

# Push is on for more broadband access

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*Wireless connections attract customers, enable entrepreneurs*

By Mitchell Kline

BRENTWOOD — The owners of Amerigo, an Italian restaurant in Brentwood, decided to offer free Wi-Fi four years ago. It turns out Google and e-mail go well with panini, penne and caprese.

"It's not uncommon to see several people with their laptops open while they eat," said Paul Schramkowski, vice president of Amerigo. "It's a reason for people to come dine with us rather than somewhere else."

Connected Tennessee, a nonprofit group working to accelerate the availability and use of technology such as high-speed Internet and Wi-Fi, says he feels the same way. The group is working with community and political leaders in all 95 counties to broaden the reach of broadband service and wireless connections. Community and political leaders who have joined the group say a more technologically advanced state will attract more businesses in high-tech industries that would generate more tax dollars to pay for roads, parks, police and other public services.

Williamson County ranks high among computer users and broadband service. A study conducted by Connected Tennessee found that 84 percent of county residents own a computer and 67 percent have broadband service. That's more than 13 percent higher than the state average in both cases.

Technological advances have also brought new expectations to people who've developed habits that revolve around devices such as laptops, iPhones and BlackBerrys. There are more than 75 businesses or other public places in Williamson County that offer Wi-Fi, according to Connected Tennessee. Only 19 of those places offer free, no-strings-attached Wi-Fi. It's become something many customers ask for and even demand.

## **Courthouse Wi-Fi discussed**

Attorney David Raybin, who spends most of his time in Davidson County, has visited the Williamson County courthouse several times and remarked on the absence of Wi-Fi. He said defense lawyers in Nashville insisted on Internet access at the Criminal Court building there.

"It is astounding that lawyers have not demanded Wi-Fi in Williamson County," Raybin said. "No attorney uses a law library anymore. All the books are online. The Internet is critical for attorneys doing legal research on Westlaw right in the courtroom."

Raybin said he is "severely hampered" during trials in Williamson County because he has to go to a coffee shop or restaurant to go online.

County Commission Chairman Houston Naron Jr. said the concept of having Wi-Fi at the county's Judicial Center was never brought up.

"It's something that could always be considered," Naron said. "I'm not aware of what the cost impact would be, but we're always open to listening."

District Attorney Kim Helper said Wi-Fi would be convenient but isn't a necessity. Helper said there are other options attorneys can use to get connected, such as aircards, which access the Internet via cellular phone service. Helper said the county shouldn't bear the cost of making it easier for attorneys to check e-mail and go online.

The free Wi-Fi spots in Williamson County include the public libraries, McDonald's and a handful of other restaurants.