



Ledger Dispatch



Sunday, June 15, 2008

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A-TCAA launches five-county Internet improvement project

Friday, June 13, 2008

By [Staff Report](#)

The Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency has secured a \$250,000 grant from the California Emerging Technology Fund to help five rural Sierra counties improve high speed Internet access for all households and businesses.

The one-year project, called A-TCAA Central Sierra Connect, launched with the first meeting of the project advisory council yesterday morning and a three-hour community forum yesterday afternoon at Ironstone Vineyards in Murphy's.

A-TCAA Central Sierra Connect involves Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa and Tuolumne counties. It is part of a statewide effort to help rural counties gain 100 percent coverage for high speed Internet and encourage wider use of technology by all residents. The CETF, created as part of private telecommunication company mergers, is charged with helping rural areas "catch up" to urban areas of the state.

"Ultimately, we all want high speed Internet to be as universal as telephone service and as easy to use for all residents including low-income, senior and disabled people," said project coordinator Michelle Shelton. "That is vital to the future of our communities."

Central Sierra Connect is the second of seven rural regions in the state to secure a CETF planning grant - the first, Redwood Coast Connect serving Humboldt, Del Norte, Trinity and Mendocino counties, was funded last year.

The Central Sierra Connect grant will pay for A-TCAA to lead a one-year planning effort that will pave the way for counties to apply for millions of dollars of public funding that will soon be available for rural communications improvements.

Each county will be contributing time and funding to the project, and each will be able to develop its own more detailed plans for future projects.

Calaveras County's Mary Sawicki, the program manager for Calaveras Works and Human Services, said broadband connections are essential for helping disenfranchised people find jobs and resources. "It has been said over 80 percent of employment opportunities are advertised on the Internet," she said. "The Internet opens up resources and educational opportunities that appear almost limitless. The most important next step is to work with the network of broadband providers to see how far and wide the service can become available."

Shelton said the community forum on June 12 was to give interested residents a chance to learn more, ask questions and get involved.

A presentation by Ernie Woods from Connected Nation, the pilot project A-TCAA's grant is based on, was also scheduled for the afternoon. As Connected Nation's project management director, Woods provides project management for Connected Nation engagements regarding technology development and implementation. Connected Nation is a national 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization widely recognized for its ability to improve digital inclusion. Connected Nation expands access to and use of broadband Internet and the related technologies that are enabled when communities and families have the opportunity and desire to connect. Connected Nation has garnered international, industry-wide recognition as a best-practice model for technology expansion. The model relies on a public-private structure to accomplish extensive broadband asset mapping and to create customized local technology plans through grassroots eCommunity Leadership Teams.

For more information, visit www.centralsierraconnect.org and www.connectednation.org.

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