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SciTech

Houston grandmother becomes USA's first 'Super Wi-Fi' user



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Washington: When Federal Communications Commission in the United States worked out the rules last year to convert unused TV channels for a new long-range, wall-piercing version of Wi-Fi, Houston resident Leticia Aguirre had no way of knowing that she would host the nation's first residential 'Super Wi-Fi' hot spot.

"I've wanted to have the Internet for a long time, but it's very expensive," said Aguirre, 48, a working grandmother who's never had a reliable Internet connection at her home.

Thanks to a partnership between Rice University wireless communications researchers and Houston non-profit Technology For All (TFA), Aguirre's home became a Super Wi-Fi hot spot this month.

TFA and Rice plan to add more Super Wi-Fi links in Aguirre's neighbourhood in coming months, and with companies racing to develop Super Wi-Fi technology, the type of network that Rice and TFA are deploying for 3,000 residents in East Houston could become a common fixture in cities and rural areas in the coming decade.

Rice's professor Edward Knightly, whose research group built the prototype Super Wi-Fi equipment that Aguirre is using, said, "We want to develop this technology so that it benefits the most people by accessing the right spectrum for the right users. Having Mrs Aguirre as our first user shows the potential benefits for people who've been underserved with traditional broadband."



Leticia Aguirre accesses her Super Wi-Fi connection

When Knightly's research group teamed up with TFA to launch a free community broadband Wi-Fi network in the East Houston neighborhood of Pecan Park in 2004, Aguirre was one of the first homeowners to agree to host a Wi-Fi hot spot.

That network, TFA-Wireless, now serves a three-square-mile area. But Aguirre, who lives at the edge of the network, has never received a good Wi-Fi signal at her home, reports physorg.com.

"I need the Internet to see that my paychecks have been deposited and to do other things," she said. "When they called me to see if I wanted to try this, it was an answer to my prayers."

Aguirre said she is looking forward to using email and Skype to stay in touch with friends and family, including her three children and her five-year-old grandson, and to watching religious videos online and learning more about how a computer can help her in her daily life.

To users, the new hot spot looks like any other; it can be accessed with any Wi-Fi device. Behind the scenes, the network uses 'dynamic spectrum access' to automatically shift between traditional Wi-Fi and unused UHF digital TV channels to provide the best possible coverage.

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