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SUNY CORTLAND INSTALLS CUTTING-EDGE CAMPUS COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

When SUNY Cortland hired Daniel Sidebottom two years ago, the new director of administrative computing services answered the College's immediate concerns about its overworked data and voice communication systems with a cutting-edge solution that merged the two.

As of January 6, the entire SUNY Cortland telephone system – all 4,100 communications devices – was upgraded from a standard data-only network into one which uses internet protocol (IP) technologies, in other words, a voice and video enabled network infrastructure.

"The same mechanism used to send e-mail is now used to also transmit voice," said Sidebottom, who worked closely with both Cisco Systems, Inc. of San Jose, Calif., and Ronco Communications and Electronics of Tonawanda, NY, in making Cortland the first four-year SUNY campus to entirely transform its communications network to an IP model.

"There's an evolution going on in the voice industry and this is the technology that is emerging," Sidebottom added.

Once-futuristic dreams of telephones where both parties could see one another while talking are quickly approaching reality with IP-based communications. While not quite at that stage yet, the Cortland faculty, staff and students can now listen to their voice mail messages over their computers and check weather forecasts from around the nation on their telephones.

The Cortland University Police Department staff, who can **remotely access 911 calls from anywhere on campus**, can now add British-developed technology with the new system to further breakdown the voice patterns and content of these important transmissions.

"This is the same communications system that was used by FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and New York City Mayor Rudolph Guiliani the day after 9/11," said Trey Layton, Ronco's Vice President of Advanced Technologies.



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"You can take your phone, plug it in anywhere across campus and it will still be programmed to ring when your number is called," noted Layton.

New York City accepted Cisco's offer to use their communications technology when traditional phone systems were inoperable in New York City after the terrorist attacks but the internet was still intact allowing the IP model to function.

"The system meets security issues that have arisen after 9/11," added Sidebottom.

"You can take your phone, plug it in anywhere across campus and it will still be programmed to ring when your number is called," noted Layton. "A 911 command center would be mobile and could set up anywhere on campus using their same hardware."

Meanwhile, the College has been able to add the McDonald Building on Tompkins Street to its campus network and in August will add the West Campus apartment complex. Other areas at the College are also reaping benefits from the communications conversion.

"The SUNY Cortland Enrollment Management Office – admissions and financial aid – is using IP based call center software which is the largest application of that technology in the country," said Layton.

Josh Peluso, lead programming analyst with SUNY Cortland's administrative computing services, added a range of instantaneous services on the College's phones which include emergency campus messages, computer technical support, and the ability to access the campus phone directory.

The phones could be programmed to provide the latest news headlines or to facilitate the ordering of tickets to campus events.

The \$3.08 million SUNY Cortland project started in Spring 2001 when Associate Provost for Information Resources Paula Warnken and Sidebottom first considered a new communications system. Then, in April 2002, **the College selected Ronco, which has been partnering with Cisco for five years** on other ventures, to begin working on a specific IP model for the Cortland campus.

"They designed and configured the entire network, but it's been a real team effort," said Sidebottom.

Ronco President Chris Wasp agreed.

"This was a great challenge for our company to take this college environment and apply the latest technology," he said. "This doesn't happen without a lot of work. But it's the first stage in a long relationship."



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Cisco has provided communications systems for the city of Dallas and Dow Chemical, for example, but the SUNY Cortland system is one of the first in the U.S. in which a Cisco authorized installer, Ronco, and not the company itself performed the work from start to finish, noted Layton.

"Seven months of planning, 15 minutes to activate," quipped John Burns, Ronco's operations manager, as he sat in the crowded "war room" set up in SUNY Cortland's Miller Administration Building to troubleshoot all problems during the system's first week of operation.

"Nothing unexpected has happened," said Layton, who added that Ronco has 20 employees on campus during this transitional phase. Some "war room" members will reconvene later in January when the Cortland students and faculty return to campus and adjust to their new phones, but for now, the rest of the College community is busy learning the many benefits available to them.

"I couldn't ask for anything better," concluded Sidebottom.



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