



Rural Maryland Council
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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release, June 9, 2008

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Charlie Ross Elected Chairman of Maryland Broadband Coordination Board

(June 16, 2008) -- Charlie Ross, president and CEO of the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce, has been elected to a one-year term as chairman of the Maryland Broadband Coordination Board, beginning July 1, 2008. He replaces Worcester County Commissioner Virgil Shockley, who served two terms as chairman and will remain on the Board.

Established by the Maryland General Assembly in 2006, the Rural Broadband Coordination Board is responsible for overseeing efforts to deploy broadband infrastructure in rural and underserved areas of the state. The Board is also responsible for reviewing and approving all disbursements from the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund, which was also established in 2006. During the last two years, the Coordination Board has been responsible for more than \$13 million in state and federal funding.

"Broadband communications is the competitive business necessity and puts everyone into the flat world picture," Ross said shortly after his election. "Rural Maryland must be painted into that picture. I look forward to lighting up Southern Maryland and Mountain Maryland, soon after we light up the Upper, Mid and Lower Eastern Shore."

Ross, who also serves as chairman of the Rural Maryland Council, has 25 years experience in government and public affairs. His expertise is in legal strategies, public affairs and advertising, and survey research. Ross holds a B.A. degree from The Johns Hopkins University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Maryland. Before returning to Garrett County in 2002, he worked for the City of Baltimore as a lobbyist and for state government, setting up its first office of volunteerism.

Since the Coordination Board was established, the broadband network has been nearly constructed throughout the Eastern Shore, from NASA's Wallops Island facility through Salisbury, Cambridge and across the Bay Bridge. The network is expected to hook up with Annapolis this fall. Expanding the network through southern Maryland and into western Maryland – that is, essentially completing the network -- could be completed by 2012 with adequate appropriations.

Other current members of the Coordination Board are:

- John Contestabile, Director, Maryland Department of Transportation, Office of Engineering & Procurement and Emergency Services;
- Ellen Flowers-Fields, Director of Regional Economic Development, Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland;
- Dominick Murray, Assistant Secretary, Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development;
- Gale Nashold, Chairman, Mid-Shore Regional Council;
- Virgil Shockley, Chair, Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore;
- Elliott Schlanger, State Chief of Information Technology, Maryland Department of Budget and Management;
- Jim Stakem, Chair, Tri-County Council of Western Maryland; and
- Eric Wargotz, Chair, Upper Shore Regional Council.

The Broadband Coordination Board is staffed by the Rural Maryland Council. The Broadband Assistance Fund is administered by the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development.

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The Rural Maryland Council is an independent state agency that brings together community-based organizations, government officials at all levels, as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify and seek solutions to the unique needs of Rural Maryland communities. As a collaborative partnership, the RMC operates in a nonpartisan and nondiscriminatory manner.

Media Contacts:

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