

Broadband Changed My Life![™]



Contest Winners and Finalists

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FIRST PLACE WINNER

Nancy Reid

My name is Nancy Reid and I live in Southampton County Virginia, which is a rural farming community. Being rural means you know your neighbor, and your children begin and finish school with their best friends. It is a slow and peaceful life. As wonderful as that is, being rural also means technologies like cable and broadband are not an option for us. We must rely on antiquated, slow phone lines for dial up internet service. To say our dial up is slow is an understatement. Logging in can take up to 30 minutes! In fact, it takes 3 hours to download and send pictures, and online banking is out of reach due to time limits set by our bank. Our computer became more of a frustration than a working tool.

Earlier this spring, I lost my job and like many other Americans, have had a hard time finding a new one. Deciding that I would have to go to college in order to update my skills was a hard decision as the nearest community college is 50 miles away. Losing a paycheck has been a financial strain, so to add to it by driving 100 miles a day, well, I had to find a way to lessen the financial blow. My option was to take as many online courses as I could. The problem, our internet couldn't keep up with all of the information I needed to be a successful student.

I was so close to achieving my academic goals but had a huge and very frustrating problem, now I would have to drive if I wanted to continue. That is when a close friend told us about his satellite broadband access. I was skeptical but after some creative financing had it installed. To say it has made an impact on my life is so true in many ways. I am now able to download and send pictures to my mom in California in seconds, online banking is a breeze, and school, well, my first 2 reports were given A's! How is that for a morale boost!!

If I was given the chance, I would like to tell our next President, "If America is to compete in today's Global Market, everyone, regardless of where they live should have access to broadband and the tools needed to succeed in this new technology world."

SECOND PLACE WINNER

Joanna Romanyshyn

There are many reasons why students on a college campus don't call the rescue squad EMTs when they should: "it's too expensive", "I don't want to get in trouble", "I'm not sure if my injury is serious enough", and the list goes on and on. All around the country, these misunderstandings prevent students from getting treatment when they need it, and causes unnecessary permanent damage and in the worst cases, death. When I was elected Public Information Officer of my university's rescue squad, my first line of action was to address these concerns. But how do we get the information out there in a way that students will actually read it (and for cheap, we're a volunteer squad after all).

The answer was simple- why not utilize an extremely popular program already instituted by the university? Broadband Internet. Between blogging, Facebook, and checking their e-mail, students spend a considerable amount of time online. Broadband internet has revolutionized the way we obtain information. With websites appearing on our screens at such high speeds, it's no longer a pain to go online and explore all the information available.

Our rescue agency had a website already, but it was old and very out of date. I worked with a web designer to give the website a facelift by using modern color schemes, posting current information, and adding new applications. Not only would students find information telling them our rescue services were free, but also about common health problems afflicting students today and how they can gain valuable experience by joining the agency. The final step, we handed out a flyer to all campus residents about our agency, directing them to the website to have all their questions answered.

The results were better than I could ever have anticipated. Almost immediately, we began to receive more requests for our standby presence at sporting events and fundraisers as well as invitations to come present about our organization at programs in residence halls and fraternity houses. Over the next few months, we noticed an increased call volume by 33% compared to the previous year. We also began receiving twice as many applications, over half of which were online.

The website's success was, without doubt, a direct result of broadband internet. If the university provided slow, or even no, internet services we never could have accomplished this project. So as you can see, broadband internet not only changed my life and that of the community, but also has the potential to save lives.

THIRD PLACE WINNER

Jeanette Landin

Without broadband, the activities in my life and my quality of living would be nearly impossible to maintain even five years ago. Because of broadband, I am able to support my family with one parent's income without having to be away from home, which enriches not only my life but also lives of my children. Broadband has touched my family's existence in many positive ways. We are now able to communicate via webcam with family in other parts of the country, which keeps the family ties strong.

Because of broadband, I am able to deliver highly effective and relevant teaching to adult learners who are training for 21st century careers. The internet via broadband allows me to tap resources from around the world to bring concepts to life for my students and to help reach displaced workers and students in remote areas who would otherwise not have access to rich learning opportunities. With broadband access, I am able to attend my own courses from anywhere in the world at any time. The experience I gain from internet-based communications enhances both my teaching and my learning.

Broadband access enables me to make informed decisions about our country's democratic process by allowing me to compare our presidential candidates without media intervention. I am also able to participate in the process by joining the presidential campaign effort. Broadband has helped me to become a more productive and effective citizen of not only the United States but of our world.

HONORABLE MENTION

Martha Mowatt

High speed internet technology has revolutionized the world. It has made obtaining information and communicating with others easy and accessible from the comfort of one's home.

