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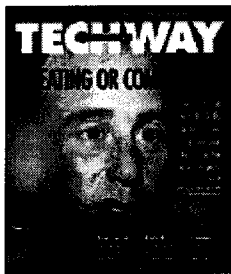
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Felicia Morton



Driving the 270 Corridor

By Felicia Morton,
Washtech.com Staff Writer
 Friday, October 19, 2001; 9:41 AM

It's not hard to find a tech-related networking event in the Washington region, but doesn't it seem that most of them take place on the Virginia side of the Potomac River?

Roger Erickson thinks so. He's president of **270Tech**, an organization formed last year to serve (you guessed it) the tech workers along Maryland's I-270 technology corridor.

Erickson thinks Maryland techies have long been ignored by networking groups and people are hungry for 270Tech's gatherings.



"If you took a graph of the amount of tech meetings that take place in the Washington, D.C., region, you'd see that 80 percent of them take place along the Dulles corridor," he said. "That just doesn't make sense when there are about 100,000 tech workers driving up and down the 270 tech corridor every day."

Erickson said 270Tech has been successful enough to allow him to quit working as consultant to focus on running the networking group full-time. He said companies such as **IBM** and tech service providers like **Mintz Levin** law firm have gladly stepped up to the plate to sponsor 270Tech and gain access to its members.

So far, Erickson has amassed 2,300 members from 500 to 600 companies in the area, such as **Manugistics**, **Celera Genomics** and **EntreMed**.

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The group's most recent meeting, held yesterday in Rockville, drew about 20 people. The event, titled "Broadband Plumbing," featured **Robert Berger**, president and CEO of **CityNet Telecommunications**, a Silver Spring company that lays fiber optic lines in sewers. You may have heard of CityNet. It attracted \$175 million in venture funding during the second quarter — more than any other company in the nation — and another \$100 million in debt financing.

Berger left **Winstar Communications**, where he worked as the senior vice-president, to form CityNet in 1999. Good move considering Winstar is metaphorically in the sewer these days—it's filed for bankruptcy protection. CityNet, other hand, is hiring, not laying off. For a laugh, check out CityNet's [Web page](#), which features streams of heavenly light emanating from sewer caps.

The news wasn't all upbeat. **Lawrence Spiwak**, president of the **Phoenix Center** in Washington, D.C., gave his monologue on why the telecom industry is reeling. "You've got to stop using the promise of technology as a cover for the underlying problem in the industry," he said. That problem, he said, is incumbent carriers don't want to share their networks.

Meanwhile, **Curtis O'Keefe**, a former Winstar employee, and **Bill Brobst**, formerly of **Zeroplus**, a Germantown Internet telephone company that is closing its doors, used the event to hunt for jobs.

O'Keefe couldn't say enough about 270Tech. Although a few complained that the group is too small, he said it's an advantage.

"It's a small enough size so that you can meet everyone who attends," he said. "At the last meeting, I met all 15 people who attended and I e-mailed all 15 of them. We still keep in touch, in fact, I just sent one a contact of mine for a job he's looking to fill."

The organization's next event is scheduled for next Friday, Oct. 26, in Bethesda. For information click on www.270tech.net.

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