

HOUSE OF THE FUTURE –

By John O'Connell - Idaho State Journal Writer -Published November 9, 2006

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Rockland log cabin features fiber-optic system

The region's next great technological advancement will be made inside a log cabin on the outskirts of a small, rural community.

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ROCKLAND

Griffin, marketing director of Rockland-based Direct Communications, is building his 3,800-square-foot dream home himself, with help from a Rockland High School math teacher named Bill Dean. When it's done, the cabin will be the first home in Southeast Idaho — and among the first homes in the state — wired with fiber-optic cable.

"That opens up the future to limitless possibility," Griffin said, adding his home would be capable of supporting an internet-broadcast television station. "Hopefully, this will increase the value of my home because it's wired for the future."

Furthermore, Griffin believes his spacious log cabin's state-of-the-art wiring will pave the way for Rockland, a community of just 316 people located about 15 miles south of American Falls, to become Idaho's first fiberoptic city.

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Brigham Griffin is the perfect guinea pig.

Fiber-optic cable transmits information using light signals through 12 hair-sized strands of glass and drastically enhances clarity and bandwidth for sending

information. One thin cable is capable of transmitting all of the digital information in the state.

"It's ironic that the little town of Rockland will have a communication system that's more advanced than most metropolitan areas in the country," Griffin said. "It's an important event in the history of the area here because it takes us to the next step of communication."

Griffin's company provides phone service for the Rockland and Bear Lake County areas and provides high-speed internet and cable service throughout Southeast Idaho. The company plans to extend fiber to Oxford and Preston for lease to Qwest.

"Right now, the only people who are doing (fiber optics) are the small, agile phone companies who can move fast enough," Griffin said.

Some time ago, Direct Communications helped build the first statewide fiber-optic loop. That loop carries a large percentage of the state's information, although in most cases it interfaces with less efficient, traditional copper wire.

As luck would have it, the 12.5-acre plot where Griffin is building his cabin, surrounded by rolling hills covered in sage, is just a few hundred yards from the statewide fiber network, which passes through Pocatello in Mink Creek. Griffin spliced into the line, which connects to his home through a \$500 box called a network interface device.

Griffin's fiber-optic cable ends in a coil stored below a manhole cover — making it easy to extend the wire to new homes that will develop on his hillside. Because fiber signals aren't disrupted by electrical currents, Griffin was able to lay his electric line and phone and cable line in the same trench, at a considerable savings.

As old-fashioned copper wires wear out in Rockland, Griffin said they will be replaced with fiber.

The fiber line itself is comparable to copper. The equipment needed to support it, however, is extremely costly. Direct Communications paved the way for homes to be wired to fiber within its network recently when the company invested more than \$100,000 to purchase new equipment for its central office. Prior to that investment, Direct Communications became the first Idaho company to buy a costly device called a digital switch, also needed to support fiber.

"I'm a good person to be a guinea pig for this project in Idaho. I'll be a person who won't mind experimenting with it and also a person to tell the story about it," Griffin said. "It's not a lot of places where you can live in a rural place like this place and have a high-tech job."

Cat-5 cable will network the entire home for "all future possibilities for media," including television, music, telephone, a home intercom, internet and a home security system all interconnected through fiber.

"I'm big into music. I'll probably wire the whole house for karaeoki," Griffin said.

Griffin plans to build a cutting-edge home theater in the basement, which will also utilize his fiber.

The log cabin home — made with a green, tin roof and dark-stained fir logs from a kit Griffin purchased from Whisper Creek, based in Utah

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ABOVE: Griffin shows the fiber-optic cable that will run much of the network in his new home.

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— is impressive on its own. It's earthquake proof and has 42-inch footings. A redwood staircase leads to an 8-foot-tall porch, supported by 16-foot fir columns.

The cabin houses five bedrooms, four bathrooms, a studio and office, a great room with an A-frame shaped wall covered in windows, a big kitchen, a balcony and an entertainment room.

"My wife just did the kitchen tile. We've never done tile before. Actually, everything in this house I've never done before," Griffin said.

Griffin, his wife Kathy, his 3-year-old daughter Jessie and his 7-month-old daughter Elsie currently live in another home in Rockland. The frame and studs are mostly installed, and Griffin is beginning the interior work.

"I've always wanted a cabin. Out here, I feel like I'm living in a resort basically," said Griffin, who was born in South Africa and was recruited by Direct Communications after completing a Masters of Business Administration at the University of Utah. "Jessie asks me every day, 'When are we moving in?'"