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## Qiniq network gets more broadband

**Guy Quenneville**

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NUNAVUT - Federal money aimed at improving the speed of Internet service in Nunavut is starting to pay off for users of the Qiniq satellite Internet network.

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Last year, the Government of Canada announced it was allocating \$21 million to improve service speeds on the network. That is good news for users of the system which was likened to "water in the desert" by one member of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corporation (NBDC) because of limited broadband capacity.

Users are now feeling some drops of rain.

On Friday, the NBDC launched the new service, having hired Yellowknife-based satellite Internet provider SSI Micro to make the necessary hardware improvements after purchasing additional bandwidth for the network.

The cost of the \$1.5 million upgrade was shared between the feds and SSI Micro.

"The upgrade wasn't done for speed per se, but by virtue of the fact that it's now actually accommodating the number of people that are on it, the performance will be much better as a result," said Patrick Doyle, executive director and CEO of NBDC, the non-profit organization that jump-started the Qiniq service in Nunavut in May 2005.

Doyle estimated the network currently has 4,500 account users (not counting family members or friends of account users), with an additional 2,000 accounts expected to come online within the next two years.

The rest of the federal money will be used to purchase more bandwidth over time.

"We're catching up to ourselves and building in incremental growth so that obviously it will continue to grow and we can manage that year to year," said Doyle.

Additional features - such as reserved space for large file transfers as well as video conferencing - are set to follow in March.

"Essentially, it's like reserving a conference room," said Doyle of video conferencing. "You'll be able to purchase blocks of time reserved for that purpose. It's like reserving a lane on a highway.

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"You can do that in a commercial sense, whether it's companies or businesses, but they'll be a flavour of that that individuals can access, as well."

Qajaaq Ellsworth, vice-chair of the Nunavut Film Development Corporation and co-ordinator of a youth program teaching photography and filmmaking skills for the Iqaluit-based Embrace Life Council, said it's high time for the upgrades.

"Given the limited broadband capacity that we have in the North, generally we're quite far behind in terms of speed and pricing with what the south has," said Ellsworth on Tuesday. "Working in media, we have a need to exchange significantly large files on a pretty regular basis and not really having the option of always connecting with people face to face."

That makes the web a crucial way of exchanging information, continued Ellsworth.

"I often FTP videos that young people create through our workshops and things like that (and) we stick those up on our website," he said. "Depending on the size and quality of the video, it does take quite a while."

The file sharing application being prepped for March, called Time Shift, will "allow for exchange of large files in off-peak hours, so it's not congesting the network," said Ellsworth.



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