



In Texas Trial Coordinated by Rice University

by [Karl Bode](#)

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Last fall the FCC finally [began crafting rules](#) for white space wireless broadband, which uses unlicensed and partially vacated spectrum created by the shift to digital television. Broadcasters (and [Dolly Parton](#)) have been worried about the technology's potential for interference, the FCC assigning Google and eight others as [overseers of spectrum databases](#), used to match electronic devices with unused, unlicensed TV spectrum. Aside from an ongoing hospital trial of the technology [Ohio](#), real world deployment of this technology has been slow in coming.

Today Rice University announced that thanks to a partnership between Rice University wireless communications researchers and Houston nonprofit Technology For All (TFA), one Houston grandmother is among the first consumers to give this technology (which Rice and the FCC have dubbed "Super Wi-Fi") a spin.

Rice University electrical and computer engineering Professor Edward Knightly has worked since 2004 with TFA to build a community Wi-Fi network in the East Houston neighborhood of Pecan Park. One user of that network, 48-year-old Leticia Aguirre, consistently saw poor coverage from the network and had never had reliable broadband -- so she was selected as the first person to receive a prototype in-home "Super Wi-Fi" hotspot.



Since the service operates using 500-700MHz signals, it more easily penetrates walls and can deliver service at longer range. Additional prototype devices will be offered to area locals and graduate students involved in the effort. The bill for the White Space upgrade is being footed by the National Science Foundation, though Rice University is also working closely with companies like Cisco and Microsoft on the project.

"Mrs. Aguirre was the perfect user for this because of the problems we had serving her with traditional Wi-Fi," said Ryan Guerra, a Rice graduate student who spent several months creating the Super Wi-Fi equipment that TFA-Wireless installed at Aguirre's home. Guerra notes the new hot spot looks like a traditional Wi-Fi device, and can be accessed by any Wi-Fi capable device. According to Rice, 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.

Will Reed, president and CEO of TFA insists the fact this trial is happening in a community broadband setting is significant. According to Reed, white space broadband "has a real potential to break down barriers and bring broadband to underserved urban and rural communities."

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