

THE RANGER

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A school on wheels

Wi-Fi opens up new learning doors on Iron Range school buses

Find your seat. And connect your tablet or smart phone.

Students in the Chisholm and Mountain Iron-Buhl school districts on long bus rides to school or extracurricular activities are gaining access to new technology.

The two Iron Range school districts have installed Wi-Fi on school buses.

It's part of a Blandin Foundation Broadband Communities Program supported by Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation. The program is helping six Iron Range communities advance local broadband initiatives.

Broadband on school buses

rides or extracurricular trips can be lengthy.

"I think it's great for the kids and for the community," said Dr. Janey Blanchard, Chisholm Public Schools superintendent. "This (technology) is what these kids have been raised on. On those long bus rides, it will allow them to get their homework done, do a lot of research, and their parents will be able to check on them."

Chisholm's Wi-Fi system works like a combination of a cell phone and a router, said Joe Phillips, Chisholm School District director of technology.

"It has a cell radio in it that talks to AT&T at LTE4G speeds," said Phillips. "Basically



Joe Phillips, Chisholm Public Schools technology director, shows off Wi-Fi installed on district buses.

"Our first concern is for opportunities for those students who don't have any access at home."

Lisa Kvas, co-chair Mountain Iron-Buhl Area Blandin Broadband Communities Committee

is just one of many broadband plans being developed by committees in each of the communities.

Access to broadband on school buses is a growing trend across the nation.

It gives students already crunched for time the ability to complete schoolwork or study during time when they might otherwise be socializing, texting friends, or being a bit rowdy.

It's especially beneficial in rural districts such as in northeastern Minnesota, where bus

it's the same speed as your smart phone. As long as you have a cell phone signal, you will have internet service."

The system blocks inappropriate websites through a filter. It also monitors and limits each student's bandwidth usage, so no one student can "hog" the service.

Two Chisholm buses equipped with Wi-Fi will be used to transport activities students and students from the district's rural areas, said Phillips.

At Mountain Iron-Buhl, all seven of the district's school buses are getting Wi-Fi.

"Our first concern is for opportunities for those students who don't have any access at home," said Lisa Kvas, who co-chairs a local committee

addressing broadband needs in the Mountain Iron area as part of the Blandin Foundation program. "It will give students who don't have access at home extra time to do their homework and support what they're learning in class."

Plans are not firmed up in either district, but when not in use for school trips, the buses could be parked at locations within the communities and serve as a "hot spot," for others to gain internet access.

Taking you to the top

Giants Ridge to unveil two new quad ski lifts for coming season

For alpine skiers, getting to the top of the ski hill quickly and down again means more snow for your dough.

Giants Ridge in November unveils two new ski lifts that will transport skiers quicker and more comfortably, to the top of its ski hills.

A 2,186 foot-long, high-speed detachable quad lift and a 1,825 foot-long fixed quad lift will create a more enjoyable experience for skiers and allow

skiers to get in more runs, said Fred Seymour, Giants Ridge general manager.

"The new lifts will get folks up the hill faster, be more convenient and be helpful to beginners and intermediate skiers," said Seymour. "The detachable quad slows down at the bottom of the

hill, which allows people to get on comfortably. It also gets you

up the hill faster and allows for easier loading and unloading."

The high-speed detachable quad, on the Sarajevo ski hill,

replaces a triple chair lift. It will get skiers to the top of the hill in 2.3 minutes rather than eight minutes. In the off-season, it can also be used for mountain bikers or hikers.

The fixed quad on the Helsinki run, replaces a double chair lift. Each of the new chair lifts can transport 2,400 skiers per hour to the top of Giants Ridge.

The new lifts are a \$5.7 million investment by Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation, which has owned the facility since 1984.

About a year ago, a new 34,000 square-foot, \$11.5 million chalet opened at Giants Ridge.

Along with addition of several new snowmaking machines, construction of a climbing wall, 3.5 miles of single-track mountain biking trails, and a children's playground under construction, the improvements are part of a multi-recreation Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation investment strategy to grow the facility's \$43 million annual economic impact.

"It's a beautiful location," said Seymour of Giants Ridge, who with 30 years of experience in the ski business, was this summer named general manager. "It's gorgeous country. It's a very desirable place to come."

Giants Ridge has 35 downhill ski runs, over 60 kilometers of Nordic trails, snow tubing and snowshoeing trails. It also offers two 18-hole award-winning championship golf courses.

Giants Ridge will focus on continuing to attract young skiers to the sport and serving long-time skiers, said Seymour. "We want to make sure we have the programs to get kids out and the pricing to get families to ski here," said Seymour. "We also need to make sure we have opportunities for the community and for the destination traveler as well."

By mid-November, the new ski lifts are expected to be ready for testing.

Depending on weather conditions, Giants Ridge ski season typically opens around Thanksgiving.

FAST FACTS

- What:** Two new Giants Ridge quad ski lifts
- When:** To be ready for 2017-18 ski season
- Why:** Quicker to top of hill, more comfortable
- Who:** Skiers, mountain bikers, hikers



Construction is beginning on two new ski lifts at Giants Ridge.