

The Brookwood, Atlanta: 'Fastest Condo in the Community'

In this issue, **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** showcases The Brookwood, a high-rise condominium in Atlanta's ultra-chic Buckhead neighborhood. The Brookwood's condo association, with the help of tech-savvy residents and the consulting firm Broadband Planning, took a do-it-yourself approach to outfitting the building with world-class broadband. The result: an attractive, low-cost amenity for condo owners as well as cost savings for the management office. Thanks to The Brookwood Homeowners Association, Dick Price at Broadband Planning, Clara Sorrells at FirstService Residential and Greg Ritter at Ritecom for providing the information for this profile.

By Masha Zager / *Broadband Communities*

When the educated, tech-savvy homeowners at The Brookwood, a 219-unit high-rise condo in Atlanta, took over management of the community from the developer, one of their top priorities was to improve broadband services and provide the fastest Internet speeds in Atlanta to all residents. And they succeeded: Today, every resident of The Brookwood can get 50 Mbps symmetrical Internet access for only \$22 a month.

"Our directive was to find a way to provide residents with the fastest Internet speeds of any condominium community in the city," says Mike Wright, president of The Brookwood Residential Condominium Association. "We also wanted a way to do it and control the price and the service levels."

After reviewing proposals from several traditional providers of residential Internet services, the association decided to take matters into its own hands. At the recommendation of Clara Sorrells of FirstService Residential, the property's management company, it

hired Broadband Planning, an Atlanta-based consulting firm that represents both owners and condominium associations in negotiating broadband services.

Richard Price, owner of Broadband Planning, explains, "Technology is rapidly changing, and property managers and community boards of directors need to know all the options available for their communities before getting locked into long contracts with cable providers. Communities with fast Internet speeds and the ability to have choice for cable providers are going to be more appealing to potential buyers."

The Brookwood Residential Condominium Association created a committee, led by a resident and telecommunications professional, Karen Angellatta-Wheeler, to work with Broadband Planning and search out high-quality companies that could help the condo association accomplish its goal.

After a yearlong search for the perfect solution, the association made a bold move:



It decided to build an Ethernet data network in the building, using the telephone wires that already served each unit along with commercial-grade Ethernet electronics and a 10 Gbps network backbone.

The system is powered by a whopping 500 Mbps data circuit, which can be upgraded to 1 Gbps or more with only a week's notice to keep the building on the cutting edge. The Brookwood's bandwidth pipe is even larger than that of nearby Georgia Tech, and it serves a much smaller constituency. Because it was a modification of the existing infrastructure, the new system was implemented without major cost.

This solution gave all residents 50 Mbps upstream and downstream – a service that was not previously available to residential users in this area – at a cost of only \$22 per month, which also covers access to a dedicated customer service line that dispatches technicians 24 hours a day.

The Ritecom Group, a well-established local commercial broadband and fiber optic contractor, provided the design, network equipment and commercial-grade customer service for an all-inclusive monthly fee. The Ritecom equipment and services and the separately contracted commercial-grade circuit are the association's only two expenses.

In addition to the association-supplied Internet service, Brookwood

residents can choose Comcast or DirecPath for video service, and they have access to 30 Mbps Wi-Fi in the property common areas. The association uses the excess bandwidth for management office telephones and other low-voltage monitoring, cutting its management office monthly expense from more than \$1,500 to \$250.

VITAL STATISTICS

Property Description: The Brookwood is an energy-efficient, mixed-use building in Atlanta's Buckhead neighborhood. It has 219 condominium units, 20,000 square feet of retail space and restaurants, and a 1-acre green deck. This classic 19-story building offers dramatic views of downtown, midtown and Buckhead, large open-floor plans with spacious terraces, floor-to-ceiling windows, a pool and an owner's club, fitness facilities, a concierge and more.

The Brookwood is Atlanta's only high-rise condominium community constructed with the environment in mind and built to the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards, the only building in Atlanta using the Energy Recovery Ventilator Air System and the building with the fastest Internet speeds in Atlanta.

