

# 2007 Volunteer of the Year

## Gale Given

By Tom Schuman



In today's broadband world, speed is the name of the game. Whether it's business applications or in-home entertainment, fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) is the key to unlocking virtually unlimited opportunities.

Verizon is the pioneer in FTTP. The company provides Internet connection rates at up to 30 and 50 Mbps (millions of bits per second), with testing currently taking place at even high levels. Gale Given, president of public affairs, policy and communications for Verizon's Great Lakes region, has also quickly made her mark since coming to Indiana four years ago.

Based in Indianapolis, Given oversees regulatory, legislative and external affairs efforts in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin. She was nominated to the Indiana Chamber board of directors in 2004 and serves on the health care policy, taxation policy and nominating committees.

Given is quick to credit the company and all its employees for business and community support accomplishments. In addition, the Indiana broadband landscape changed in early 2006 when the state was among the first to pass a comprehensive telecommunications reform package.

"Telecommunication reform has brought a huge amount of investment from both large and small companies," Given states, calling the company's FiOS Internet and video products (the company has invested \$100 million in its fiber optic network in Fort Wayne and New Haven and is investing nearly \$23 billion nationwide) the "most modern high-speed video system available in the world."

### Making an impact

Northeast Indiana has been at the forefront in Verizon's national network deployment. A strong partnership with Fort Wayne Mayor Graham Richard has opened up new community opportunities in enhanced education, telemedicine, safety communications and more. While the company is also nearing completion of high-speed Internet (through its copper-based network) to its territory throughout Southern Indiana, there are challenges in any expansion effort.

"We have a huge amount of rural geography and the communities are smaller (than in many other areas of the country)." Fort Wayne, Given notes, is smaller than other metropolitan areas in which this technology has been deployed. She says the challenge is to provide customers with the best services possible, while at the same time making sure the financial investment makes good business sense.

The company, however, continues to invest. The FiOS video product faces cable and satellite competition in Fort Wayne, but has fared very well in adding new customers. When high-speed Internet is introduced to a new population, the customer growth is tremendous. That growth naturally slows, but doesn't stop, as the product is in the market for a longer period of time.

There is a decline in traditional telephone service, Given says, as more homeowners go wireless, prompting further expansion in that aspect of the business. It's the fiber deployment and the capabilities it offers, however, that are the present and future.

"Once you get the bandwidth to the home, you're really unlimited. Then it becomes what do people want," she explains.

"When you have that bandwidth available, there are a lot of smart people out there coming up with applications."

### Coming to Indiana

Given, who earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from Marshall University, had an extensive

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Gale Given says the Verizon Foundation strongly supports the communities it serves, including matching funds for employee efforts.



## Given

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industry background with Verizon and other companies in West Virginia before coming to Indiana in November 2003. The fact that her oldest son was a Purdue University student at the time helped in the transition.

“When you move to a new state, you want to get involved where you can bring some things to the table,” Given offers in discussing her Chamber participation.

The Verizon Foundation has a national focus on workplace literacy, among other education and technology initiatives. In Indiana, Given and the company teamed with the Chamber to produce the 2005 report: “A Demand-Side Strategy to Meet Indiana’s Workforce Basic Skills Challenge.” The Verizon Foundation has sponsored two statewide summits on the topic and continues to support Chamber and business community efforts through the Ready Indiana workforce development program.

For the FiOS television expansion in the Fort Wayne area, Verizon hired 300 installation technicians who required advanced skills and training. They are working with complicated home entertainment networks and utilizing computers to be able to successfully complete the installations and upgrades.

Given contends that “the workforce has to be continually upgraded and retrained to help grow the economy, which is

good for all of us. At Verizon, we have to have good quality people coming in; then we can train them on what they need to know.”

Verizon focuses on employee involvement at the community level, with the foundation providing matching funds for participation in charity walks and other activities with nonprofit organizations. Volunteerism within the company takes place, according to Given, at a very high level with nearly \$767,000 contributed from the employees and the Verizon Foundation in Indiana in 2006.

She spent considerable time in Michigan earlier this year as that state successfully passed video legislation. There is more similarity, than differences, in what she sees in the five states in her region.

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“One thing that strikes me is that a lot of states are dealing with similar issues – the same things are being discussed or they’re using the same consultants,” Given explains. “What I watch and look out for is something novel, something different where you get the edge. An example would be the Toll Road (and Major Moves plan).”

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