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Cities of Monroe and West Monroe Band Together to Bring Technology Opportunity to Rural Louisiana

(Monroe, LA) The cities of Monroe and West Monroe are banding together to bring technology opportunities to the Twin Cities. Both municipalities have entered into an agreement with Technology for Rural America (TFRA) that will help bring enhanced broadband infrastructure and the availability of significantly better broadband services to residences, businesses, government, and institutions like schools, libraries, and healthcare providers. The Twin Cities' relationship with TFRA will help both cities find the best way to move forward amidst so many different funding opportunities and identify next steps for both cities' priorities.

Mayors Friday Ellis and Staci Mitchell recognize that the availability of robust broadband is more critical than ever to public health, education, healthcare, and a thriving community. "Access to reliable broadband is no longer a luxury but a necessity to recruit businesses and people to the Twin Cities and keep us moving forward," said West Monroe Mayor Staci Mitchell.

More than 42 million Americans lack broadband access, including rural communities. TFRA is seeking to expand rural broadband access. "Access to high speed internet is not only a workforce issue, but an equity issue," says Monroe Mayor Friday Ellis.

The cities also recognize there are significant state and federal funding sources available in the near future to assist both private broadband service providers and public entities like the cities. The American Rescue Plan Act earmarked \$350 billion for a variety of services for state and local agencies, including expanded broadband access. Consulting with experts in the field of broadband will allow both Monroe and West Monroe to improve and deploy new infrastructure, aid affordability, and increase digital literacy that will improve the quality of life for citizens and businesses. Furthermore, working with experts like TFRA, gives both cities the opportunity to leverage established relationships and connections from across the country.

"We view widespread access to high-speed internet services as a critical enabler for improving Education, Telehealth, online commerce and attracting businesses and jobs to our region. We believe the cities of Monroe and West Monroe are taking a leadership role in significantly transforming their communities by strategically focusing on, and planning for, a robust broadband future for their residents and businesses. We look forward to working with them in this important endeavor." said Glen Post, TFRA CEO and Chairman.

Next steps include completing and evaluating mapping data to determine specific broadband needs.

Best,

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