

RURAL OXFORD CONNECTIONS brings broadband Internet to rural seniors and farmers

Bob Parkhill lives the bachelor life on a beautiful little farm in Norwich. He was born in 1944 and suffered a stroke six years ago. As a result, Bob travelled to London for an X-ray computed tomography (CT) scan. Following his discharge, Bob returned home and has had no relapse. Bob required speech therapy for several months after the event but has no problems keeping up his end of the conversation – in fact, is more than entertaining.

Bob's been a farmer all his life. He had a dairy farm for many years before selling. After the dairy farm was sold, Bob 'needed more to do', so he earned his real estate license. He still sells some real estate today - a salesperson with an independent broker.



Bob Parkhill connected to the Internet via broadband.

The farm in Norwich on which Bob presently lives was established in 1914 by his grandfather. Half-jokingly Bob stated, "I'd like to live another three years so I can say the farm was in the family for 100 years." Bob still actively works the farm. He plants soya beans, corn, wheat and hay. Because he needed more land, Bob rented a farm just down the road and then bought it outright three years ago. He hires someone to do the combining and no-till drilling, but Bob does all of the planting, spraying, and ploughing himself.

Bob has always been an Execulink customer via dial up. The dial-up connection was very slow. "You could pretty near have a coffee while waiting for a download, and still have time for a piece of pie," said Bob. For example, downloading a land survey or doing the GST through dial up, was tediously sluggish. Bob noted, "Not only was it slow, but the Web-based applications on these sites would just time out or freeze up."

Bob said, "I've told many people that I'd be the last person in Canada to get broadband Internet or natural gas, given where I live." That's where the Rural Oxford Connections program of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) came in. Execulink Telecom is the Internet Service Provider selected through a Request for Proposal by the County of Oxford, who administers the program, to bring broadband wireless Internet to the nooks and crannies of the County, and rural parts in-between. According to Joel Freund, Wireless Operations Manager for Execulink, "when the company started to build in Norwich, Bob Parkhill got talking to one of our installers, Jim Hill. Jim is a Norwich resident so he and Bob saw each other regularly at the local Tim Horton's." Jim referred Bob to Joel and after some discussion Bob consented to be a 'guinea-pig' to help Execulink test out the new licensed wireless broadband service to work the bugs out of it.

Bob stated that, "Execulink had the wireless service installed in February and they had a fair bit of problems getting me connected because of my location and weather conditions at that time of year. But Execulink persisted and I called them regularly as they asked to tell them about performance issues," said Bob. Joel stated that, "Bob would call me personally to tell me about the signal drops in the network; and Bob's feedback was important to our building a rock-solid network."

"In the past couple months the service has been great," said Bob. "The broadband service is the difference between day and night. I use it for my real estate business, with the Tillsonburg Real Estate Board," stated Bob. Bob is able to get each listing, a daily hot sheet of new listings on the computer now, including all of the Web-based forms he needs to complete a transaction. "As a farmer, I get the farm prices each night on the commodities and I am able to keep up to date on



Broadband wireless antenna on Bob Parkhill's farmhouse.

market changes. The commodities markets are very volatile and it is important to keep up," said Bob.

Bob has set up a Facebook account, but he's, "not using it too much yet." And now he's able to communicate with friends over Skype, like his buddy Lloyd in Lethbridge. And he does his banking via the Internet, "which was terribly slow before on dial-up.

"Execulink has provided good support; I can't complain at all, they have been very responsive. This has been a great experience for me and I tell everyone I know to give it a go," Bob stated in closing.

