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## **A big call becomes a sure thing**

Local telecommunications provider Bendigo Community Telco is this year celebrating ten years of operation.

Ten years ago several major telecommunications companies were approached with the aim of establishing a community-based telco in the Bendigo region.

“The concept was based on the success of Bendigo Bank’s Community Bank model, and telecommunications was seen as another avenue for retaining locally generated profits in the local community.” said CEO Phil Lazenby.

In the end fourteen local businesses took up the initiative, pledged their combined telco spend to the idea and made it a reality.

In 2000 Bendigo Community Telco began and the concept is now celebrating ten successful years of operation.

“Here in Bendigo we have grown from servicing the original fourteen foundation clients up to over 5,000 and still counting, ” said Mr Lazenby.

In fact it has been so successful that Community Telco Australia, which is led by Bendigo Community Telco’s original CEO Andrew Cairns, was created in July 2003 to take the model into other Australian regional centres.

Mr Lazenby added, “Naturally we can provide leading edge telecommunications solutions to all levels of business, however the major reason our customer base continues to grow is the personal service we can provide.”

Further evidence of a sustained commitment to building a lasting and meaningful community asset was shown when Bendigo Community Telco became the first public company in 50 years to launch on the Bendigo Stock Exchange. Shareholders continue to receive a fully franked, healthy dividend.

Bendigo Community Telco Ltd trading as Bendigo Community Telco™ ABN 88 089 782 203

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Even as Bendigo Community Telco positions itself to be a major facilitator in the adoption of fibre optics to the region in readiness for the National Broadband Network, Mr Lazenby reminds us that it's important to remember why the telco was created: "The Chairman of Bendigo Community Telco, Rob Hunt, the visionary behind this concept and the Community Bank concept, has long stated that Bendigo has always drawn on its own resources to build and sustain itself and that its strength has always been its sense of community."

"That strength increases when money generated in the community stays put."

A previously conducted survey by La Trobe University demonstrated that Bendigo Community Telco boosted total regional output by \$74.3 million, which corresponds to 272 jobs. It has also generated highly skilled employment in the Bendigo area.

Chairman Rob Hunt points out, "Since our inception, increased competition has seen Bendigo's telco marketplace repositioned into one of the most competitive in Australia and telecommunications infrastructure improved and developed. And importantly, we have helped retain capital flows," said Mr Lazenby.

As it celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Bendigo Community Telco can be confident of lasting success. It began as an idea based on a strong belief in local communities and their right to sustain themselves. Over the following decade it has proven what a committed community can achieve.

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