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State Technology Department Receives Prestigious National e-Government Award

“Access Delaware” Project Will Enhance Access To Information and Services by Delawareans. System available at 866-276-2353 (toll free)

A project initiated by the Delaware Department of Technology and Information has been selected as an award recipient in the 2003 Accenture and MIT Digital Government award competition (<http://www.digitalgovawards.org/>). The Department’s “Access Delaware” project is a groundbreaking new initiative that is focused on providing alternative mechanisms for Delaware agencies to deliver Internet-based information and services to citizens.

The announcement was made today at the e-Gov 2003 Conference and Exposition, which is being held in Washington DC. State Chief Information Officer Thomas Jarrett will accept the award, presented for the outstanding pilot or prototype e-Government project, on behalf of the Department of Technology and Information. Digital Government Award recipients were selected from nearly 200 nominations from across the United States, representing a 60% increase in the number of submissions over the 2002 awards nominations. This year’s winners are being honored before nearly 1,000 government and industry executives at the e-Gov Conference.

“This is a highly prestigious national award that recognizes the very best e-Government programs from across the country that use technology to improve service delivery,” said Secretary Jarrett. “We are extremely proud to find our work so highly acclaimed among that of other governments from across the country.”

Delaware’s project began last fall with the help of Lt. Governor John Carney, who helped launch the State’s *Voice Portal*. The project is focused on providing new channels for the public to access government services and information. Specifically, the project encourages the use of a new technology called VoiceXML. This new Internet technology will allow Delaware agencies to

provide phone-based access for Delaware citizens to services and information previously available only on the "visual" web. The State of Delaware Voice Portal can be accessed by calling 866-276-2353 (toll free).

"One of the fundamental goals of state government is to provide access to information by citizens," said Delaware Governor Ruth Ann Minner. "Finding ways to bridge the Digital Divide, by using new technologies and applying creative ideas, are just some of the ways that the Department of Technology is helping to lead the charge to address this important issue."

VoiceXML is a technology that makes any telephone (even a rotary phone) an Internet device. This is important for governments because access to telephones far surpasses Internet-connected computers. Statistics from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration indicate telephone penetration rates nationally of about 94 percent. Additionally, using telephones to provide access to web-based information helps address other basic Internet access issues like computer literacy -- a voice-based interface is much more natural and user friendly to individuals without computer training.

"VoiceXML is not a panacea for the problem of the Digital Divide," said Lieutenant Governor John Carney. "However, we believe that it is an important component in our strategy to address this problem and fulfill our fundamental mission of providing ready access to government information and services."

Since its inception, the State Voice Portal (available at 866-276-2353) has housed several important voice services for Delaware citizens:

- § The **Internet Access Locator** allows citizens to search for locations in their neighborhoods that provide public Internet access. Users can search by speaking the name of a city or town, speaking a zip code or by entering a zip code on their touch-tone phone.
- § The **Polling Place Locator** (operation from October 24 -- November 5, 2002) allowed any Delaware citizen to locate their polling place for the statewide general election.
- § The **Voice-Enabled Tax Service Center** provides Delaware taxpayers with a suite of services to help them file their taxes, and to access information on the status of their personal tax refund.

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The Department of Technology and Information also wishes to acknowledge the Delaware Government Information Center and Diamond Technologies for their contributions during the development of the Internet Access Locator.