



Connecting

Today at 5:06am



What began with one connection and one antenna has resulted in connections across the nation and research that is bringing broadband opportunities across the world.

<http://networks.rice.edu/publications.html#conf>

What began as a chance meeting in Monterey, California ten years ago has resulted in personal and digital connections that have advanced wireless research and created an opportunity for four young people in a low-income Houston neighborhood to enjoy the NCAA Sweet 16 regionals in Houston this weekend.

Yesterday, Technology For All received four tickets by overnight delivery from Colorado. The tickets are for the NCAA regional basketball games this weekend and were received as a donation from a donor I first met by email on Wednesday afternoon. Because of his donation four of the kids that use the computer lab at our office at Mission Milby will be attending the two games tonight (Baylor vs. St. Mary's and Duke vs. Purdue) and the regional finals on Sunday afternoon. How the donation came to be is a study in the ways that people make connections today. It is different than it used to be.

In 2000 I met Tony Elam, then assistant dean of the Rice School of Engineering, at a meeting we were both attending in Monterey, California. We attended the meeting at the invitation of a company named Enron and its Broadband division. While in California, we struck up a conversation and discovered that we lived very close to each other in Houston and even ate regularly in the same TexMex restaurant. We were connected.

In 2003, Technology For All received a small collaborative grant from the Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund that provided us the opportunity to install a one gigabit fiber circuit into the Mission Milby building where we office in Houston's East End.

Fast forward to 2004 when I was drinking coffee at the house one morning and reading the Houston Chronicle newspaper. In the paper that morning I read an article by Eric Berger, who is now the "SciGuy" in the list of Houston Chronicle blogs. The article noted that Rice University had received a National Science Foundation grant with several other major universities across the nation. The grant was to fund research that would someday make it possible for 100 million homes in America to access at least 100 megabits of bandwidth. The article stated that the Rice researchers were going to be studying wireless solutions to the challenge. That intrigued me. The lead scientist on the project was to be a man by the name of Dr. Edward Knightly. I remembered my friend Tony Elam and sent him by email an online link to the Houston Chronicle article. I asked, "Do you know this professor?"

We corresponded by email and he shared with me that "Ed" Knightly was one of the rising stars at Rice and that he was on sabbatical as a visiting professor at École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Lausanne, Switzerland. So my friend Tony introduced us by email and early one morning for Ed, and late one night for me, we talked briefly by phone. I told him that TFA had excess bandwidth (at least 100 megabits) that we would be willing to contribute to his research with the hope that together we could someday provide wireless Internet services to the low-income neighborhood around our office. That phone call began the development of a research relationship and friendship that continues to this day. So today, over 4000 users in the neighborhood around our office are able to access wireless Internet and Rice has been able to advance research in the field. To date, over 75 journal articles have been published from research on the project. See the list here.

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About two years ago two Rice alums were in Houston (from Colorado) for the Rice business plan competition. My friend Ed introduced them to TFA and the collaborative wireless project with Rice because of an interest they had expressed. Ed hosted us at a wonderful meal and conversation at the Back Street Café on Shepherd Drive.



Earlier this week I got a phone call and an email from Cindy, one of the Rice alums that we had dinner with. It seems that a friend of theirs had four tickets to the NCAA regionals here in Houston. "Would TFA be interested in using them to send some deserving youth to the games." I quickly said, "Yes!" Cindy put me in touch by email with their friend in Colorado and this weekend four of our youth will enjoy the games. Today, these four youth have the world at their fingertips because of TFA-Wireless and the research by Dr. Knightly's team.

What began as a face to face meeting in Monterey, California in 2000 and the reading of a brief article in the print version of the Houston Chronicle way back in 2004 has resulted in digital and personal connections across the country and across the world.

That is the power of connections.