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Wireless Washtenaw could showcase creative ideas

Wireless Washtenaw recently received 18 responses to its request for information from area vendors that are interested in building a countywide high-speed wireless Internet system.

One of the responses came from a group called **Washtenaw Wideopen Wireless**, consisting of Ann Arbor-area companies **IC.net**, **Synergy Broadband**, and **Cybernet Systems Corp.**

IC.net and Synergy both offer wireless access among their services. But Cybernet?

I've written several times about some of the things amazing things Cybernet has created - bullet sorters, real-time weather map management systems for TV weathermen, joystick technology, remote medical monitoring systems - so I was intrigued by just how Cybernet fit into this picture.

Cybernet has technology that it originally developed for the military, which follows the company's typical pattern. In this case it's technology to build mesh communications networks.

One unique part of Cybernet's technology will allow any nearly any wireless-ready laptop in the county to become a transmission node in the system, simply by downloading a piece of free Cybernet-developed software. The more of these kinds of transmission points in an area, the better the network will be.

This helps cut costs in the more densely populated areas, and, by extension, the overall cost of the system.

"The capital cost is low," said Cybernet CEO **Chuck Jacobus**.

Because there is so much rural area in the county, he said, "there's no way you're ever going to use a traditional wireless model and make money."

Part of Cybernet's financial incentive, Jacobus said, is to prove its military technology works on a fairly large scale. If



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that happens, "we could (become) a vendor of equipment and software." Or it could license the technology to a bigger player.

Making money is, after all, why any vendor would get involved in Wireless Washtenaw. I've talked to several potential suppliers and the general consensus is that it's going to be difficult for anyone to profit, given that the county wants a level of free service and there's so much rural space to cover.

So it will probably take a lot of ingenuity to make Wireless Washtenaw work.

Few companies in this area answer that challenge better than Cybernet.

STM Power sells engines for Chinese landfill

Scio Township-based **STM Power Inc.** has sold five of its electricity-generating Stirling-cycle engines to the largest landfill in Shanghai, China, a city of 16 million people.

And, "they will take more," said **Mark Oehmke**, STM's director of sales and marketing.

STM is 24 years old but has just gotten its first product, a 55-kilowatt engine, out the door. In April 2004 it closed \$29.6 million in venture funding, so investors have to be glad that the \$66,900 machines are finally being shipped.

So far it has about 30 of the engines at landfills and wastewater plants, many of them outside the U.S., Oehmke said.

Electricity produced from the

engines, roughly 240 kilowatts in all, is going back onto the grid. The units burn methane that's produced by the decomposition of garbage. Hot water is also a byproduct, and that's being pumped into a wastewater treatment plant to speed digestion of the bacteria.

China, Oehmke said, should be a great market for STM, through its Singapore distributor **Singapore Technologies Kinetics**. The Chinese want to use oil and natural gas for other parts of their burgeoning economy so it makes sense to use landfill gases to generate electricity.

STM is producing about eight units per month but hopes to build five times that many next year, Oehmke said.

New home for Ashcom Technologies

Ashcom Technologies Inc., which began life in 1985 as **CK Systems Inc.**, has moved into a smaller, but much more usable, headquarters on Research Park Drive.

The company, now with 25 employees, used to be on two floors totaling about 6,000 square feet on Airport Boulevard but has taken 5,000 square feet on one floor.

"One of the reasons (for moving) is so we can all be together on one floor," said **Carol Gourlay**, director of operations.

Ashcom specializes in software for document management, automated invoice generation and computerized maintenance management.

In April the company started a maintenance strategies division to help companies use whatever computerized maintenance systems they happen to have. The old office didn't have enough training space, Gourlay said.

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Tech Law Update

'Bot' programs, spyware attacks high record high

From April through June, 2005, the number of incidents involving the hijacking of personal computers reached 13,000, according to McAfee, Inc. McAfee, an anti-virus software company, tracks the number of PCs unwittingly taken over by 'bot' programs, spyware and adware. Bot programs can be used to remotely control a network of PCs to launch attacks on other computers or web sites. The number of incidents during the three month period is four times more

than the number of incidents in the previous three month period. For an article with more information, go to http://news.com.com/2102-7349_3-5783646.html

High-speed Internet access up

The Federal Communication Commission reports that business and residential use of high speed Internet access increased in 2004 by 34 percent to nearly 38 million lines. Of this amount, over 21 million were cable modem users

and almost 14 million represented users of Digital Subscriber Lines, or DSL. For more information on high speed Internet access, go to <http://ftp.fcc.gov/cgb/consumer-facts/highspeedinternet.html>

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