


# New Frontiers in Telecommunications



**A** faculty member's vision, an automobile ride to Rochester and a fortuitous meeting helped initiate and cement collaborative relationships for SUNY Orange with Citizens Communications Company/Frontier and Rochester Institute of Technology that will bolster the College's curriculum, enhance students' transfer options and put graduates in position for employment consideration by Frontier.

Thanks to its partnership with Citizens/Frontier, the College will cut the ribbon on a state-of-the-art telecommunications laboratory in the Bio-Tech Building (Room 357) this spring with an eye toward offering the first courses of its new telecommunications degree program (Associate in Applied Science degree in electrical engineering technology) this fall.

Frontier and several of its vendors donated all of the equipment for a 1,400-square-foot lab that will supplement the new degree program, which is expected to receive full New York State Department of Education approval this spring as well.

After completing a telecommunications graduate course during the summer of 2005, **Fern Steane**, chair of the College's Applied Technology Department, began considering ways to modernize the department, specifically the electrical engineering technology degree program. That fall,

College officials started discussing a local paid student internship program with Frontier and ways that SUNY Orange could upgrade its applied technologies curriculum.

The subsequent involvement of SUNY Orange President **Dr. William Richards** and **Maggie Wilderotter**, chairman and chief executive officer of Citizens Company (parent company to Frontier), vaulted the project toward fruition. But it wasn't until College officials visited Rochester last summer that the full impact of the project crystallized. That's when the SUNY Orange contingent met a Frontier employee who had at one time been a community college student.

"We talked with him a lot about how a telecommunications program at his community college would have benefited him," says **Dr. Melody Festa**, associate vice president. "He said the learning curve on the equipment would have been faster had he been exposed to it earlier. The Frontier lab we saw him working in was cutting-edge. He had never been exposed to that type of lab, but he said having it at the community college level would have given him a phenomenal advantage."

"Frontier believes we are going to produce the telecommunications employees of the future by working with SUNY Orange," **Tom FitzGerald**, Frontier's vice president of operations for New York state, says. "Telecommunications is a great industry. It is always evolving and this lab can create and attract great students for SUNY Orange."

FitzGerald says the unique collaborative philosophies of Richards and Wilderotter were vital to the project's success, and demonstrate the endless possibilities available when educational and business leaders unite.

"These two CEOs think differently about their worlds of education and business, and how to effectively utilize resources outside the borders of both," he explains. "For them, there are no boundaries, and they are proving that it is important that business, education and communities make an impact together for everyone in that community to be successful."

Input from Frontier employees **Sue McDermott**, network engineer, and **Janet O'Connor**, senior technical analyst, along with SUNY Orange professor **Arlin Bartlett**, has created a lab that will allow students to replicate every aspect of Frontier's daily operation, and will serve as a fertile training ground not only for SUNY Orange students, but current and future Frontier employees in the region.

"An added benefit is that the College has been able to collaborate with RIT on transfer agreements that benefit our students," Festa says.

"Without Frontier's collaboration, this whole thing would have been impossible. SUNY Orange could not have offered an adequate telecommunications program without the proper equipment. It would have been a disservice to our students," Steane asserts. "Frontier facilitated acquisition of the equipment for us and also helped us develop a relationship with RIT. Quite frankly, SUNY Orange could not have afforded to do this on its own."

Frontier has also agreed to continue its partnership with SUNY Orange, assuring not only that the College will have access to the latest equipment as it is developed, but a bright future for students and citizens who aspire to a career in telecommunications.