

VIEWPOINT

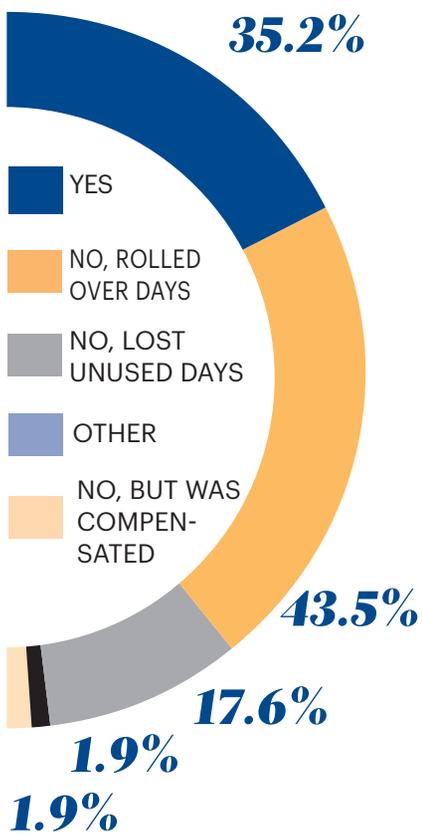
Triad Business Journal welcomes letters to the editor

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► BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY

WE ASKED

IN THE PAST YEAR, DID YOU TAKE ALL YOUR ALLOTTED VACATION TIME FROM WORK?



THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

HOW WOULD YOU RATE NORTH CAROLINA'S BUSINESS CLIMATE?

POINT OF VIEW

Could free Wi-Fi transform Greensboro? I believe so

The city of Greensboro is holding a contest, the Strong Cities, Strong Communities Challenge, or SC2. The competition is sponsored by the federal government and is designed to determine the best and most transformative economic-development idea for Greensboro.

Since SC2 was first announced last year, the competition has been reorganized and will award prizes to as many as six entries, with a top prize of "only" \$500,000, down from the original \$1 million. SC2 will now yield an array of winning ideas instead of picking a single winner.

In the first round of the contest, teams submit proposals for their projects. Last month, 35 were submitted, and 20 are still in the running. On Nov. 20, up to six finalists will be announced for the second round, in which the finalists will expand on their proposals to create detailed project plans. Those plans will be due in April.

When I first heard about SC2, I was skeptical. Could a mere idea transform Greensboro's economy? Don't we already know that the key is investing in education, infrastructure and industry clusters? But then Roch Smith Jr. approached me with a concept for a city-wide system of public wireless Internet access, or Wi-Fi, and I immediately saw it as a smart investment in local infrastructure. I joined Roch to work on the project we came to call Cityfi. You can read more



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about it at www.cityfi.org.

Greensboro has an extensive municipal network of fiber-optic cables and Wi-Fi "hot spots" at libraries and other city facilities. Cityfi proposes to leverage this existing backbone to provide public Wi-Fi throughout the city. Recent advances in Wi-Fi technology, as well as newly available portions of the radio spectrum, have made this possible. Cityfi is scalable, affordable and technically feasible.

Other cities, from Minneapolis to Portland, Ore., have established public Wi-Fi networks. Like them, Cityfi would deliver Wi-Fi access free to users. Thanks to North Carolina's Level Playing Field Law, passed in 2011, it is nearly impossible for cities to provide for-pay broadband Internet service. But the law permits a free service.

Cityfi's benefits for Greensboro would be far-reaching. It would help bridge the "digital divide" in Internet access.

Roughly one-third of all Greensboro residents are without broadband access, and Cityfi would bring free Wi-Fi to previously underserved areas of the city. Children in those neighborhoods would have the same access as their wealthier classmates to the content in their school-provided tablets. Connecting with the online world wouldn't be a function of where one lives.

Other benefits of public Wi-Fi include the potential for remote apartment management by landlords, and the enhanced use of "wearables" such as fitness bands, smart watches, and Google Glass. Mobile phone users could offload calls and data usage onto Wi-Fi no matter where they are. This would be great for Greensboro, which was recently ranked 104th out of the 125 largest U.S. cities for cellular network performance.

Cityfi would be a tool for work force development, entrepreneurial expansion and improved quality of life. But most importantly, Cityfi would be a plan of action. Economic-development initiatives are often about process: focus groups, charrettes, visioning exercises. Talking about our economy is important, but Cityfi would do something about it.

Cityfi is one of the 20 entries still in the SC2 competition, and of course I hope it wins a prize. But my guess is that the more you learn about Cityfi, the more you'll appreciate its potential to remake the Greensboro economy. Wish us luck!

► GAINERS & LOSERS



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TV VIEWERS

Who will be the winners in Tuesday's elections? How about television viewers who won't have to sit through endless political commercials telling us how bad our choices are.



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TV STATIONS

Count your money while you can. It's two years until the next election.



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N.C. TAXPAYERS

New Tax Foundation report has the state jumping 28 spots to 16th in the nation for "tax climate," the result of reductions in individual and corporate income taxes. The McCrory administration has bet big that this will also lead to jumps in job growth and recruitment wins.



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OAK RIDGE CELEBRITY SPOTTING

With rocker Chris Daughtry and race car driver Kevin Harvick both moving from the northwest Guilford town, shopping at Lowes Foods at N.C. 68 & 150 has lost some of its element of surprise.