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NEWS RELEASE

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Big bandwidth for small-town libraries

BOISE, ID -- Preston's Larsen-Sant Public Library gets 11 Mbps of broadband Internet connectivity and 12 new computers. The East Bonner County Library District Branch in Sandpoint gets 45 Mbps and 22 new computers. The big bandwidth replaces capacity that clocked at less than one Mbps for public access computing. These are among the first of fifty-five Idaho public libraries that will have expanded public access computer centers and online resources this summer.

The Idaho Commission for Libraries, through grants from the Federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has matched up individual libraries with the lowest-cost providers for broadband Internet service in their particular communities. In Preston this is the small independent telephone company that serves the community. Ongoing, 80 percent of the Internet bill for the Preston and Sandpoint libraries will be paid by the FCC E-Rate Universal Service Fund. In addition to increased broadband and computers provided through the grant, most of the libraries are getting wi-fi equipment that will enable people who bring their own computers to the library to access the Internet.

"Increased Internet access and computing capacity expand the reach of community colleges, workforce development centers, and Adult Basic Education centers," said State Librarian Ann Joslin. "Public libraries are often the only local free public Internet access points and therefore play a critical role in public access to online services and resources."

The libraries' expanded public computer centers are a place that job-seekers and the underemployed can tap into resources from the Idaho Department of Labor and work to improve job skills with online resources like LearningExpress Library. In addition, e-government resources such as road maps, license renewal, and tax information are easily accessed at the public computer centers.

The 55 public libraries participating in the Idaho Commission for Libraries' "online @ your library" BTOP project are predominately rural and serve BTOP-defined vulnerable populations. See more about the "online @ your library" project at <http://libraries.idaho.gov/online>.

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ABOUT IDAHO COMMISSION FOR LIBRARIES

The Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL) assists libraries to build the capacity to better serve their clientele. To learn more about ICfL, visit <http://libraries.idaho.gov/>.

