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GWI, Arctaris Impact and FAME Partner to Build Fiber Broadband Networks in 5 Maine Opportunity Zone Communities

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Biddeford, Maine- Great Works Internet Partners (“GWI”), Arctaris Impact Investors, LLC (“Arctaris”), and the Finance Authority of Maine (“FAME”) announced plans today to build new fiber broadband networks for five communities in Maine, including South Portland, Millinocket, East Millinocket, Medway and Belfast. The projects are made possible through a partnership with FAME, which is providing a loan and commercial guarantee support to the project.

Officially known as Biddeford Internet Corporation, GWI is the premier provider of fiber optic internet service in Maine and the state’s first Internet Service Provider (ISP) to be certified as a B Corp. for meeting higher standards of transparency, accountability and performance. Arctaris, a Boston-based impact investment firm which provides growth capital to businesses and infrastructure in underserved regions, will be funding the projects using Opportunity Zone equity capital.

“Today, more than ever, equitable access to affordable, high-speed internet is crucial to the economic viability of cities and states throughout our country,” said Neil Katz, principal at Arctaris. “By building fiber-based broadband networks, we are developing the infrastructure necessary to lessen the digital divide in underserved communities. Arctaris is deploying a similar program in Colorado and we plan to replicate this model in additional locations nationwide.”

In total, GWI and Arctaris will build over 240 fiber-optic route miles and the networks will pass over 12,000 residential and business premises. The networks will cover significant portions of South Portland and Belfast, including opportunity zones, that also encompass the economically distressed areas constituting the first phase of subsequent projects. The network will cover all premises in Millinocket, East Millinocket and Medway. The high-impact projects will provide great benefits to these communities, including their low-income populations in need of more, affordable, quality broadband access.

The necessity for reliable broadband was accentuated during the pandemic, when many were forced to work and educate remotely. The pandemic highlighted inadequate broadband accessibility and also expedited the growth in the gap, both regionally and socio-economically, between those with access and those without.

“There is a digital divide accelerating between thriving communities with good infrastructure and struggling communities without,” stated Kerem Durdag, President and COO of GWI. “When it comes to the needs of residents, there is a growing demand for bandwidth on a daily basis and our goal is to provide universal and ubiquitous service to all. Fiber infrastructure plays a vital role in addressing these challenges for the long term.”
GWI has already started the design work and is quickly progressing to constructing the network starting in the next couple of months with goals to begin turning up customers in early 2023; detailed coverage maps will be posted on the GWI website in the forthcoming several weeks.

“As a member of the Belfast City Council and Broadband Committee, it has been very clear for several years, even before the Covid pandemic, that broadband infrastructure is more important today than providing electricity to all communities was last century,” stated Belfast City Councilor Mary Mortier. “We have been working on finding the right long-term solution for Belfast, to provide universal Hi-speed Internet Connectivity to our residents and businesses. We believe fiber-optic service to the premise is the future proof pathway to successfully realize our goal of giving all of our community members the opportunity to be able to fully participate in the world we live in today and tomorrow, whether it’s related to education, healthcare, employment opportunities or recreation. We believe that our choice of GWI to provide this key infrastructure buildout in two phrases, along with their dedication to obtaining B Corporation status shows exceptional commitment to their current and future customers in Belfast.”

In December of 2020, FAME approved a request by Arctaris for 20% leveraged loan insurance on $9.5 million of funding to construct the dark fiber networks in South Portland and Belfast. Arctaris Broadband Company, LLC (ABC), a wholly owned and operated portfolio company of the Arctaris Opportunity Zone Funds, will act as the distribution agent and lessor owning the network. GWI will serve as lessee and build and operate the fiber network in both cities. A $1 million FAME Direct Loan was approved as well, and will be used for post-construction capital expenditures and working capital.

“FAME is pleased to support this important project as Maine moves to improve broadband access statewide, as well as make a positive difference for workers and families in these communities,” stated Carlos Mello, FAME Acting CEO.

About GWI

Founded in 1994 and headquartered in Biddeford, Maine, GWI (www.gwi.net) is a Maine owned and operated Internet Service Provider (ISP), serving residential and business customers and is an advocate for the expansion of high speed internet access in the state. The first broadband carrier in the nation to become B Corporation certified, GWI is an industry leader in designing, constructing, funding, and operating high-speed fiber networks. For press inquiries, please contact Colin Haley at 207-286-4990 or at colinhaley@staff.gwi.net.

About Arctaris Impact Investors

Arctaris Impact Investors, LLC is a Boston-based impact investment firm with experience spanning more than 13 years and six funds, with both debt and Opportunity Zone equity investments. The firm manages funds that invest in growth-oriented operating businesses and community infrastructure projects located in underserved communities. Founded in 2009, Arctaris has partnered with the Kresge Foundation, Harvard Business School Professor Michael Porter’s Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, and multiple...
other foundation, federal and state government agencies to invest in Opportunity Zones, inner cities, and targeted rural communities throughout the U.S., with the aim of delivering above-market investment returns alongside positive social impact. For more information visit www.arctaris.com or for press inquiries contact jane@arctaris.com.

About FAME

The Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) is a quasi-independent state agency that provides innovative financial solutions to help Maine citizens pursue business and educational opportunities. FAME helps to lead the creation of good paying jobs for Maine citizens by working at the nexus between economic and workforce development. To learn more about FAME, please visit www.famemaine.com

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