

Orlando Gets \$100K Pledge to Help With Courting Google

March 26, 2010

By Mark Schlueb, Orlando Sentinel

To attract the attention of Google, Orlando residents have made goofy YouTube videos, joined a Facebook page and even renamed a condo complex in honor of the Internet giant.

Now, with Friday the final day to apply to be a test community for Google's ultra-high speed fiberoptic network, the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation has committed \$100,000 to the cause — if Google picks Orlando.

"We want to help make sure that if Orlando is elected, our nonprofits would be able to fully take advantage of the Google high-speed network," foundation president David Odahowski said.

The money would be used to help charities defray the cost of computer upgrades and training necessary to use the fiber-optic network to its fullest. The Winter Park-based foundation was founded by philanthropist and arts lover Edyth Bush, who died in 1972, well before the Internet age.

"Mrs. Bush might never have thought that someday we would help nonprofits with ultra-high-speed Internet...but I think she would approve," Odahowski said.

Google has pledged to pay to install fiber-optic cable in communities it selects that can deliver Internet speeds 100 times faster than what most users have, with download speeds of 1 gigabit per second. The company hasn't said how many communities will be chosen, only that it will serve between 50,000 and 500,000 people.

Along with a slew of cities across the country, Orlando joined the race to catch Google's eye two weeks ago. Also in the hunt: Kissimmee, which unveiled googleforkissimmee.com; Leesburg, which is banking on an existing fiber-optic network; and the Brevard County communities of Melbourne, Palm Bay and Titusville.

There's no comprehensive list of applicants, but at least 200 cities are vying for Google's attention.

Some have banked on quirky humor; Topeka officials renamed the city "Google, Kansas" for the month of March. In Sarasota, the mayor swam in a shark tank.

Orlando launched its push with a Facebook page that had 3,570 fans at last count, and a new website, getgoogling.com. It has its share of humor, with YouTube videos posted by others featuring action figures and talking cats.

Board members of Wimbledon Park condominiums renamed their Semoran Boulevard complex Google for the rest of the month. Orange County Commissioner Linda Stewart changed her name to LindaGoogle, at least on Facebook.

Google also has encouraged people to say how they would use lightning-quick Internet speeds, hoping

to encourage next-generation computer applications. Orlando residents posted their answers to that question on an interactive map on the city's website, with possibilities ranging from high-speed video conferencing to playing more World of Warcraft.

Orlando Health posted a video of an Internet-connected robot rolling into a patient's room to illustrate the possibilities: "With Google's improved bandwidth, a neurologist at another hospital or even in their own home could remotely view and evaluate a patient in an emergency or examination room miles away."

Google hasn't said when it will make its choice.

Mark Schlueb can be reached at mschlueb@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5417.