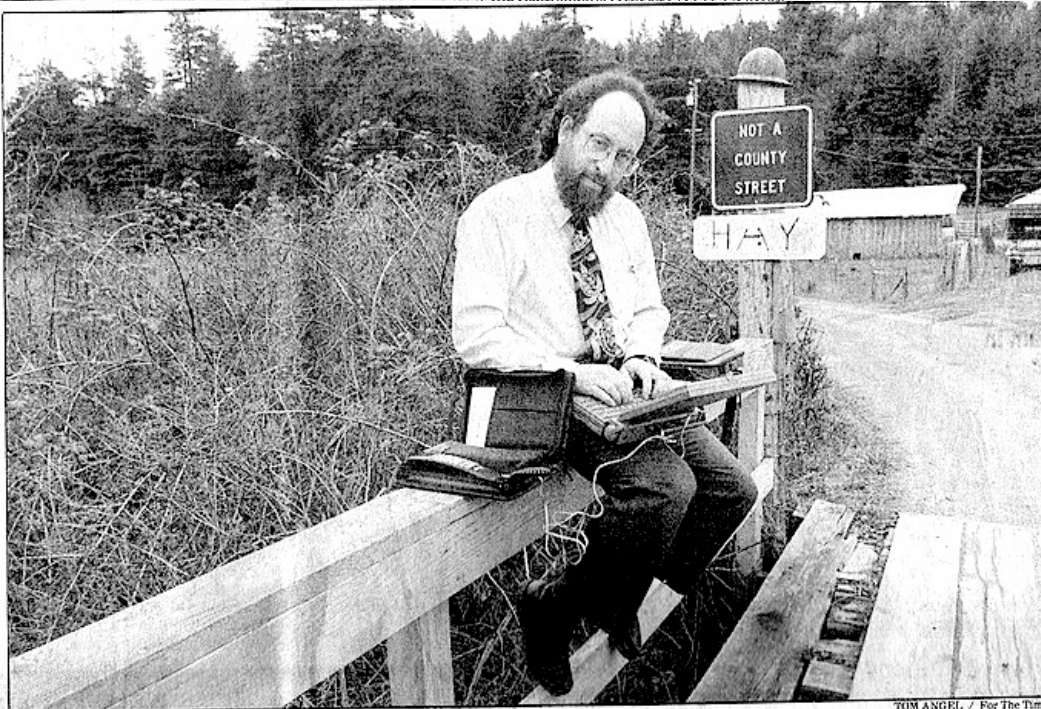


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TOM ANGEL / For The Times

By MARIE GRAVELLE
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

EUREKA, Calif.—Larry Goldberg's town has a grocery store, a theater, a library, an art gallery and, of course, a teen-agers' hangout. But you won't find it on any map.

It's called Northcoast Electronic Town, or N.E.T., a cybernetic linkup of five of the state's northernmost counties that Goldberg launched last year.

Humboldt, Del Norte, Mendocino, Trinity and Lake are rural counties with more redwoods than people, where people go to escape the cold efficiency of computers and other trappings of high-stress urban life.

But Goldberg—a former New Yorker who came west to attend Humboldt State University—thought that with all the remote towns that make up the North Coast, why not use high technology to help close the miles separating them all?

So with \$20,000 of his own money, the Eureka business consultant created N.E.T., a cybertown where people

Welcome to Cyberville

Residents of Remote North Coast Counties Use Computer Network to Keep in Touch

can order blackberry jam from a food store, browse through an art gallery, find out what's playing at the local theater, read the complete works of Shakespeare, or debate President Clinton's timber policies, all without leaving home.

"This is the community of the future," Goldberg, 41, said of the fledgling computer network.

"The same reason I stayed here is why I created this system—to main-

tain my quality of life," he said. "You can live in the country and have this quality of life and still be connected to big-city services."

Goldberg's company, Sequoia Technical Services, is headquartered in Eureka, about 250 miles north of San Francisco. Thus far he has enticed about 200 subscribers, with about half of those paying the monthly \$10 fee. To get the system going, he has offered free access to schools,

local governments, libraries and hospitals. He hopes to someday have 1,000 subscribers.

"We just have to train people," said Goldberg, who lives in the tiny fishing village of Trinidad about 20 miles up the coast from Eureka. "We're always a little behind the times up here."

Clicking on the "calendar" button, a subscriber can find the title of this month's play at Humboldt County's Ferndale Repertory Theatre, as well as a schedule of sailboat races on Humboldt Bay. Teen-agers click on the "coffeeshop" and tap into the on-line forum "Northcoast Teen Topics." Business leaders use the "professional building" section, looking for grants and ways to build coalitions to attract business to the economically depressed region.

Goldberg sees N.E.T. as a new tool for economic development of the five-county area, which has been battered over the last decade by federal regulations that limited timber harvests and hurt the salmon fishing industry.

"The biggest area of concern for businesses here is people are very

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CYBERVILLE: Network Links Remote Counties

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remote from each other," he said. "We began electronic networking as a means of talking to our colleagues and seeking funding. Nobody was providing a region-wide service."

Subscribers receive some services from the global network Internet. These include Associated Press wire service, electronic mail service to other Internet subscribers and 200 of the 8,000 USEnet "conferences" news groups.

But N.E.T. subscribers also receive local news provided by two area magazines and Arcata's Humboldt State University newspaper. There are N.E.T. discussion groups about Northern California politics and other issues of interest to those living behind the "redwood curtain."

N.E.T. is different from most other networks because it ties together a region and its people. Having similar lifestyles, the people of Northern California can talk to one another about fishing, timber harvesting, watershed work, social service programs, economic development and other local issues.

Mitch Patenaude, a computer expert who lives in Blue Lake, about 20 miles north-east of Eureka, subscribes to several national computer networks. "After a while I found I had little in common with most people" on discussion groups on the Internet, Patenaude said. "But the N.E.T. is community-based. You might have something to talk about."

Subscriber Jim Moorehead, owner of the Joshua Grindle Inn on the Mendocino

coast, is using N.E.T. to meet with members of the Mendocino County Visitors Bureau Board. Using electronic mail, he can send the same message to all board members with a few clicks of the mouse. No copying, no stamps, no fax machine and no "snail mail" (a computer term used to describe the U.S. Postal Service).

"It takes me two hours to get to a meeting," Moorehead said. Using N.E.T. and its 800 number, he can talk longer for less. Other board members can listen and make comments.

Another subscriber relies on the network to communicate with his researcher in Eureka, a two-hour drive from his office in Crescent City, near the Oregon border.

A group of subscribers from three counties—Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity—

is using N.E.T. for "bio-regional marketing" to sell herbs, mushrooms and other products harvested locally.

Others are using the service to find economic support.

"I use it to track Option 9," said Tim Cochrane, president of Six Rivers National Bank, headquartered in Eureka. Option 9 is Clinton's new forest policy. It includes grant money that could spur Northern California's economy as employment in the timber industry drops.

There have been complaints about the price on N.E.T. For \$10 a month you get two hours of on-line time. After that the rate is \$5 an hour. That is slightly higher than other, larger networks.

But, Goldberg said, "we've created the feeling of living in a small town . . . an electronic village with access to the world."