classwork at home.

"We are almost two years

into the pandemic and so it is going to take a period of time until the infrastructure technology is in place in our area, because our community has been left behind," Hyatt said.

For those who benefit from the EBB program, it will last as long as the federal government provides funding. Comcast

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