I work with people diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) also known as Lou Gherig disease. ALS robs people of all voluntary and involuntary movement, rendering the person totally paralyzed including their ability to speak, chew, swallow and breathe. The internet has made it possible for ALS patients to communicate with their friends and family through e-mail and instant messaging. It allows pictures to be sent in an instant and communicating through the use of web cams. ALS people become home bound when their condition deteriorates and going out becomes impossible. They are able to participate in "support groups" through chat rooms and post messages to each other. The internet prevents isolation.

The internet has allowed a 75 year old ALS patient who has lost her ability to speak to send e-mails to her family and friends. She is able to express her thoughts and share her intimacies. She has a web cam and "visits" with her family members in other states. She can see her grandchildren grow and feels a part of their lives. Prior to having access to the internet, she had minimal contact as she could not speak her thoughts in an intelligible way. This was frustrating for both herself as she was not understood and her loved ones who did not understand her.

For those ALS patients living in the Midwest where Neurologists specializing in ALS are scarce, the internet allows doctors to conduct medical evaluations using web cams and digital medical equipment that allows doctors to obtain vital signs remotely. Through the use of advanced technology, electronic records and distance medical monitoring, visits to specialized care is no longer out of reach. Doctors are able to "see" more patients and patients can obtain much needed specialty care.

Broadband technology has revolutionized how we communicate with others and has minimized isolation for disabled individuals. It has also made remote specialty care accessible in rural areas where without this advancement patients would go without care. We must continue to find innovative ways to reach out to others unable to use conventional communication methods and facilitate medical care for those living too far from medical services.

FINALISTS

Ann Breznai

Broadband has definitely changed my life, so much so that it will be difficult to keep this brief! Not only has it allowed me to stay connected with relatives - all of whom live out of state, MI to CA is quite a distance and we can't afford the long distance (I don't own a cell) - but that is not nearly the most important way. My mom's side of the family, all my aunts, uncles and cousins, all live in CA. Before broadband, I was only able to connect with them once every 3 or 4 yrs. Now I can connect anytime. My dad's side is more scattered, from New Mexico to Iowa, WI, MN and KY. Broadband is essential to me having any kind of decent life!

Broadband has allowed me to work from home (dial-up tied up the phone for hours and was just too slow for the software I needed), something that, when it was first planned, I had no idea would become absolutely essential! When my husband and I decided to start a family, we decided that I would reduce my hours to part-time and work from home so I could raise our child, not daycare workers. What we did not plan was to be hit from behind when I was 4 months pregnant, an accident that totaled our car, left us short on money to replace the car and broke my tailbone. The accident made it so I am unable to stand for any length of time or sit in most chairs for long periods of time. The accident left me in constant pain. Working from home is the only way I am able to keep a job, though the hours and pay have gone way down - it is still better than no job.

We also did not plan for our son to have autism. Being able to be here with him has meant more to me than I could possibly put into words! Most parents of children on the autism spectrum end up having to quit their jobs to stay home to care for their children. Broadband has allowed me to keep mine and it has truly been a lifesaver. Autism also means that my son has no insurance coverage. Yet another reason keeping my job, thanks to broadband, has been crucial. Being here with my son has allowed him to make amazing social progress, something I am so thankful for! This is definitely the most important way broadband has transformed my life, but not the only important way. Broadband has also allowed me to work toward real change for all the families of MI whose lives are effected by autism.

Two yrs. ago I started campaigning for legislation that would end the discrimination insurance companies have been able to perpetrate against individuals with autism. I connected with legislators who are willing to write the legislation, but it is broadband that has allowed me to find and connect with families and organizations across the state - even across the country - who can help us to get the legislation moved forward and, hopefully soon, signed into law. Broadband has allowed me to help in the lobbying of Congress to sign bills to fund critical research into the causes of autism, too. Broadband is the reason I went from a "stay at home mom" (who works part time, but here at home) to an advocate for families facing autism. Broadband has allowed me to find information on autism, something desperately needed when we were looking into figuring out what was going on with our son, prior to his diagnosis. It is how we were able to search for doctors in order to get a diagnosis. In fact, if it were not for broadband, I am not sure how long it would have taken to get a diagnosis? (It took 6 mo. as it was!)

Nabha Goldfeder

Broadband has changed my life and my world in so many ways. When I first "got on" in 1999 I was excited and inspired. The opportunities for global communication were fantastic to me. I decided to find out what was going on in war torn Bosnia. Clinton was in office and we were starting to drop bombs. I took up a pen pal with a Serbian, who wanted the genocide to end, and started praying for peace. I was also searching for peace organizations; I found many on line. I decided to hold a global silent peace meditation, head quarters, my home. I advertised over the internet and asked people around the world to join in prayer at the same time. I hung posters in the local shops and spoke with community groups. I even had a local water company sponsor who donated fresh water for the home event. On that afternoon, people I had never met before (and some I had) gathered in my home and silently invited peace to themselves and the world. Later, I ran into people on the street who had heard me speaking at their community

group. They told me they had taken a break at work or from the kids, in order to ask for peace. It was a beginning!

