

Broadband conference points way towards future

"In terms of technology infrastructure in southwest Florida, if we talk in terms of an expressway metaphor, the question is not 'Do we have enough lanes?' but 'How do we get more people on the road?'"

Whitney Gray, Regional Planning Council



PHOTO: NELSON SANDERSON

Regional Technology Partnership's Brooke Gabrielson listens to the ideas of her breakout session group members

Shortly before the holidays, several members of the local technology community gathered at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) to hear speakers about the status of technology in southwest Florida, discuss this topic and then break out into smaller groups to talk about what technology issues face the various "silos" of the region, including the business community, local healthcare organizations, the educational system, communication systems and law enforcement among others.

The event was presented by the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council and hosted by Dr.

David Kakkuri, Director, Center for Leadership and Innovation at FGCU. It opened with a presentation by Bill Price of the Florida Division of Communications and his announcement of the approval of an \$8.8 million grant just given the state of Florida.

Price stated, "This grant is fully intended to increase Florida's participation in the digital economy." It will be dispersed to a variety of sources, such as educational institutions, the library system, local broadband planning organizations, broadband data collection and mapping groups. He added, "The grant is meant to be used to increase our knowledge, to better utilize the resources available, to uncover opportunities and to secure future funding."

The breakout sessions generated a great deal of buzz and excitement in the room. Brian Hamman, Manager Market Development for CenturyLink, indicated, "A lot of the technology is already here—it's just not highly publicized. Most of our (Cen-

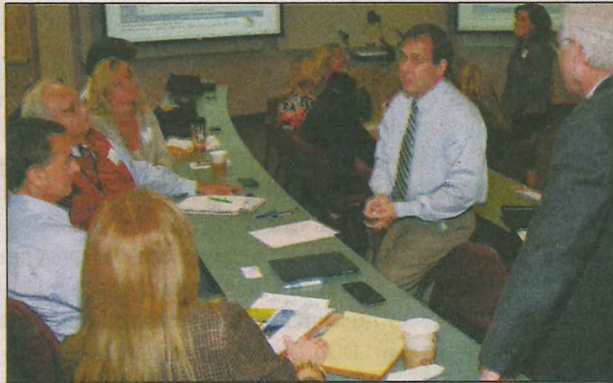


PHOTO: NELSON SANDERSON

Fort Myers Regional Partnership's Warren Baucom leads the lively discussion during the business community breakout session.



PHOTO: NELSON SANDERSON

SWFL Regional Planning Council's Jennifer Pellechio and Bonita Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Christine Ross are enthusiastic about the conference

turyLink) work right now is in medical facilities, hospitals, the school system."

It was also pointed out that technology is also already heavily utilized in the law enforcement sector/public safety arena. When there are fires, it is used to locate floor plans: ambulance medical personnel use it to connect with hospitals/records: the court system utilizes it to organize the all parts of the trial process.

The conference highlighted a variety of organizations and speakers, including the Regional Technology Partnership, with Brooke Gabrielson presenting the opportunities of creating alliances within the technology field and across industry lines. She pointed out, "Every topic represented here is connected to at least one other topic represented here. We need to catalyze, cultivate and connect. This meeting is a great first step."