

PORT NETWORKS

PRESS RELEASE

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Mesh Network Developed for Military Clears Tabs for Inner Harbor Dinner Cruises

Baltimore, MD – October 22, 2008 – For most businesses, processing a credit card charge is as easy as swiping the card and waiting for an approval to come back through the Internet. That simple task is much more of a challenge, though, if you're Spirit Cruises of Baltimore and you're trying to process that charge for a customer on board a ship plying Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

This summer, the company solved that problem – and other networking challenges – by adding its three ships and its operations center to the Inner Harbor Wireless Mesh Network operated by Baltimore-based Port Networks. Now, Spirit Cruises is able to process normal restaurant operations throughout most of each cruise, instead of being limited to live sales only at the dock.

"We spent many months and tens of thousands of dollars trying to set up reliable wireless links, but this is the first time we've had a system that works," says Tom D'Amato, a vice president at Spirit Cruises.

With the new system in place, Spirit Cruises has been able to streamline operations and cut costs, with staff completing administrative tasks on the way in from a cruise instead of after the ship has docked. Because credit card charges can now be verified on the water, they can also resolve any problems before customers disembark.

Best of all, the company was up and running with the new system in record time. Port Networks designed, installed, and configured the on-board systems in less than two weeks, putting to use its experience in mesh networking installation and its existing infrastructure around the harbor. The company provides Spirit Cruises a package that includes network access, equipment rental, maintenance, and support, all for a flat monthly fee.

Locally Developed Technology

The core of the Inner Harbor Wireless Mesh Network is made up of equipment from Persistent Systems, a wireless startup founded by two Johns Hopkins graduate students. Though Persistent Systems specializes in military applications for its mesh technology, called WaveRelay, Port Networks has successfully deployed the company's products in non-military installations around Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

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Mesh Network Developed for Military Clears Tabs for Inner Harbor Dinner Cruises, cont.

“WaveRelay incorporates an outstanding algorithm for moving traffic through a wireless mesh,” notes Carl Peterson, Network Manager for Port Networks. “Using hardware from Persistent Systems allows us to build a very resilient network that our customers can count on.”

To maximize reliability, the private mesh network Port Networks built for Spirit Cruises features two radios at each point in the mesh, one operating in the 2.4GHz range and the other operating in the 5.8GHz range. Even if there is interference in one of the two bands, the system keeps working because traffic is automatically routed to the radio with the best signal.

Telemetry Instead of Telescopes

Like other mesh networks, the ship-to-shore system in use by Spirit Cruises can keep track of thousands of small data packets flying through the air. Unlike other mesh networks, it can also keep track of several large ships slicing through the water.

By incorporating GPS transceivers into the system and creating an interface between the private mesh network and Google Earth, Port Networks has added real-time vessel tracking to the system. Staff at the Spirit Cruises operations center can watch the ships come and go on their computer screens, while simultaneously monitoring the wireless links between the ships and the center.

“It can be a bit captivating,” says Peterson. “As a network manager, it’s great to be able to see how the whole system is functioning, even as parts of the network move across the water.”

Because the design developed for Spirit Cruises offers both highly-reliable data connectivity and real-time tracking, Port Networks sees wide applicability for the system in other maritime settings.

“For ferries or water taxis or anyone else conveying paying customers, we think this makes a lot of sense,” says Port Networks General Manager Hugh Bethell. “They get the ability to process credit cards while underway, and an easy tool for showing customers the location of each vessel in the fleet. Imagine using your iPhone to check when the next water taxi will arrive at your stop. With this technology, that’s easy to accomplish.”

The company is also talking with law enforcement agencies about using a similar system to transmit data back and forth to patrol boats and helicopters. Because it features redundant, fail-safe technology, the system will work even when one node on the network is moving at high speed. Persistent Systems has tested its links at up to 80mph.

Meanwhile, Spirit Cruises is considering expanding its use of the system to other cities it serves.

