

## <sup>21</sup>Benton utilizes ICN Network

By AJ WENNDT

The Iowa Communications Network (ICN) is a Des Moines-based agency that administers the state's fiber optic telecommunications network. Over 700 video classrooms are currently in use in educational, medical, governmental, armory, and public library facilities throughout the state. Benton Community is continuing its use of the network as a distance learning this school year. Benton Superintendent Gary Zittergruen commented on the history of ICN usage in the school district.

"Through the efforts of GWAEA, Kirkwood Community College, and local school districts an effort was made to coordinate courses that could be shared between school districts," he said. "Benton was one of the first school districts in the area to take advantage of this opportunity and has been on board ever since. Our high school ICN room has served as the origination site for many course offerings over the years including high school and dual credit college courses."

Kirkwood Psychology instructor Don Logan uses the ICN to instruct up to 140 high school and college students, spread throughout eastern Iowa, at a time. Don is a Van Horne resident and teaches several General Psychology courses from Benton High School's ICN room, which are broadcast to neighboring high schools and Kirkwood locations.

"The ICN works to many students' advantages at Benton since it allows them to take classes that they would not be able to access otherwise," said Don. "It also is quite useful for a number of Staff members and community members who take graduate or other educational training classes in the evenings. The network is widely used by Iowa high schools

to share classes much like what Benton Does. It is used by Kirkwood and other colleges to bring undergraduate and graduate classes to a 'neighborhood' school so that travel costs and time are reduced greatly."

Though schools can benefit from using the ICN Network, there are a few flaws in the system that are brought about primarily by technological glitches and limitations - though these aspects of the network are only a slight burden.

"One slightly troublesome aspect is that sometimes the 'technology' gets a glitch and it does not work properly for a short period of time," Mr. Logan said. "Another aspect is the lack of real face to face contact and feedback that you get with the teacher live in the room with you. Thus, a larger burden is put on the student to be self controlled and disciplined."

Students enrolled in ICN courses at Benton - such as junior Emily Mattison - believe the network has both good and bad characteristics.

"It is sometimes difficult," said Emily, "to hear what the teacher is saying and to be on task. I do think, though, that classes offered through the ICN are very effective."

Benton guidance counselor Aaron Cretin agrees with Emily's views on the system's effectiveness. Students are fortunate, he stated, to have such opportunities for distance learning.

"The ICN at Benton is used primarily for distance-based courses - both high school and college," said Mr. Cretin. "We are very fortunate in this day and age to be able to share resources with other schools, and to provide students with the opportunity to further their academic studies."

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