

## Broadband initiatives put NIU among best in innovation, econ. development



Northern Illinois University has become a leader in managing numerous important regional broadband projects, including iFiber. The left and middle photos show construction crews building the iFiber network. At right is NIU President Doug Baker.

### iFiber, NIU part of Broadband event

Broadband Communities will host its second regional conference in Tinley Park Nov. 5-7, and iFiber will be represented with speakers and as an exhibitor.

iFiber will exhibit at a booth along with three other broadband entities under the umbrella of Northern Illinois University's Outreach,

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Northern Illinois University is among the inaugural 16 institutions nationwide designated as an "Innovation and Economic Prosperity University" by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU).

The designation acknowledges universities working with public and private sector partners in their states and regions to support economic development through innovation and entrepreneurship, technology transfer, and talent, workforce and community development.

In addition, NIU was named one of six national finalists for APLU's inaugural Innovation and Economic Prosperity Award.

"Universities are economic engines that not only directly employ people, but also generate research-

based innovation and technical expertise that allow businesses to start up, grow, and thrive," said APLU President Peter McPherson.

"This designation recognizes universities that are really stepping up to strengthen their local economy."

The extensive award application was a joint project of the Division of Outreach and Engagement and the Division of Research and Graduate Studies.

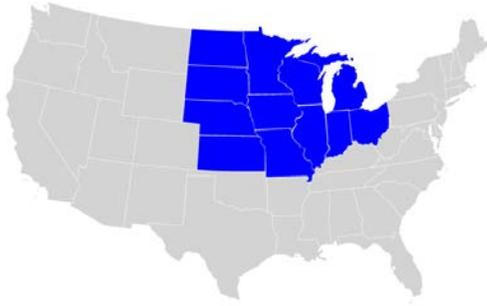
In addition to an expansive description of how NIU fosters entrepreneurship and develops external partnerships that result in mutual benefits, the application focuses on three case studies: broadband development, the P-20 (pre-school through graduate school) initiative, and engagement

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## iFiber's Team

iFiber's Outreach Team is a collaboration of Northern Illinois University, LaSalle County, North Central Illinois Council of Governments, the City of Rockford, Boone County and Blackhawk Hills Regional Council.





## iFiber, NIU part of Nov. 5-7 conference hosted by Broadband Communities

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Engagement and Information Technologies department. iFiber board president, Dr. John L. Lewis, also will participate on a panel discussing "Growing the Knowledge Economy Through Education and Workforce Development."

The conference will focus on the extraordinary experiences of dozens of communities in America's Midwestern heartland, including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

NIU (DeKalb) has become a leader in numerous important regional broadband projects. Its involvement clearly exemplifies NIU's economic engagement goals with regional stakeholders. Among projects benefiting from NIU's leadership are iFiber, NIU Broadband Development Group, NIUNet and Illinois Rural HealthNet (IRHN). NIU has strategically planned and assisted in the build out of over 2,200 miles of fiber optics in Illinois, with over 750 Community Anchor Institutions having high speed broadband capabilities.

**NIUNet** is a 175-mile fiber optic loop throughout the western Chicago suburbs and greater northern Illinois region.

**iFiber** is a provider of extremely high speed (up to 1Gb) network transport services in Boone, Carroll, JoDaviess, LaSalle, Lee, Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside and Winnebago counties.

**IRHN** connects over 75 health care facilities in Illinois, used primarily for Health Information Exchange (HIE), Telemedicine and Telehealth.

**NIU Broadband Development Group** provides connectivity solutions to clients and partners in Illinois. Broadband Development Group's Rusty Winchel, Project Coordinator for the Chicago Southland Fiber Project, will lead a session on Nov. 6 entitled "Economic Revival: The Chicago Southland Fiber Network Story."

The new 144-strand fiber trunk from downtown Chicago down the I-57 corridor is almost complete – and will connect dozens of educational, community and medical institutions. As fiber community networks branch off the trunk in the years ahead - local employers are counting on it.

Speakers include: Bruce Montgomery - Board Member, Broadband Illinois; Ed Paesel- Executive Director, South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association; and Ed Zabrocki – Mayor of Tinley Park. Winchel also will

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## NIU among best in U.S. innovation



Anne Kaplan

Lisa Freeman

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efforts in Rockford.

"Like our Carnegie designations, the APLU title defines a level of excellence in how we serve our community and our region," said NIU President Doug Baker. "It further affirms to students and their families that NIU is on the cutting edge of real-world education."

