

BOB connects where wireless rivals fading

Some nerds may recall BOB as the name of a short-lived and overly cute effort by **Microsoft Corp.** to provide user-friendly software a dozen years ago, but that's not what **Rich Kingston** has in mind when he touts BOB these days.

It's **Business Only Broadband**, a wireless high-speed Internet connection service based in Burr Ridge that serves a large portion of the Chicago metro area. A veteran of several competitive telecom carriers, Kingston started BOB three years ago.

With 23 towers transmitting in the city and suburbs, BOB reaches into spots where other wireless providers may have difficulties, said Kingston. The firm offers small and medium-size businesses high-speed connections at rates well below the cost of comparable wired connections, he said.

While many businesses use BOB as their only data connection, almost 40 percent of Kingston's customers use BOB as a backup, insurance in case their main wired connection goes out.

"We have no dependence on AT&T's wired network," said Kingston. "Unlike most competitive carriers, we're completely wireless. We don't lease any lines from AT&T."

BOB uses a proprietary wireless technology from **Motorola Inc.** called Canopy to reach its customers. Interest by Chicago and several suburbs in establishing municipal Wi-Fi services and the growing interest in WiMax, a new cousin to Wi-Fi, has sparked a general awareness of wireless high-speed Internet, Kingston said.

"Even though we're not using Wi-Fi or WiMax, all the talk creates a buzz about wireless that helps us," he said. "I think WiMax and the hype around it is like a brand name, Band-Aids or Coca-Cola, that ultimately benefits our business. We can do anything WiMax can."

TELEPHONE CALLING PLANS: With the new year the **Citizens Utility Board** is shifting into high gear trying to persuade phone customers to abandon existing calling plans from **AT&T Illinois** and adopt one of three cut-rate plans now available.

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bid to free itself from much state regulation. In return, AT&T agreed to offer some no-frills, low-cost plans and to provide some funding for CUB to promote them.

The least expensive plan charges \$6.03 monthly to most residents of Chicago and nearby suburbs, providing 30 local calls a month and charging 6 cents for each local call beyond that. The basic charge is \$3.05 for downtown Chicago residents and \$9.50 a month for more distant suburban customers.

CUB's analysis suggests that a majority of Illinois customers can save significant money by switching, especially as phone rates will go up for those who do not change their service plan.

This month CUB launched an online tool on its Web site at www.citizensutilityboard.org intended to show individual consumers how a new calling plan may save money. Consumers also may phone 866-688-4282 to learn more.

MICROSCOPY FIRM EXPANDING: For **The McCrone Group**, it's the little things that count, but the overall package is now much bigger.

The nation's foremost private laboratory providing a full array of microscopy services has completed a significant addition to its facilities in Westmont, including its new college of microscopy.

"Last year we celebrated our company's 50th anniversary," said McCrone President **Donald Brooks**, "and the facility expansion is a testament to our dedication to modern microscopy and microanalysis."

The privately held company