



The Reverend Raymond Woodward is surprised to find new email when standing on a pedestrian bridge over the St. John River, NB.

The eZone

by Steve Llewellyn

the fibreoptic network as a showcase for the technology involved, said Gallant.

"It would be expensive if we were starting from scratch," he admitted.

Don Good, president of Fredericton's Chamber of Commerce, said the wi-fi network is vital city infrastructure.

"You take a look at the type of economy we have: government, IT, the universities, they all rely on being connected," he said. "I think it is a plus for the business community," he added.

Good said it allows business travellers visiting the city to take their offices with them wherever they go.

As head of Team Fredericton, Don Fitzgerald has the job of marketing the capital as a place to do business. Wi-fi makes his job a little easier and not just because he can access his email just about anywhere.

"It is going to figure prominently in our future marketing campaign," he said. "It is an integral part of positioning Fredericton as a smart city."

THE LAST PLACE Rev. Raymond Woodward expected to get his email was on a pedestrian bridge over the St. John River that divides downtown Fredericton, New Brunswick.

The United Pentecostal minister and avid outdoorsman was finishing his Sunday sermon on his laptop and soaking up some summer sunshine in August 2003. But when he checked his appointment calendar, he was surprised to see new email appear on his screen.

"I wondered what the heck was going on," he recalled in a recent interview.

That is how Woodward discovered that Fredericton has Canada's first free, municipally-owned wi-fi (wireless fidelity) network called Fred-eZone.

Later that month he even accessed the wireless fibreoptic network from his boat while cruising past the downtown core on the river.

"What a great place to live," said Woodward.

So far the city has invested about \$200,000 in creating and running the wi-fi network, and Maurice Gallant, Fredericton's information technology manager, said there are no plans to begin levying a fee for using the service.

"You don't charge people for walking on the sidewalk," he said. "This is all part of being a smart city."

According to Gallant, the city has just added 20 new access nodes to enlarge the wireless network's coverage, bringing the total to about 50. Each node has a range of about 300 metres, and all a user has to do

is have Internet-capable technology that uses 802.11b wireless cards.

In 2000 Fredericton started building a 22-kilometre fibreoptic network to link various municipal buildings. The extra capacity on that network was offered to the provincial government and business users. The wi-fi network just piggybacked onto that system.

"We got the main roads done," said Gallant, still using the municipal infrastructure metaphor. "The small side roads were not a big deal."

The project is a partnership between the city, a local IT company called e-Novations, BrunNet (the internet supplier) and Eastern Wireless (the technical supplier). IT giant CISCO is also involved and using

Free wi-fi in Fredericton

The city is getting lots of calls from other municipalities wanting to know how the free wi-fi network was created, said Fitzgerald.

The city is about to start installing stylized "E" signs all around the downtown to indicate access points for wi-fi. Fitzgerald predicted that will result in a dramatic spike in usage of the network.

He said he recently used the network to check his office email on his PDA just before he went into an important meeting.

"I knew that I went into that meeting with the most up-to-date information that we had," said Fitzgerald. *ML*

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