I still use the internet today to connect around the world with real people on global issues. I have friends who keep me up to date with issues in Nepal, India, Europe, and throughout Latin America. At home, my family and co-farmers, use the internet to find out how our customers are enjoying our farm fresh organic produce. We sell fresh veggies and eggs as a Co-operative CSA with 13 other farmers in our area. Broadband has been a vital tool in my life over the years, allowing me to be touched and touch the world in many ways. Broadband is used in our business, supporting our local community, and in the way I care about our greater, global community. Thank you.

Karen Meek

I wanted to share with you the positive advantages of broadband internet access. The broadband has opened many doorways to help me communicate with my students as an effective educator. Education needs to have any resources available that students can relate to and keep them engaged. I have created a class blog for assignments and a message board so the students can communicate with each other and also ask each other questions. I am being very honest it also gives them an outlet for any stress related to my class and life itself. This way I can monitor those individual students that need help and guidance without causing any embarrassment. The students really love the fact that Mrs. Meek can give them information in a format they can use and understand without a textbook being their only source of information. Also, students can move at their own pace without being pushed at a pace that hinders learning and shuts them down emotionally.

I have a chronic health condition called Lupus. Many days after school I am exhausted and must come home and lay down for a power nap. When I wake up the laptop comes on and I complete grades and email parents if needed. This way I am 100% student involved while at work with my students and complete the internet work through my broadband connection at home.

I believe broadband connection helps me with my Lupus disability to be a better educator and also offers an environmental background for student success.

Jacque Richardson

In 1998 I met a retired professional boxer by the name of Alex "The Bronx Bomber" Ramos, who was homeless and making serious efforts to change his life, get sober and help his brothers in boxing who suffered from similar circumstances. Professional boxing is the only sport that does not provide a pension for its athletes. 87% of all retired boxers retired with some injury or damage to their bodies. Because of damage to the frontal lobe of their brains, they have a higher propensity of impulse control issues, alcohol and drug abuse, etc. They have no medical coverage so many of them just wait to die.

I helped Alex start the Retired Boxers Foundation and I remain the unpaid Executive Director. The first thing I did was to teach Alex how to use the computer, then the Internet and then how to use email to communicate with the boxers and their families around the world. We used the

broadband connection to search for free and no/low cost resources for rehabilitation, housing and assistance. Since 1998, we have helped over 1000 retired professional boxers.

Access to the Internet and email has helped Alex focus on his mission to assist retired professional boxers in the transition from their glorious days in the ring to a dignified retirement.

This has helped Alex maintain his sobriety and he is now living in his own apartment. He has learned to be independent and he shares what he has learned with his brotherhood of boxers, their families and their loved ones. We developed a Medical Advisory Board, all of whom we met on the Internet, who are experts on brain injuries suffered by professional boxers. We have developed extensive resources and we could not have done any of this without broadband. Access to broadband has helped us help over 1000 people who had given up hope and were basically waiting to die. What a gift to us and to the world, at no cost to the government. Both Alex and I are volunteers. THANK YOU.

Kyle V. Young

I was born perhaps five decades after our fabled "hay-day" when Gary, now considered of the nation's most failed cities, was an educational powerhouse.

Business flourished unconditionally and the steel industry employed a solid majority of the residents of not only Gary but Lake County and Illinois' Cook and Will counties. However, during the mid 1960s, there was a devastating "white-flight" that took place. The towns surrounding Gary weathered somewhat admirably but the fortunes of Gary and another city, Hammond, were greatly altered for the worst. The broadband boom of the new millennium greatly gave us our dreams and ambitions back.

It aided in stabilizing equality between the rich and poor and the various ethnicities that dwell here.

It has altered how we've behaved in politics; much of the populace here of northernmost Indiana is profoundly democratic; preferring higher taxation as a means to regulate and control business wherein lies the means for better funding of public services that have led to greater output from all levels of society.

Students on all levels have been greatly aided by the coming of broadband. Homework that used to take hours on end can be done within minutes while schools have built computer labs some as big as 15000 sq. ft. to aide students who might not have computers at home. They also can more readily rely on each other and teachers for support.

Employees have been able to achieve greater quality jobs, the earnings of which then help to supplement their families and communities rather than each single family struggling alone. Region hospitals routinely save 50,000 lives per year thanks the broadband boom better technology. Several here have enjoyed a near total immunization from illnesses that once devastated populations.

It is because of all this, that I could never permanently leave "the Region."

