

Metronet project continues forward

By Laura Goetzinger

Preliminary work on Decorah's new fiber optic Metronet network has started.

The Metronet's contract with Voltmer Electric of Decorah began Sunday, April 1.

The Decorah Metronet will connect 18 points in the city with fiber optic cable, increasing communication abilities for those locations.

Fiber should arrive sooner than first thought, said Chad Bird, Decorah city administrator and the city's representative on the Metronet group. Originally, the Metronet committee was told it would be eight or nine months be-

fore fiber would be available. Most recently, Bird said they were told it could be in here in 60-90 days. The fiber is American made, a condition of a grant awarded to the project.

Auxiliary work will be done whether they have the fiber on hand or not, Bird said. Voltmer Electric and subcontractors will begin digging conduits and preparing buildings for the fiber prior to its arrival.

The contract with Voltmer runs through Dec. 30, Bird said. The fiber is expected to be in place by then.

Additionally, the Metronet committee is working on a lease arrangement with the Iowa Communications Network, which uses the

fiber for schools, National Guard armories, libraries, hospitals and government offices. ICN would like to lease 24 pairs of the Metronet's 144 pairs of fiber, Bird said.

"We have to hammer out what that agreement will look like," he said.

While the ICN will not lease fiber to businesses, the Metronet group may in the future, Bird said. The committee is in discussions about those options.

About the network

The Metronet will circle the city with 144 strands of fiber optic cable.

A committee of representatives

from the six Metronet anchor members (city of Decorah, Winneshiek County, Winneshiek Medical Center, Decorah School District, Luther College and Upper Explorerland) have led the efforts to make the networks a reality.

The project is expected to cost about \$957,300. Grant funding of \$519,869 has been ensured through the Federal Recovery Act's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program. A local contribution is required, and the six anchor members have pledged a combined 30 percent match, of \$222,804. The Broadband Technology Opportunities Program funding needs to be used by June 2013.

