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Blazing the Digital Trail

By DAVID ANDERSON
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Deanna Ward of Lexington has been named Connected Tennessee's eCommunity Project Manager for the West Tennessee region.

If you haven't heard much about Connected Tennessee yet… you will.

Governor Phil Bredesen calls it "The Trail to Innovation."

Connected Tennessee's mission is "to close the digital divide in Tennessee."

Connected Tennessee is not a broadband provider but works to accelerate the expansion of broadband to every corner of Tennessee through public-private partnerships.

Connected Tennessee develops and implements effective strategies for technology deployment, use and literacy in Tennessee. CT works in partnership with telecommunications and information technology providers, public agencies, business leaders, community leaders, researchers and universities to meet the goals of the Trail to Innovation.

CT works to ensure the state remains the setting of choice for families and businesses by leveraging the best in technology for all of Tennessee.

"Broadband technology is an enabler for programs such as distance learning, telemedicine, e-government and for creating an environment that helps us grow jobs in all parts of Tennessee," said Gov. Bredesen. "Connected Tennessee will ensure that we have the broadband foundation and computer literacy so that Tennesseans everywhere can realize the opportunities that are possible when all communities are truly connected."

Effective economic development requires collaboration and communication between various entities and individuals throughout the state.

However, there remains a breach between Tennessee's smaller communities and the quickly developing global economy. Many refer to it as the "digital divide." This widening chasm is recognizable by the lack of relevant access to and use of broadband Internet

and related technology. Broadband Internet and other technologies can close the divide in terms of one's ability to engage the world.

Many of Tennessee's rural communities and citizens remain unconnected. Small towns and rural areas are the cradle of the best of American ingenuity, potential and values. Without sufficient access to broadband and a high level of related technology adoption, these Tennessee communities and their residents will remain technologically, and thus economically, isolated.

According to the Tennessee Broadband Task Force, "Broadband expansion is to the 21st century what rural electrification was to the 20th century...High-speed Internet access...is critically important to Tennessee's future, especially in jobs, education and healthcare."

Among the task force recommendations are the establishment of a program that promotes access to broadband service in every home and business. Also to promote competition among providers by expanding telecom policies and identify and coordinate state efforts toward expanding broadband deployment and usage.

Lexington's Deanna Ward will guide West Tennessee along the "trail to innovation" as the West Tennessee Project Manager.

Deanna previously worked for Mark IV Automotive in Lexington where she served for 13 years as Education and Training and Helpdesk Manager for all of Mark IV North American Divisions.

Prior to Mark IV, she worked as Juvenile Court Clerk for Henderson County.
Connected Tennessee's eCS Project Managers are carrying out the *Trail to Innovation* by working with local eCommunity Leadership teams throughout the state to develop individualized comprehensive technology growth plans and to educate Tennesseans about the benefits of broadband Internet and related technologies.

If broadband is currently unavailable in your area or if you're interested in getting a high-speed connection, contact Deanna Ward at 731-699-0234, dward@connectedtn.org .