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Lakeland Wants to Be Google's Test City for Fiber Optics

By [Rick Rousos](#)
THE LEDGER

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LAKELAND | Mayor Gow Fields won't dive into alligator-infested waters. The city won't use ice cream, glow sticks or temporarily name itself Googleland.

But it's still trying to try to lure Google and its experimental super high-speed fiber optic network.

If it's all the same, leaders of the Connect Lakeland effort said Wednesday at the Greater Lakeland Chamber of Commerce, cities will be judged on what they have to offer and their degree of community support. They said wacky stunts that have taken place across the country trying to attract Google won't work.

One of the things here that may help draw attention: "Lakeland is the center of 8.6 million people within 100 miles," said Chuck Welch, who owns and operates the Lakeland Local Web site and is one of the local organizers trying to attract Google.

Google said in February that it would choose at least one American city as a testing ground for an ultra-high-speed broadband. The Google offer is called Google Fiber for Communities.

The threshold, local officials said, is for towns with a population of 50,000 to 500,000. That leaves Lakeland as Polk County's only possible site.

The city will send an application to Google by Friday's deadline. After that, there's more to be done, mainly adding to the connectlakeland.com Web site being used to showcase the effort to Google.

The organizers of the local lure-Google movement, a mix of business, city and educational leaders, say the only way Lakeland will be considered is if there's a broad base of support.

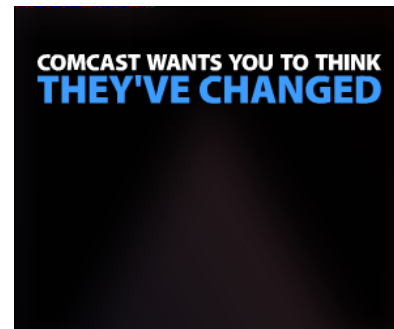
Connect Lakeland plans to solicit videos from schools in the area.

Organizers say they will give a cash prize to the school whose students come up with the best video.

Lakeland has about 300 miles of fiber-optic network now, serving Lakeland Regional Medical Center and some nearby medical businesses, electric substations and schools.

Google is "the next step of the delivery of the Internet," Welch said. He said that in as much time as it takes today's high-speed Internet to deliver a page, Google ultra-high speed can deliver a book.

Local organizers trying to attract Google say the company would probably utilize the current network, but that would be up to Google.



For more information about Connect Lakeland, call 863-606-8425.

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