



## **New firm to provide Internet service on Lenowisco fiber**

By: JODI DEAL / Staff Writer

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Sunset Digital Communications will no longer be the company providing household and business Internet service on a local fiber-optic network.

A new company, Clariti Media, is taking over that business, and is absorbing all current Sunset customers.

Sunset founder Paul Elswick and his son, Clariti president Ryan Elswick, explained in a Tuesday telephone interview that the formation of the new company is part of an ongoing effort to extend more home and business Internet service across the multi-million dollar broadband network that loops through the region.

But the new company won't replace the old one – Clariti is only taking over retail Internet service. Sunset will continue to operate the broadband network through a contract with the Lenowisco Planning District Commission, and will provide high-bandwidth data services to major customers like Wise County schools and local hospitals.

Paul Elswick pointed out that the idea all along was for the local network to be open for multiple companies to sell Internet service and anything else that can be operated through fiber conduits, like television, telephone and even security services.

“But we didn't have people falling all over themselves to use that bandwidth on a provider basis,” he added. That's how Sunset ended up in the business of selling Internet access alongside its duties overseeing the system and handling large data transport customers.

There's been concern for some time that other companies would hesitate to try using the fiber since the operator was also acting as the only retail provider on the lines, he added.

Handing retail service off to a new, separate company will let Sunset focus on overseeing the system and efforts to obtain funds to extend and upgrade the network, link it to other networks in major metropolitan areas and try to find new services to provide through the lines.

Meanwhile, Clariti can devote its time to aggressively promoting Internet services, Ryan Elswick explained. Previously, Sunset has mostly relied on word of mouth to obtain customers.

Efforts are underway to obtain financing and contracts for Clariti to provide television and dialtone services, too, Paul Elswick divulged.

## BIGGER BANDWIDTH PACKAGES

Fiber optic lines have a much higher capacity to carry data than traditional cable or copper telephone lines, the Elswicks explained. The bandwidth available to a customer depends totally on what kind of electronic equipment controls their connection.

In press releases and advertisements, Clariti has touted its ability to provide up to 100 Mbps of bandwidth per home or business, an extremely high speed not available in many areas.

Of course, that package isn't for everyone, and is priced accordingly. Most normal household or small business internet customers can get by just fine on the company's tier one package, which offers 10 Mbps, or tier two service, which is 25 Mbps.

Previously, retail Sunset customers have been able to choose from two tiers – a 5 Mbps package and a 7 Mbps package. Those customers will soon be upgraded to the new tier one and tier two services, respectively.

So who needs the beefed-up package? Other than technology enthusiasts who want it for recreational purposes, the Elswicks expect to see employees who want to work from home snapping up the high-speed option. Such employees and their employers have been requesting increased connectivity for some time, they added.

“We think companies are going to go for telecommuting in a big way during the economic recovery,” Paul Elswick said, pointing out that it's cheaper to upgrade an employee's home Internet connection and have them work from the house than to build new offices. Thanks to voice over IP technology, a company with a home base in another state could give a telecommuter an

extension that would ring right to his or her house, he pointed out.

#### GETTING CONNECTED

Right now, Sunset, Clariti and Lenowisco have funding to extend service to about 1,800 houses and small businesses within 1,500 feet of the existing fiber-optic backbone. Any further and there's a cost associated with running the needed lines to get the service where it needs to go.

Paul Elswick noted that federal stimulus funds are currently being sought to extend fiber to within 1,500 feet of every structure in Wise and Lee counties.

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