Demographics: 30- to 60-year-old upper-income residents

Greenfield or retrofit? Retrofit

Number of units: 219

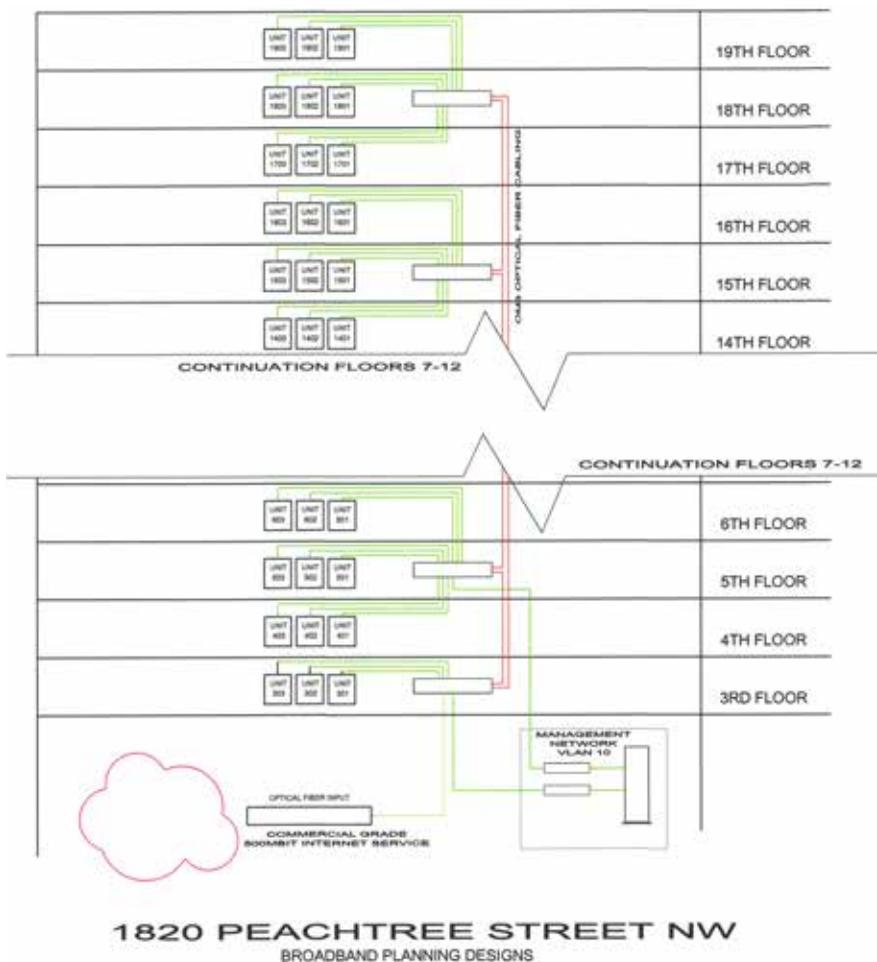
Style: High-rise

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH HIGHLIGHTS

~ The Brookwood, Atlanta ~

- Condo association installed its own DIY Ethernet access network.
- Fiber-to-the-floor network design minimized cost by using existing telecom wiring to each unit.
- Network provides the highest-quality Internet access at the lowest cost in the Atlanta area.
- Key vendors included Broadband Planning, Ritecom Group and Juniper.

PROPERTY OF THE MONTH



A 10 Gbps fiber backbone delivers Internet signals to Ethernet switches throughout the building.

Time to deploy: 60 days, following a year of research

Date services delivered: October 2013

Special requirements: Enough bandwidth to provide 50 X 50 Mbps and serve all common-area bandwidth needs

SERVICES

Services offered on the network: High-speed Internet access with a top speed of 100 Mbps; common-area wireless

Provider choice: DirecPath and Comcast offer both video and Internet access.

Do the competing service providers operate separate broadband networks or deliver services over the network described? DirecPath and Comcast have cable distribution systems in

the building. Each company has its own riser, but they share the coax. Neither provides services over the network described here.

Technical support: 24/7 Internet tech support from Ritecom Group, a company hired by the condo association. When a resident calls The Brookwood Broadband number, a tech will call back within 30 minutes. If a visit is needed (which is rare), it is made the same day or, if the call is made after 6 p.m., the next day.

BUSINESS

Which parts of the network are owned by the service provider, and which parts are owned by the property owner? The property owns the system and leases the equipment through its telecom support company.

Is Internet access provided on a bulk basis? Yes, residents are charged \$22 for 50 Mbps symmetrical Internet access as part of their monthly condominium fees. To upgrade to a higher tier of Internet access, a resident calls the service number and requests the additional speed. Residents with upgraded service are billed individually, and in most cases the upgrade can be done without reentering the unit.

Network benefits: The system increases condo property values because it is the fastest bulk building in the area.

TECHNOLOGY

Broadband architecture: Fiber to the floor with Cat 5 cable to each unit

Methods for running cables vertically within buildings: Simple fiber riser system through existing cores

Vendors/products used: Juniper equipment for fiber backbone

LESSONS LEARNED

What was the biggest challenge? Getting existing providers to agree to our terms

What was the biggest success? Installation of the system was well-coordinated and easy, and transitioning all residents from 2 Mbps to 50 Mbps with no latency delighted residents.

What feedback does the leasing/sales office get from residents/guests? Residents are very happy to pay \$22 for 50 x 50 Mbps, and they are satisfied with the customer service, whose response time is that of a business with a critical circuit.

What should other owners consider before they get started on a similar deployment? Learn your existing infrastructure and know what can be done with it to reduce costs. Find a reliable business-class telecom company that can install and service equipment. ❖

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