

**Publication:**The Virginian-Pilot;**Date:**Aug 29, 2005;**Section:**Hampton Roads;**Page Number:**18

# Elizabeth City on the digital edge

**W**hen you think "high-tech," Elizabeth City is the last place that pops to mind.

But thanks to entrepreneurial spirit, downtown E. City now has something most of its bigger, richer neighbors to the north lack: free wireless Internet service for anyone with a modem.

Best of all, taxpayers aren't on the hook for a dime of the cost.

Free Wi-Fi for E.C. is the brainchild of Frank Paris and Danny Teachey, who founded a company called American Wi-Fi. Paris' friendship with the creator of a similar company that established free hot spots in Morgan Hill, Calif., and in Hampton, led him to consider setting one up in Elizabeth City.

It works the same way as radio: Local online advertisements pay for a service residents can access for free. With that financial backing, Paris and Teachey installed two antennas at Elizabeth City's waterfront, and downtown residents have begun to surf away.

Some have complained that the sig-

nal isn't strong enough. Others have eagerly dragged chairs to different rooms or onto the city's sidewalks to access their favorite Web sites. Paris and Teachey are reportedly considering adding a third antenna.

**Elizabeth City now has free wireless Internet, something it's richer northern neighbors lack.**

Wi-Fi spots aren't new. Computer users have been able to log in for years now in hotels, restaurants, schools and stores. But there's almost always a fee or taxpayer money involved.

With this venture, Elizabeth City becomes only

the third city in America to offer free Wi-Fi to the public, paid for by local ads instead of taxpayers.

In an age of \$50 gas fill-ups, when every penny counts, the free service means many citizens can forgo monthly Internet service bills.

It also helps bridge the digital divide. Poorer residents, who might have had a hand-me-down laptop but not enough money for Internet service, will now be wired for free.

Paris and Teachey deserve credit for a vivid reminder that the free market and the greater good can go hand in hand.