

# Network offers discounts to boost rural Internet

BY DARREN FISHELL  
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — The operator of a statewide high-speed data network announced it will offer discounts to Internet service providers in rural areas.

Maine Fiber Co., which operates three connected loops of fiber-optic cable spanning from Kittery to Calais to Fort Kent, announced Friday that it will set aside more than \$500,000 to support discounts to service providers or municipalities in rural areas who win grants from the state-funded ConnectME Authority.

That's on top of reduced rates the company said it will charge for the inland portions of its network, which make up about 60 percent of the network's 1,200 miles.

Tim McAfee, chief executive officer of the Houlton-based Pioneer Broadband, said the discounts have a benefit for Internet providers such as his that want to offer faster speeds to rural communities.

"[Maine Fiber Co.] is changing the math in a way that makes it more likely rural communities are going to get high-speed Internet sooner, and that is a big deal," McAfee said.

Pioneer started replacing its copper cable networks with higher-speed fiber-optic cables in the towns of Sherman and Stacyville during the summer and has about 40 miles of fiber-optic cable in Houlton. It has received state funding for some of its fiber expansions.

The discounts to rural areas would allow service at no cost to the provider for up to the first two

years, for projects approved by the ConnectME Authority. Maine Fiber said a project would then move to rate with a 29 percent discount, starting Jan. 1, with a commitment to lease the fiber for at least five years total.

For a project that requires a lease of 100 miles of Maine Fiber's network, the full discount would total about \$60,000, a 57 percent discount from the full rate. That lower amount includes service at no cost to the provider for the first two years.

The lower rate generally applies to the inland portions of the company's network, except for areas that have other fiber optic network options already available, including lines from Bangor to Orono, Ellsworth to Bar Harbor and Portland to Brunswick.

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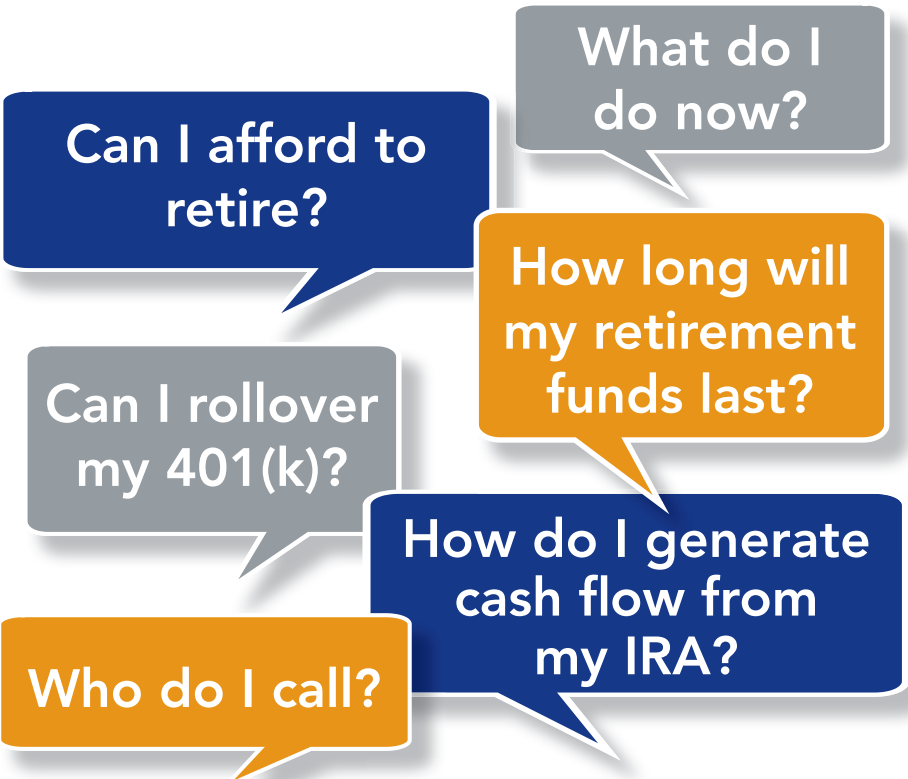
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