About Spirit Cruises of Baltimore

Spirit Cruises, LLC, purchased locally owned Harbor Cruises in March 2007 and is recognized as the largest harbor cruise company in America. Its fleet of 12 ships offers dining, entertainment and sightseeing cruises in seven of America’s most popular port cities including Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New York, Weehawken (NJ), Norfolk, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

About Port Networks

Port Networks is a privately-held wireless equipment developer and Internet service provider, located in Baltimore, MD. The company was founded in 2003 and serves customers in the marine, residential, and commercial markets.

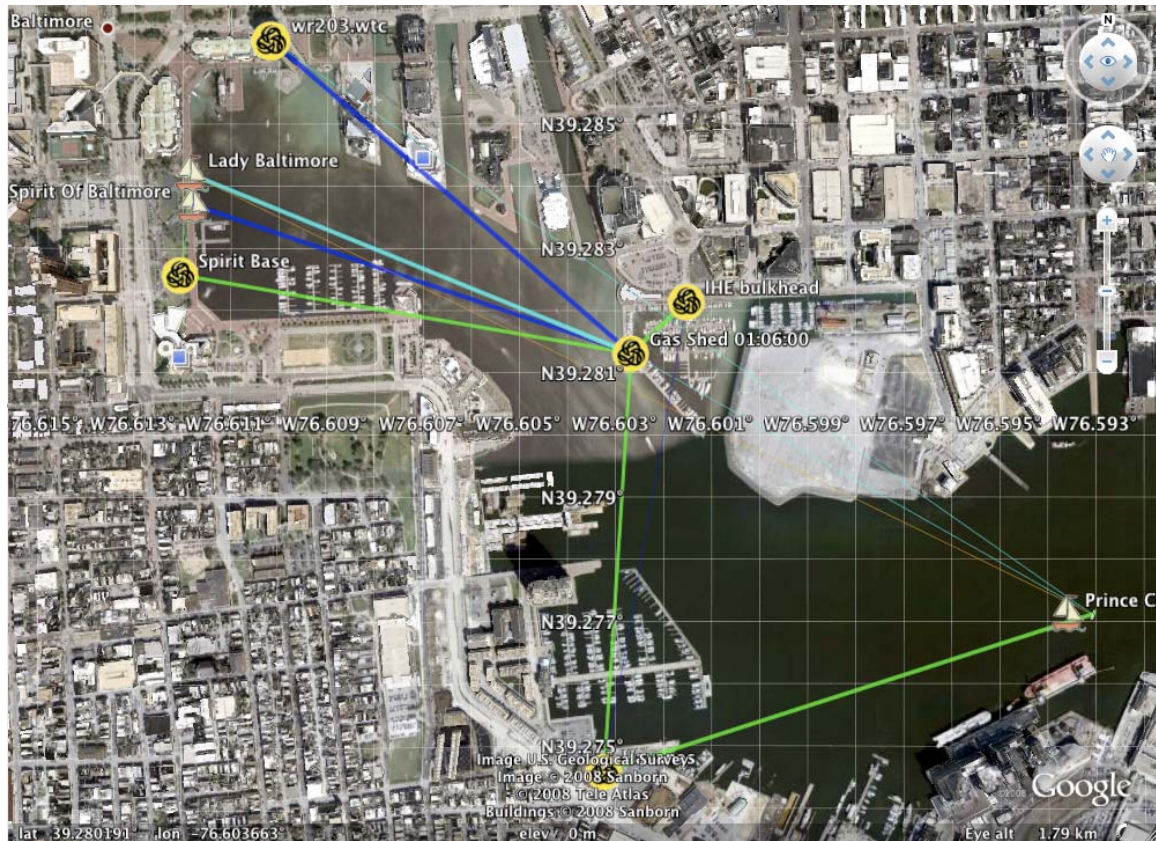


Photo Caption: “Using a private mesh network developed by Port Networks, Spirit Cruises is able to track and communicate with the ships in its fleet while they are underway.”

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