



Speakers at the broadband symposium held by the UW-Extension Office of Broadband Sustainability (UWEX-OBS) and the Three Lakes Economic Development Committee included, from left, UWEX-OBS Communications & Web Man-

ager Jennifer Smith, UWEX-OBS Community and Economic Development Manager Professor Andy Lewis, UWEX-OBS Director Marie Alvarez-Stroud and Three Lakes Economic Development Committee Chairman Don Sidlowski.

—Photo By Jan Hintz

## Three Lakes continues work on improved Internet access

Members of the UW-Extension Office of Broadband Sustainability (UWEX-OBS) were in Three Lakes for two days of discussion with the Three Lakes Plan Commission's Economic Development Committee last week.

The highlight of the visit was a symposium on broadband held last Thursday in the theater of the Three Lakes Center for the Arts in the Northwoods. Local and county officials, educators and community leaders attended the symposium.

Speaking at the event from UWEX-OBS were Director Marie Alvarez-Stroud, Communications & Web Manager Jennifer Smith and Community and Economic Development Manager, Professor Andy Lewis.

Meanwhile, speaking on behalf of the Three Lakes

Economic Development Committee was Chairman Don Sidlowski.

The speakers noted the importance of high-speed Internet access to the community, saying it's essential to economic development.

It allows businesses, individuals and institutions, such as libraries, governments, schools and healthcare providers, to share large amounts of data very quickly over a network, according to Professor Lewis.

"Everybody gets excited about or is afraid of technology," he said, presenting charts detailing how the U.S. is falling behind in the areas of broadband access and technology compared to other developed countries. Lewis further explained that Wisconsin ranks 45th in the nation in broadband connectivity.

"It is important to create infrastructure to provide broadband," said Lewis. "There are very few communities in the North Woods that have the wireless Internet access you do in Three Lakes."

In 2007, Three Lakes set out to become the anchor for technology in the North Woods, according to Sidlowski.

"Five years later, we have accomplished phase one of that plan, with high-speed Internet and 3G wireless phone service now available to almost 90% of our residents," he said.

Sidlowski added that it was important not to passively wait for technology to come to a community, saying residents must build strong relationships with providers and collaborators.

As a part of what has been dubbed the "Three

Lakes Model," the town continues to work with local, regional and state agencies while building relationships with private technology providers.

Alvarez-Stroud said the Three Lakes Model is being rolled out in five counties as an integral part of the Public Service Commission's LinkWISCONSIN Region 2 Plan.

The model will be used in communities with demographics similar to Three Lakes, according to Alvarez-Stroud, thus giving them greater chances at similar success.

After the presentations, Lewis was asked what Three Lakes can do to continue to enhance broadband.

"Three Lakes should continue to foster public and private partnerships," he answered.