

Buckeye CableSystem puts fiber-optics lines to the test

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PERRYSBURG TOWNSHIP

By JON CHAVEZ
BLADE BUSINESS WRITER

A Perrysburg Township subdivision with cable television and Internet hookups is getting high-speed fiber-optic lines in a test program to improve its service without having trenches dug to make the replacement. The result is expected to be faster Internet service and the ability to handle more bandwidth for potential future services such as better high-definition or even 3-D television. And the change potentially can be done for less money and with less mess than digging out the old wires.

About 160 homes in the Carrington Woods subdivision off West River Road are involved in the test program by Buckeye CableSystem that allows fiber optic to be threaded quickly inside existing coaxial cable lines. Buckeye CableSystem, owned by Block Communications Inc., which also owns The Blade, provides cable television and Internet services. Buckeye officials said they expect coaxial cable connecting the homes to be replaced by a fiber-optic network this week. The network is to be ready for use by the end of December.

Nothing would change inside customers' homes, which would keep the existing coaxial cables.

The technology being used in the test neighborhood is from Kabel-X USA LLC of Davie, Fla. If the new system works as planned, other area homes in the Buckeye CableSystem network could get the hookups to improve service and allow use of new technologies that require a better signal or broader bandwidth. Company officials said the change is tied to its capital budget and is not directly reflected in monthly cable bills to customers.

Buckeye has nearly 130,000 miles of fiber-optic strands throughout the Toledo area, but they run from its headquarters on Angola Road to junction boxes in neighborhoods. From each box, coaxial copper cable runs to 250 to 500 individual homes.

That can result in a less reliable or slower signal if all 500 homes are using cable services simultaneously, Buckeye officials said. In practical terms, it could mean Internet connections would slow as all homes surf the Web.

Fiber-optic cable would erase that problem because it provides greater bandwidth and would be connected directly to each home, Buckeye officials said.

But replacing coaxial lines with fiber optic is expensive when a traditional system of digging up old lines and laying new ones is used. The Kabel-X technology allows the existing lines to be used, stripping out part of the coaxial cable and reinjecting the line with fiber-optic cable without digging new trenches, Buckeye officials said. A hole is dug only near the junction box to perform the work.

Joe Jensen, chief technology officer at Buckeye CableSystem, said, "In some ways it really lowers the bar to convert a neighborhood to all fiber optics."

David Adler, Kabel-X vice president, said a handful of U.S. firms have tested the technology in remote locations to see whether it worked. The Perrysburg Township project, he said, is the first large-scale test in the United States.

Mr. Jensen said if the test works, the new process could reduce the cost of laying fiber cable by 30 to 50 percent. In traditional cable replacement, his firm could replace 200 to 300 feet a day. But with Kabel-X, it can replace 200 feet in 20 minutes, he said.



Kenny Mohr, a technician with Kabel-X USA, prepares cable lines in the Carrington Woods subdivision off West River Road for fiber-optic lines to be installed. The process prevents trenching.
(THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)



Installation of fiber optics will allow Buckeye CableSystem to deliver more bandwidth for future services such as better high-definition or even 3-D television. Officials of Kabel-X USA said the Perrysburg Township project is the nation's first large-scale test of the technology.
(THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)