Evanston prepares to jump on the 'wired' bandwagon

Technopolis project will partner the city with a Chicago technology firm

By Kya Fawley, The Daily Northwestern

The Technopolis Evanston Task Force will partner with a Chicago-based technology firm to wire the city with a fiber-optic communication network, Evanston Inventure announced Monday.

Evanston Inventure, which works to increase economic growth downtown, made its announcement at 10 a.m. to a group of business people gathered in the Evanston Public Library, 1703 Orrington Ave. Five community leaders — including Mayor Lorraine Morton and Eugene Sunshine, Northwestern's senior vice president for business and finance — spoke about the partnership, which would provide Evanston schools, businesses and residents with high-speed Internet access by 2000.

"The city has pulled together all facets to use on this project," Morton said.

The Technopolis Evanston Task Force consists of 30 business and community leaders working on the Technopolis Evanston project, which is designed to turn the city into a "cyber center."

The task force's primary goal is the creation of a fiber-optic communication network that will provide Evanston with high-speed internet access. The network will also provide access to an interactive web page connecting residents, businesses and other community organizations.

To accomplish this goal, the task force will work with The Performance Group, a Chicago-based firm that specializes in bringing new technology to a variety of organizations.

"We have a great responsibility and desire to work on this project with Evanston," said Timothy King, director of The Performance Group.

The Technopolis Evanston project will be implemented in three phases, said Ron Kysiak, task force chairman. The task force recently began a 90-day planning session to be completed by Aug 1. They will then build the network from August to December 1999 and activate the network for schools in 2000. Kysiak said it might take longer to provide service to businesses and residents.

The Performance Group will also enlist the aid of other technological companies, including Cisco Systems Inc., and Siemens Building Technologies to help wire the city, King said.

The improved access will not be free, Kysiak said, but he hopes for a competitive price.
"People will be able to choose to take the service or not, but I think it will be better faster and cheaper than anywhere else," he said.

The project will also boost business development and increase property values, King said.

NU, the NU/Evanston Research Park and 80 Evanston businesses are already wired for fast Internet access. The Technopolis Evanston project will also connect these institutions with the rest of the city. NU is serving as a consultant to the project because of its technological experience and knowledge, said Patricia Widmayer, co-chairwoman of the task force.

The project will benefit NU students and faculty who live off campus because they will get faster Internet access, Sunshine said.

— The Daily's Emily Breuker contributed to this report.