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# Navajo Nation bridges the digital divide

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Conterra Telecom Services, a national broadband services company specializing in rural areas, has announced the commencement of high speed wireless wide area network service for the Northeast Arizona Technological Institute of Vocational Education. The Ethernet-based microwave radio network connects all of the eight member district high schools through 66 career technical classrooms. A five-year contract was awarded to Conterra through the federal E-Rate program, which subsidizes a large portion of the district's costs for the services.

N.A.T.I.V.E. is a Joint Technological Education District in Arizona working in partnership with eight area high schools: Chinle, Ganado, Pinon, Monument Valley, Red Mesa, Tuba City, Valley and Window Rock, all located on the Navajo Nation. Its mission is to provide career technical education for all its students. The N.A.T.I.V.E. district spans 22,000 square miles throughout three counties, servicing an average of 4,000 students annually. The average distance between N.A.T.I.V.E. high schools is 101 miles and 78 percent of student traveled roads to school are unpaved. High quality, high speed broadband services had been virtually non-existent on most parts of the Navajo Nation.

In the fall of 2008, Conterra teamed with BNI Solutions, a subsidiary of Numerex Corporation, to deploy a high speed, fiber optic quality wireless broadband network which provides Internet access and on-demand interactive video conferencing services to students, administrators and faculty. Conterra monitors, manages and supports the network and guarantees network performance and reliability. These sites now share curriculum, receive college-level courses for students, receive professional career development support, plan team-taught multi-site lessons, and share individual expertise. The Interactive Video Conferencing Distance Learning Network lets students at any location take classes from all over the world. This network is the first of its kind on the Navajo Nation.

“The extreme distances between sites and the isolated rural environment of the Navajo Nation make video conferencing distance learning the only option for providing curriculum equity to our students. Through the vision of the N.A.T.I.V.E. Governing Board, implementation of interactive distance learning across a high speed microwave network reduces the negative impact of isolation, and opens the door to a wide variety of career training opportunities,” said Karen Leshner, superintendent of the N.A.T.I.V.E. District. “Our students are benefiting today by having otherwise inaccessible college-level career programs now available at their sites.”

“We are extremely gratified to be able to utilize our many years of technology and telecommunications experience to deliver services to students and teachers in parts of the Navajo Nation that might otherwise be unable to access the growing number of ‘distance learning’

opportunities available through the Internet,” said Dennis Francis, Conterra’s president. “This is a great example of the federal E-Rate funding program achieving its intended result of bridging America’s digital divide by making sure locations and economics do not stand in the way of equal education opportunities for all American school children.”