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## Education segment fuels fast growth in Fibertech sales

By MIKE DICKINSON

Fibertech Networks LLC's booming education segment boosted its sales in the first quarter to nearly match its total 2003 sales.

The firm sold contracts worth \$39 million in the first three months of this year, President and CEO John Purcell said. It closed on some \$45 million in sales contracts during 2003, up 50 percent from 2002.

Fibertech, which turns 4 years old in May, in December logged its first profitable month.

"We've had a great quarter—the biggest ever," Purcell said. "(It's) across the board. Now we have (ensured) a profitable year."

The company in the first quarter notched sales in both its enterprise and telecommunications carrier segments, and all 14 geographic markets, he said.

The sales jump reflects a rebound in capital spending on telecommunications, particularly in the education arena. The need for broadband and the ability to connect separate buildings is driving the demand at schools. Available federal funding—through the Universal Service Program—is helping to pay for the expansion.

"Schools are now looking to gain some of the improvement in productivity that businesses saw in the 1990s," Purcell said.

Education spending on telecommunications networks is driving the speed of Fibertech's growth. Some 15 percent of this year's sales are connected to the non-collegiate educational market. Total education sales, including colleges and universities, account for 25 percent to 30 percent.

"They are the bluest of the blue-chip customers," Purcell said.

Fibertech provides fiber-optic networks to school districts in Connecticut, Penn-

sylvania and New York.

It has network deals with 31 school districts and has won competitive bids for 21 additional districts. Purcell expects at least 10 of those to come through this year.

The biggest deal for the Brighton company was a contract last month to expand data networks around Connecticut schools and libraries. It was the second-largest contract in Fibertech history, trailing only its deal with Choice One Communications Inc.

Records at the schools and libraries division of the Universal Service Administrative Co. show the five-year contract to be worth some \$30 million.

The new contract calls for Fibertech to provide Connecticut with broadband fiber-optic connections using portions of its existing networks in Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven. In addition, Fibertech will extend service to Danbury, New London, Stamford and other areas.

The project is expected to double the number of K-12 districts to be added to the Connecticut Education Network this year, from the 53 currently being connected, to 87.

Fibertech will have 650 route miles in Connecticut when the new contract is completed, up from 250 route miles.

State officials claim the Connecticut Education Network is the largest educational, Ethernet-based broadband network in the country. It links K-12 public schools, college campuses and libraries throughout the state.

"This critical network resource will significantly upgrade our ability to provide state-of-the-art technology to students throughout Connecticut," said Rock Regan, chief information officer for the Connecticut Department of Information Technology, in a statement.

Fibertech's collegiate business includes work for Yale University and Rochester

Institute of Technology.

Fibertech today announced a deal with the Community College of Allegheny County to provide the Pittsburgh college—the nation's 16th-largest multicampus community college—with a high-speed dark-fiber network. Dark fiber is the term for fiber optics unlit by communications electronics. The company is connecting five locations.

Christina Russell, director of information technology services at the college, said it aims to provide broader access to new communications tools and technologies across its campus locations.

"(Our college's mission) is also to provide our students with superior technology resources with which to learn and achieve their career goals," she said. "This type of infrastructure will allow for faster development of new services and expanded access and faster implementation of these services."

Under the terms of the agreement, CCAC will lease dark fiber from portions of Fibertech's 221-mile network in Pittsburgh.

In addition to Pittsburgh, Fibertech has completed its core networks in 13 other midsize cities: Rochester; Syracuse; Buffalo; Binghamton; Albany; Indianapolis, Ind.; Columbus, Ohio; Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven, Conn.; Providence, R.I.; and Worcester and Springfield, Mass.

The company in February said it would build fiber-optic networks in metropolitan Wilmington, Del., and Stamford, Conn.—its 15th and 16th cities.

Fibertech has 74 employees, with 67 in Rochester. Its work force has remained steady here the last few years.

The company has added two people in the Connecticut area and is looking for additional staffers.

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