

Technology Corner
By: George Champine

Wireless Networking

Wireless networking is becoming increasingly popular in Quailrun and in the country in general. The advantage is that you can put the computer anywhere in the house and get internet access. Wireless is especially attractive with laptop computers because you can sit anywhere and get Internet connection. In fact, several people in Quailrun have replaced desktop computers, with their large size and tangle of wires, with laptops and wireless. (I accept donations of old computers to be refurbished and given free to senior citizens.)

To implement wireless, you must purchase a router with a wireless capability. A router is a device that allows two or more computers to share access to the Internet. The current most popular wireless standard is 802.11B, and these routers are available for about \$40. The router plugs into the cable or DSL modem in place of the computer. The most popular brand is Linksys (although there are several other high quality units), and most have four wireless connections and four Ethernet wired connections. This means that you can have up to eight computers sharing the same connection to the Internet. More recently, routers supporting a newer wireless standard called 802.11G (sometimes called “wireless G”) have become available at a higher price. These also support 802.11B. Although these 802.11G routers are faster, I doubt that many people would notice the difference in speed.

To complete the wireless connectivity, your computer (desktop or laptop) must have wireless capability. Many computers now have wireless capability built-in, but if not, you can buy a wireless network adapter for about \$40. Wireless network adapters come in three kinds: 1) a PCMCIA card for laptops (very convenient), 2) an add-in PCI card (often finicky) for a desktop computer, and 3) a USB wireless adapter that works on both and which I recommend because of easy installation.

Your wireless computer has the ability to “see” all wireless routers within a few hundred feet. From my unit on 2 Strawberry, I can “see” four wireless routers. If the signal strength is strong enough, I (or anyone) can connect to the internet through them if the wireless link is not encrypted. Unless you have set up your computer to allow file sharing, this does no harm because the “piggybacker” can not see or access anything on your computer or see anything that you send or receive over the wireless link. If you want to prevent anyone from “piggybacking” on your wireless link, implement encryption by following the instructions that come with your wireless router. Using encryption slows the link down by 20 percent to 40 percent, and serious hackers can break the encryption if so motivated. Note that when computers come from the dealer they are configured to prevent sharing. If you elect to set up file sharing, the system requires a password that provides protection.

Because of its convenience, wireless internet connectivity (also called Wi-Fi) is sweeping the country. Many motels now offer free wireless internet access, for example Fairfield

Inn. There is a monthly charge for wireless access at Starbucks, but the first month is free. Many McDonald's restaurants have wireless for a small fee. The going rate seems to be about \$6 per hour. There are 16 wireless access points in zip code 01749 including Ariba Coffee on Main Street and McDonalds on Washington Street. In the longer term, many cities are implementing city-wide free wireless access. Cities that have made this commitment include: Athens GA, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Francisco, and others. For a fairly complete listing of wireless access points including our zip code, see <http://www.JiWire.com> or <http://www.MetroFreeFi.com>. The wide availability of access points make it attractive to take a laptop along when you travel.