

ASTF wires schools to Net

In a major step to bring the international knowledge of the Internet into classrooms across Alaska, Gov. Tony Knowles and the Board of Directors of the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation announced the award of \$10,000 to each Alaska public school to wire its classrooms for Internet access.

In addition to the \$4.5 million set aside for school connectivity, ASTF awarded another \$18,800 to the statewide NetDay program, a non-profit business that helps schools get wired and connected to the Internet by organizing volunteers to do the work and seeking corporate funding sources.

"The key to Alaska's continued economic success is making sure our children are prepared for the increasingly competitive challenges of the global

marketplace," said Knowles, who joined ASTF board members at Anchorage's Chugach Option School for an Internet demonstration. "This decision by Alaska's leading technology agency is a major step in that direction. It will help keep Alaska competitive internationally by providing our students the most current educational tools."

"This has all the appeal of an old fashioned community barn-raising with a 21st century angle," said Lt. Gov. Fran Ulmer, an ASTF board member and the administration's technology point person. "The ASTF board thought there was an urgent need for this kind of help, and we had the desire and financial resources to step in to provide that help."

"It's the bottom-up entrepreneurial spirit to which ASTF is responding," said Jamie Kenworthy, ASTF executive director. "We think that if we provide the funding

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to wire schools, it will leverage local efforts at the grassroots level to continue the momentum."

To qualify for a grant, schools must enroll at least 10 students, must not currently be wired or connected to the Internet, must fill out a brief application and be willing to self audit its completion. The grants cover the cost of classroom wiring and connectivity only, which includes routers, wiring, servers, and hubs. Not covered under terms of the grants are cost of installation labor, overhead or computer equipment.

For schools already partially wired, administrators can apply for grants to complete the wiring or upgrade the system. While 1.5 million in funding will be made available each year over a three-year time period, some schools are ready to log on to the Internet now.

Knowles highlighted the need to connect Alaska schools to the Internet in a major education address to the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce Feb. 10 and urged the Science and Technology Foundation to fund the connections. He has called on educators to add a fourth R to the standard three - computer literacy. In the Chamber talk, he also praised NetDay Alaska leader Mark Newell.

Kenworthy estimated that about half of the public schools throughout Alaska, as well as a handful of other private schools, still need to be wired.

The Alaska Science and Technology Foundation is a state agency created in

1988 at the urging of then Gov. Steve Cowper that invests money to improve Alaska's economy and to increase the state's science and engineering capabilities. ASTF supplies grants for small and large business development and research projects and coordinates a teachers grant program, which encourages the development of science and technology curriculum.

The Internet connection announcement follows a recent decision by BP Exploration to make the largest single computer donation ever made to public education in Alaska.

Working with the state, individual school districts and other corporate partners, BP is donating up to \$1.5 million in combined computer equipment, software, teacher training and cash grants to 15

school districts throughout the state.

BP is setting up a "Teacher Exploration Center" in all of the designated districts. Each center, which will be located in a school, includes a 25-unit network-based computer lab, education and multimedia software, Internet access and a printer. Additionally, teachers will be provided training, designed to integrate technology into the curriculum.

Currently, BP is undergoing a change from a Macintosh to a PC-based computer system company-wide.

As a result of this changeover, approximately 1,500 computers will be available for distribution. "Education is a number one priority for BP and its employees," said former BPXA President John Morgan. "We know that technology is expensive and that these computers are important

to schools throughout the state. But we also wanted the equipment to be useful—to be fully integrated into a district's curriculum."

Each of the 15 school districts also will receive additional computers to be distributed to individual schools. Districts include Anchorage, Fairbanks, Mat-Su, Kenai, Juneau, Kodiak, Ketchikan, Dillingham, Bethel, Southeast Regional Resource Center, North Slope Borough, Cordova, Valdez, Chugach, and Alaska Gateway.

Other corporate partners participating in the computer donation program are GCI, MicroAge Infosystems Services, Lynden Logistics and Apple Computers, Inc.

Distribution of the computers is scheduled for the first quarter of 1997.