



CORNING

Baldwin City, Kansas

Local leaders seize the promise of community broadband

The Challenge

Baldwin City, Kansas, once a stop along the Santa Fe Trail, is home to Baker University, the oldest university in Kansas. Baldwin City is also home to 4,500 residents who, while being proud of their community's traditional character defined by historic downtown buildings and brick streets, recognized that today's vibrant community requires technological adaptation.

The town's outdated communications infrastructure diminished Baldwin City's opportunities for job growth, economic development, and small-town quality of life. The "work wherever you are" promise of [the Glass Age](#) is out of reach for smaller communities lacking equal access to the digital economy. Like many small towns, Baldwin's young graduates often leave for greener (better-connected) pastures.

To maintain a quality of life into the future for the people and businesses in Baldwin City, the town had to get access to high-speed broadband. As is often the case in community broadband, ultimately whether a network is built comes

down to champions in the town. Leadership was needed to spearhead an effort to cost-effectively bring gigabit fiber and all that it enables to Baldwin City.

The Solution

In small towns, local champions are unafraid of rolling up their sleeves to make things happen. The people who live and work in Baldwin City have a strong sense of ownership and pride in their hometown. So when small business owner Mike Bosch's software development company outgrew the town's internet capacity, he did what you can do in a small town: he went right to the mayor.

Recognizing that fiber infrastructure was crucial for their hometown to thrive in our increasingly connected world, Mayor Marilyn Pearse had the vision to support bringing gigabit connectivity to Baldwin City. Her commitment to addressing the town's broadband access was the crucial first step in creating positive change for the community. It's the one factor separating towns with and without necessary infrastructure; the rest comes down to the question of how to make it work.

Bosch built a software-driven fiber network prototype under his new company, RG Fiber, to prove that building world-class fiber networks in small towns is possible. Then RG Fiber built a 20-mile backbone to bring fiber into the town. For the entire team at Baldwin City, this initiative cemented the belief that a fiber infrastructure was both feasible and a necessary investment for the health of the community ... provided that the price (and quality) was right.

Enter Corning's [FlexNAP™ system](#), an innovative technology that enables installers to “tap into” the fiber optic cable running through Baldwin City and connect it to homes and businesses in a process that’s similar to plugging a lamp cord into an electrical outlet. The system uses lengths of fiber optic cable that have been connectorized in the factory, assuring network quality while bringing down labor costs throughout the life of the network.

“Without a doubt, one of the key things that made this project successful from the start was more than just Corning’s industry-leading products; it was their engineering expertise that helped me figure out how to be successful from planning to implementation and now to growth,” said Bosch.

The Impact

With broadband access now available to 80 percent of Baldwin City, already the town’s commitment and leadership is paying off. The deployment is moving along so rapidly, thanks to the easy-to-install FlexNAP system, that fiber-enabled internet, cable, and telephone services are already expanding into the county and neighboring towns.

“I’m a big believer in taking care of issues now and not leaving problems for the future. Baldwin City’s governing body and department heads have many accomplishments that I’m proud of, and chief among them is gigabit fiber. It will serve our community for the foreseeable future, helping the people and businesses in Baldwin City to realize their potential right here at home.”

Marilyn Pearse, Mayor of Baldwin City

The residents and businesses of Baldwin City are switching to the more reliable, faster fiber network, with a take rate in most neighborhoods between 40 and 70 percent. Better yet, they will be able to participate in continually evolving applications and services of the future (think “internet of things” and virtual reality), without having to wait for their town’s optical infrastructure to catch up. It is ready to go.

And the kids who will likely teach their parents to use tomorrow’s devices and services? They are already seeing the life-enhancing benefits of gigabit fiber at home and school. Participation in online classes is an option these days, and broadband is enabling the latest technology in



Baldwin City classrooms. “A reliable connection allowed our schools to focus on the students in the classroom instead of phone and internet outages,” said Bosch.

Baker University, too, is connected to the network now, a key consideration in the investment in Baldwin City’s broadband future. Today, students have access to gigabit Wi-Fi in all the dorms and nearly all of the Greek houses, allowing them to complete assignments everywhere without buffering slowing them down. The benefits extended all the way to the athletic stadium, enabling ESPN/ESPN3 to stream the Baker University football games for the first time ever in the 2015-2016 school year.



The community’s connectivity, once a hitch in this one-stoplight town, has become a differentiator in the area, a recruiting tool for the university, and an incentive for businesses and families to call Baldwin City home.

“One of our new city council members, AJ Stevens, moved here specifically because of our unique combination of an idyllic small town and world-class connectivity. Now he’s leading the effort to fully leverage the network to drive prosperity in Baldwin City.”

Marilyn Pearce, Mayor of Baldwin City

For more information about Baldwin City’s gigabit fiber project, check out www.rgfiber.com or contact RG Fiber at 785-594-5414. To explore Corning’s solutions and capabilities, connect with us at www.corning.com/muni or contact customer care at 828-901-5000, or toll free in the United States at 800-743-2675.



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