

Rural Miltonians' plight for reliable Internet service

By Melanie Hennessey
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The saga of receiving reliable Internet service in rural Milton continues, with one provider abruptly closing in recent weeks, leaving local residents in the lurch.

According to rural Miltonians, MDS Wireless stopped providing Internet service to them earlier this month with no notice. When they attempted to contact the Vaughan-based company that specialized in servicing rural

areas to find out what's going on, they discovered that MDS's phone line is out of service, along with the company's website.

This left many, like Nassagaweya resident Chris Walton, frustrated and scrambling to change providers quickly, given the necessity of Internet service in everyday life.

"There was no notice — they're just gone," he told the *Champion*. "It has been a challenge and a huge disappointment."

But more importantly, Walton is demanding answers from the body that regulates Inter-

net service providers, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

"The CRTC dropped the ball in supervising MDS Wireless," he asserted. "I work for an insurance company and we are so heavily regulated. Why is such a vital service like the Internet not as equally protected?"

According to CRTC spokesperson Patricia Valladao, there are no regulations in place that would require an Internet company to inform its customers if it's going out of business.

"We also don't monitor the financial health of companies," she told the *Champion*.

In recent months, the CRTC has gone so far as to declare broadband a basic telecommunications service for all Canadians and directed Internet service providers (ISPs) to begin planning to increase both service and speeds in more isolated, rural areas across the country.

The new targets laid out by the CRTC include basic download speeds of at least 50 megabits per second (Mbps) and upload speeds of at least 10 Mbps. ISPs will also be required to offer customers the option of unlimited data

packages.

The CRTC is establishing a fund to support projects in areas that don't meet these targets, with \$750 million being made available over the first five years.

The ultimate goal is to reduce the number of households lacking high-speed service to 10 per cent from 18 by 2021, and down to zero over the next 10-15 years.

While this comes as welcome news to Councillor Cindy Lunau, who recommended that high-speed Internet be deemed an essential service during a presentation she made to the CRTC last year, she's still anxiously awaiting further details on the program's implementation.

"How and when this will yield results is unknown, but hopeful," she said.

For Lunau, the issue with MDS Wireless has once again shone a light on the fact that rural Milton remains an underserved area when it comes to Internet service.

She explained the issue gets back to the need for Internet service providers to share the available spectrum — the crucial frequency used in all wireless communications, such as wireless Internet service.

“There was no notice — they were just gone.”

Chris Walton
Nassagaweya resident

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