NIU finds itself in excellent company in APLU's first class of innovation and economic prosperity universities. "Classmates" include the University of Michigan, Ohio State, University of Georgia, State University of New York, University of Missouri and the University of Idaho, among others.

"To be placed in the company of America's top public universities in this effort sends a message about the centrality of engagement to the overall mission of the modern public university," said Anne Kaplan, vice president for outreach and engagement.

NIU's application describes how the institution serves a region that is simultaneously urban, suburban and rural, and how it forges both public and private partnerships that benefit all parties.

Three case studies anchor the application.

In the first, NIU describes a decade-long effort to bring high-speed broadband connectivity to the region. As of this fall, the university has overseen installation of more than 2,200 miles of fiber optic cable throughout the northern Illinois region and beyond, including 900 miles as part of iFiber. More than 750 "community anchor institutions" – schools, libraries, public safety agencies, museums, hospitals and city governments – have been connected to broadband through NIU-managed projects that have attracted close to \$120 million in federal and state funding.

A second case study focuses on the Center for P-20 Engagement. The P-20 center connects external partners such as schools, government agencies and community colleges with people and resources across five colleges and more than 20 offices, centers and institutes at NIU. Among more than 30 university-wide activities currently managed by the center, the APLU application highlights STEM Outreach as an initiative providing a broad range of examples of innovation growing out of multi-disciplinary collaboration.

The final case study focuses on NIU's engagement efforts in Rockford, where residents face the dual hardships of high unemployment and low educational attainment. One

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## Broadband Conference Nov. 5-7



**Dr. John L. Lewis, iFiber board chairman, will participate on a panel at the Broadband Conference.**

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participate on a panel entitled “Helping Small and Medium Businesses Grow and Prosper With Fiber.”

Broadband Communities is assembling an outstanding multi-disciplinary roster of national, regional, and local experts who have extensive experience in using advanced communications capabilities to foster economic development and create jobs. The conference will examine what is working well, what is not, and what lies ahead, particularly as federal stimulus funding ends.

The conference will address the latest “hot” topics, including Google Fiber, FirstNet, the Connect America Fund, the FCC’s new Health Care Connect Fund, emphasizing their potential to foster economic development and job creation. There will be ample time for networking and learning about relevant cutting-edge products and services.

For more details about the conference in Tinley Park Nov. 5-7, including a complete agenda, visit [www.bbcmag.com/chicago/index](http://www.bbcmag.com/chicago/index).

## NIU committed to innovation

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such initiative involves NIU’s successful partnership with Rockford to develop an aerospace cluster based less on manufacturing and more on design and testing. This project has attracted considerable attention from both federal agencies and private business: Last year Rockford landed a \$2.4 million grant to support aerospace job development, while a leading aerospace company cited the NIU-led initiative as a deciding factor in its choice of Rockford for a \$385 million expansion investment.

“In all three of these case studies, what we see is a commitment to innovation,” said Lisa Freeman, vice president of Research and Graduate Studies. “At NIU, we are both doing new things, and doing old things in new ways, always with a focus on creating value.” Unlike many award programs, the APLU competition required universities to describe both accomplishments and challenges. To that end, NIU’s application includes a “growth and improvement” section that outlines how the university intends to maintain momentum in its regional engagement efforts.

“Highlighting this kind of work is critical to developing a sustainable culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among our students and faculty,” Freeman said. “It really requires us to consistently focus on what works, why it works, and what it will take to do more of it.”

APLU is a research, policy and advocacy organization representing 219 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems and related organizations. Founded in 1887, APLU is the nation’s oldest higher education association with member institutions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and four U.S. territories. Annually, member campuses enroll more than 3.8 million undergraduates and 1.2 million graduate students, award more than 1 million degrees, employ nearly 1 million faculty and staff, and conduct more than \$37 billion in university based research.

*(From NIU Today: Nov. 14, 2013)*

### STAY INFORMED

Thank you to the 500 Community Anchor Institutions that have made the commitment to the iFiber project, which will be complete by late 2013.

iFiber’s CAI partners will enjoy the most advanced fiber optic technology available. The network will benefit schools, healthcare services, libraries, community colleges, municipalities and public safety agencies.

### CONTACT US

E-mail: [info@ifiber.org](mailto:info@ifiber.org). See a map outlining iFiber’s progress at [www.ifiber.org](http://www.ifiber.org), where issues of this newsletter are archived.

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