

The issue: An area consortium of information technology leaders spearheads advanced broadband connections.

Kevin Groskreutz's view: These efforts have been highly beneficial to the region and are receiving widespread attention.

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Group's efforts connect area to meet our broadband needs

Just more than 13 years ago, our community faced several difficulties. We were preparing for Y2K and also dealing with steeply rising municipal costs and demands for services with reduced budgets.

These challenges brought together a weekly "Y2K breakfast club" of area public and later private information technology (IT) leaders. This group dreamed up a unique, farsighted collaborative known as CINC, the Chippewa Valley Inter-Networking Consortium. Today, this local group utilizes advanced broadband networks that connect Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire hospitals, clinics, fire and police, city and county governments, libraries and schools and non-profits — at speeds and price points not commercially available.

What began as a weekly IT leader breakfast has grown into a "community area network," or CAN. It is a national best practice model for municipal government cost-saving, economic development, and it also has strengthened our health care community.

Dedicated to "broadband serving the public interest," CINC uses underground fiber optic cable and wireless towers to provide advanced broadband. It has expanded services and technology while simultaneously reducing costs of municipalities and health care — saving millions in taxpayer and patient dollars. Best of all, it is now expanding this high-speed access to many small town and rural public schools, rural clinics and hospitals. CINC's underground and wireless infrastructure may be out of

sight and out of mind. Even so, we benefit from the network every day — from traffic light management, to EMS and fire public safety, education and libraries and city and county services.

On March 25, Sacred Heart Hospital in Eau Claire and St. Joseph's Hospital in Chippewa Falls hosted two international researchers: Yasuichi Kitamura, a researcher at the National Institute of Information and Communications Technology in Japan; and Dr. Hiroshi Mizushima, chief senior researcher at the National Institute of Public Health in Japan.

Our guests visited to meet CINC IT leaders to learn how our network is transforming public services and health care. They also learned how CINC helps bridge the "digital divide" that causes disparities in care for rural patients and caregivers. In addition to visiting the Chippewa Valley, they visited colleagues in Washington, D.C., and best practice networks in Indiana and Michigan.

CINC supports a robust and reliable health care infrastructure to advance cost-effective health care for this region. It also helps lay a foundation for economic development, job growth, a favorable business environment, a strong educational system, and private-sector partnerships.

Groskreutz is chief information officer of Hospital Sisters Health System Division in Western Wisconsin and a member of the CINC Executive Committee.



Kevin Groskreutz