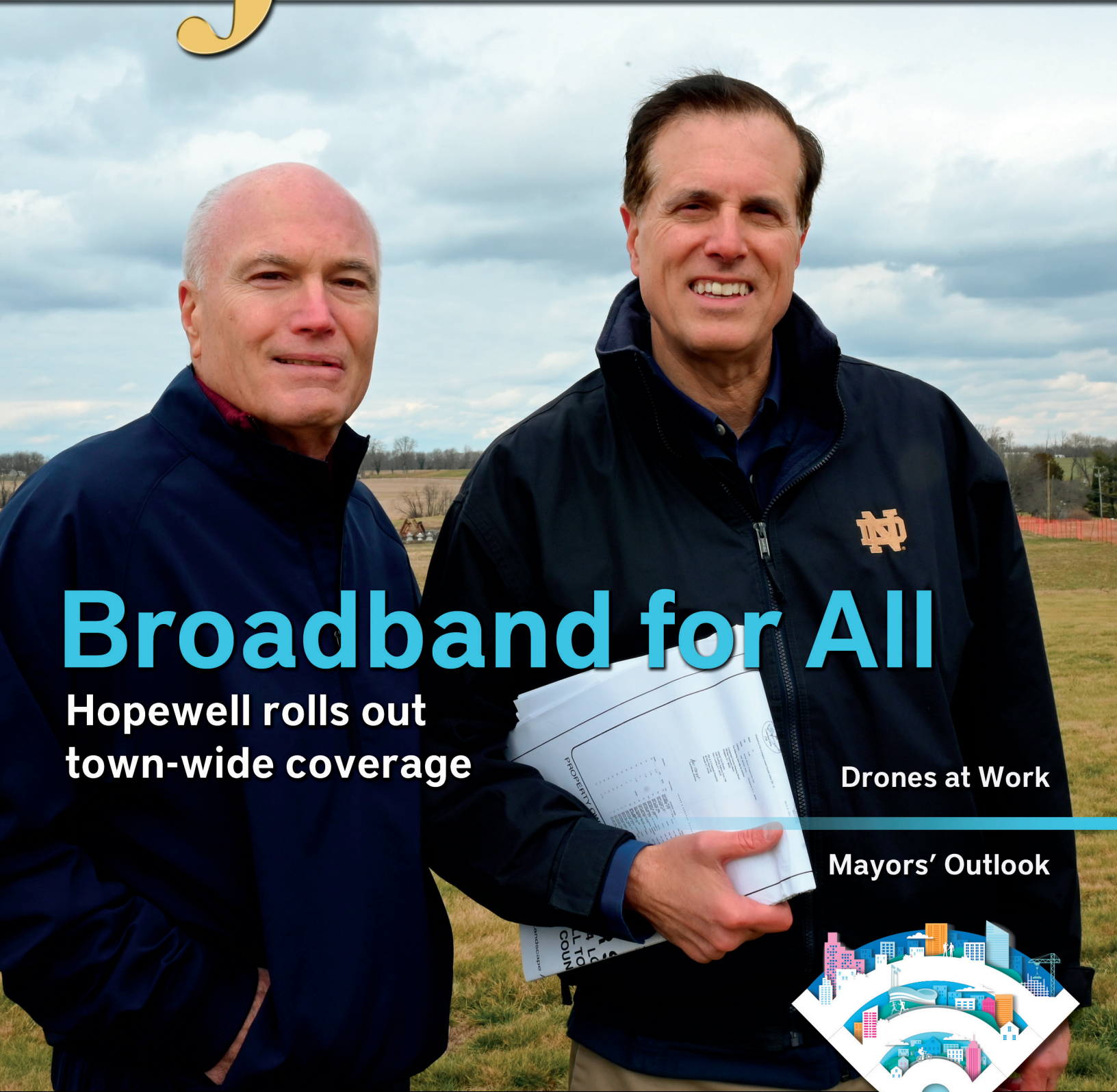


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Broadband for All

Hopewell rolls out town-wide coverage

Drones at Work

Mayors' Outlook



Focus: Local Tech



Mayor Paul Ritter (r) with Greg Facemyer, former Vice-Mayor and Township Broadband Committee member.

