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[March 28, 2005]

Sturgis Hospital Gets County-Wide Connectivity

STURGIS, Mich., March 28 /PRNewswire/ -- Rural Communications today announced that a project that began over 24 months ago with Sturgis Hospital is now complete. The remote doctors' offices that are affiliated with Sturgis Hospital are being connected via a wide area network (WAN). These doctors' offices include Bronson Family Health Center, Colon Medical Clinic, Constantine/White Pigeon Medical Center, Howe Medical Center, Chicago Road Medical, The Doctors Office and the offices of Sturgis Hospital Physical Therapy and Home Health Care and Hospice. The physicians and associates of Sturgis Hospital now have point-to-point connectivity to the resources at the hospital's main computer center at speeds 50 plus times faster than under the previous system. In addition, each remote site has access to the hospital's high-speed Internet to provide their patients real-time resources and voice extensions to the hospital using IP technology. This project in part has been made possible by the USDA funding Rural Communications received this past January 2005 to connect St. Joseph County to high-speed Internet and local IP-based telephone service.

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In early 2003, Connie Downs, Sturgis Hospital Chief Financial Officer, negotiated with Rural Communications to reduce operating costs associated with providing local and long-distance telephone service and at the same time provide a [solution](#) to increase the speeds at which the remote sites could connect to the hospital. The challenge was three-fold: Provide a solution under the current operating budget, which was based on IP standards, allowing for the migration of [voice and data](#), and reaching to the remote offices of Colon, Constantine, Bronson and Howe, Indiana, where affordable technology was not available. "We are pleased with Rural Communications' foresight in helping us to design and implement a solution that makes sense for Sturgis Hospital and our remote sites. The connectivity solution provides a seamless connection to our main campus resources," said Downs.

"We are and continue to be very excited and proud of being part of the hospital's continued growth and expansion into the county. This project is the perfect example of how community [businesses](#) working together can create a greater good for our entire community including reaching out into our neighboring counties," stated Gerald Ludwick, President and CEO of Rural Communications. "The communities of Bronson and Colon will be direct beneficiaries of this project. Rural Communications would not have been able to build out its network to reach Bronson and Colon and offset the costs. With Sturgis Hospital's support in offsetting deployment costs, we have been able to reach these locations and provide affordable high-speed Internet and local telephone services for the entire communities."

"I applaud all the folks at Rural Communications and Sturgis Hospital for joining forces to ensure that the residents of St. Joseph County have access to quality healthcare and broadband technology," said Rob Sisson, new president of the St. Joseph County Economic Development Corporation (SJCEDC). "It is essential that we as a county support and work together from within to bring growth to St. Joseph County. This is an example of how working together creates additional opportunities for our community." Rural Communications is a competitive local exchange carrier with corporate headquarters in Three Rivers, Michigan, providing IP-based local telephone service, [broadband Internet](#), and hosted IP services. Currently Rural Communications provides services to businesses and residents in over 500 square miles of St. Joseph County including Marcellus and Bronson.

Rural Communications

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Web site: <http://www.ruralcommunications.net/>

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