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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Citizens' Services

### **Expanded coverage brings high-speed internet access to Okanagan communities**

KELOWNA – Rural and remote communities in the North and Central Okanagan are now enjoying the benefits of a high-speed internet connection, thanks to funding from the provincial government's Connecting British Columbia program.

"British Columbians, no matter where they live, need a fast and reliable internet connection to access the services they count on and be part of the growing digital economy," said Minister of Citizens' Services Jinny Sims. "Our government will continue to work with local partners and make key investments that will help drive rural economic development and create decent-paying jobs in communities across the province."

Sims met with residents, students and business owners near Kelowna to discuss the positive effects of a \$113,000 provincial grant to local internet service provider ispeed Communications to bring high-speed internet access to communities including Lake Country, Enderby, Peachland, Armstrong and rural Vernon.

Sims met students and staff during a tour of the Interior Heavy Equipment Operator School in Lake Country on Thursday. The school prepares students to operate equipment like excavators and bulldozers. Staff say they have seen a recent hiring surge in sectors like oil and gas, construction and forestry.

"Interior Heavy Equipment School provides students with the practical skills they need to be job-ready for both the local and provincial sector. They have real impact on the province's economy," said Interior Heavy Equipment Operator School president Mike Hansen. "Improved internet not only ensures our students have stable access to the online curriculum portion of the program, it's a critical tool so that our site administrators can quickly access real-time student job leads."

Community internet service provider ispeed Communications recently completed work to upgrade connectivity in an area, servicing approximately 3,180 households. More than 1,200 of these households had no access at all, while the remainder were limited to slower speeds.

"Our customers, many of whom live off-grid or operate home-based businesses, have welcomed the increased bandwidth and added reliability resulting from this network upgrade," said ispeed Communications president Dave Bradich. "I've heard from customers saying they can now work from home instead of paying for an office in town. The internet is critical to the way people live and work today."

Connecting British Columbia is a program funded by the Province and administered by Northern Development Initiative Trust to expand and upgrade broadband connections in rural and remote communities throughout B.C.

“Bringing reliable, high-speed internet access to communities with limited or non-existent connectivity provides a quick boost to regional economies,” said Joel McKay, chief executive officer of Northern Development Initiative Trust. “The trust is pleased to see the positive impacts of this investment already being felt by small businesses, people who work from home and the community generally.”

**Quick Facts:**

- ispeed Communications received grant funding of up to \$185,000 to bring high-speed internet access to approximately 3,180 households. The project finished approximately \$72,000 under budget. The savings will be used for future projects in B.C.
- The North Okanagan communities benefiting from the upgrade include Mara, Grindrod, Enderby, Trinity Valley, rural Armstrong and rural Vernon.
- The Central Okanagan communities benefiting from the upgrade include Lake Country, Westside Road (Parker Cove to Kelowna, including Valley of the Sun), rural Kelowna, rural West Kelowna and rural Peachland.

**Learn More:**

ispeed Communications Ltd.: [www.ispeed.net](http://www.ispeed.net)

Interior Heavy Equipment Operator School: [www.iheschool.com](http://www.iheschool.com)

Connecting British Columbia:

<https://www.northerndevelopment.bc.ca/funding-programs/partner-programs/connecting-british-columbia/>

**Photos:**

Minister of Citizens’ Services Jinny Sims tours Interior Heavy Equipment Operator School:

<https://flic.kr/p/K4AhSM>

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