Broadband for All

Hopewell Township helps develop the roadmap for connecting 100% of New Jersey

Three years ago, a once-in-a-century pandemic changed the world and forced our lives online, virtually overnight. Remote work, school, shopping, health care, and more were made possible by robust high-speed broadband networks that answered the call, even as usage soared to new peaks driven by online classes, video meetings, and streaming entertainment.

But even in a highly connected state like New Jersey, some residents still lacked access to fast, reliable home internet service that could handle the abrupt shift online, especially in rural areas. In Hopewell Township (Cumberland County), 7% of our families, friends, and neighbors were unserved and cut off from the vital digital lifelines that kept the rest of us on the job, in class, and connected to each other.

That wasn't acceptable then and it's not acceptable today, even with lockdowns behind us. Major aspects of modern life have moved online for good, including access to government, health care scheduling and services, banking, travel planning, and more. Families and businesses that continue to lack affordable, dependable high-speed broadband access will find almost everything they need to do harder, more expensive, and often simply out of reach.

As mayor, I am committed to closing this deeply harmful digital divide. Not for some families, not for most businesses. For everyone. To me and our entire governing body, a broadband plan that reaches anything less than 100% of our community is no plan at all.

Broadband partnership

That's why, after careful study and a rigorous open-bidding and review process, my team and I decided to

enter a groundbreaking partnership with Comcast that will leverage their reliable network and significant investment as well as the power of federal grants under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to get the job done quickly, affordably, and most importantly, comprehensively—across all of Hopewell Township.

Under this agreement, federal

grants and private investment will provide more than half the necessary funds and work can begin urgently and immediately, focused on businesses and homes in our community that remain unserved by reliable, high-speed broadband. All executed by an experienced, on-the-ground private sector operator that can build out the necessary infrastructure and



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operate the resulting network going forward, creating long-term, high-pay, high-skill jobs and putting us on track to cover 100% of our community by early 2024.

Pursuing 100% connectivity means immediately focusing scarce resources on the areas of greatest need.

Our partner has a long track record of advancing broadband in our state, including recent investments of more than \$1 billion in technology and infrastructure. They have also worked hard to advance digital equity and support the communities it serves, investing nearly \$20 million worth of cash and in-kind contributions in more than 190 local non-profits over the last three years.

There are few investments a community can make with the kind of direct payoff in quality of life,

Covering Costs

Ensuring community coverage means addressing both the cost of access and helping non-digital natives navigate and understand the benefits of using the internet in their daily lives.

While the cost of high-speed broadband can be daunting for some of our neighbors, the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP, www.affordableconnectivity.gov/) now offers a \$30 monthly credit towards high-speed internet service and can also provide funds in many cases to support the purchase of a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer.

When combined with one of the low-cost plans offered by most major internet providers, the ACP credit will often cover the entire monthly cost of high-speed broadband for most low-income families!

access to services, educational opportunities, and local jobs that ensuring comprehensive access to quality high-speed home broadband delivers. It's even expected to drive a boost to home values across the Township since many potential purchasers are simply unwilling to close on a property that lacks reliable high-speed internet access.

Above all, expansive broadband service marks a necessary commitment to equity, fairness, and the core Hopewell value of leaving no one in our community behind. Pursuing

100% connectivity means immediately focusing scarce resources on the areas of greatest need. And then following through with additional resources and tools to ensure that people with new access to broadband actually subscribe and get all the benefits of connected life.

Taking down barriers

We must also work to address other barriers to adoption like lack of digital skills and uncertainty about the value and benefits of subscribing to internet at home. Our provider partner has pioneered these techniques for more than a decade through its Internet Essentials program, deploying digital ambassadors, online skills training, and extensive partnerships with outreach groups like the Boys and Girls Club, the National Urban League, and Older Adults Technology Services to help everyone see the value of getting online—and learn what to do when they get there. It's another benefit to our community from partnering with an experienced private sector operator.

Every town and jurisdiction in New Jersey will face challenging and complex decisions on how to get the most out of the American Rescue Act's broadband funding to close the digital divide in their communities. In Hopewell Township, we are excited about the partnership we have chosen to accomplish this essential obligation and priority. 🇯🇵

Lunch & Learn

March Webinar: USDA Rural Development Grants

Jane Asselta, New Jersey State Director for Rural Development at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), will discuss the USDA Rural Development Programs available to public entities, non-profits, residents, and businesses.

March 16, 2023 at 12 noon

**To register, scan code or visit
www.njlm.org/USDALunchLearn**

