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California Emerging Technology Fund and the City of Vernon Announce Major Grants to the Southeast Cities to Close the Digital Divide

A three-year project will help approximately 3,200 residents of Los Angeles County's southeast cities get ahead with high-speed broadband Internet access and education

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VERNON, Calif., Sept 11, 2008 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- The California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) and the City of Vernon today presented grant awards of \$476,000 and \$301,000 respectively to the Southeast Cities Technology Collaborative for a three-year initiative to close the growing Digital Divide among residents in the southeast cities of Los Angeles County. The event was attended by Michael Peevey, president of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and chairman of CETF, Ronald Garcia, president of the Southeast Community Development Corporation (SCDC), Leonis Malburg, mayor of Vernon, former State Senator Martha Escutia, and Leticia Chacon, associate director of Human Services Association (HSA) Bell Gardens.

"We're pleased to support the southeast community of Los Angeles County," said Michael Peevey, president of the CPUC and chairman of CETF. "Investing in high-speed Internet access will encourage the social, educational and economic advancement and help community residents get ahead. We think that the Southeast Cities Technology Collaborative will be a model for other regions to replicate."

Although adoption of high-speed broadband Internet technology is steadily increasing across the nation and within California, many underserved populations exist without Internet access. Almost all adults with household incomes above \$80,000 use computers (94 percent) and the Internet (92 percent), while those with household incomes under \$40,000 are far less likely to use either computers (58 percent) or the Internet (49 percent), according to the Public Policy Institute of California. Three in four Californians (75 percent) report that they use a computer at home, work or school, and 70 percent use the Internet. Latinos lag far behind other groups with only 58 percent using computers and 48 percent using the Internet.

A recent study conducted by the University of California in Berkeley has shown that residents of the southeast cities, including the communities of Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy, Huntington Park, Maywood, South Gate, Vernon and Walnut Park / Florence-Firestone, are largely disconnected from the Internet due to the lack of broad public access to computers, technical assistance and computer literacy education. This reality, referred to as the Digital Divide, is a concern for California's future global competitiveness.

In order to bridge the Digital Divide, the Southeast Cities Technology Collaborative will conduct a three-year technology initiative in these communities to develop strong pathways for improving educational and health outcomes by expanding community broadband access, implementing a comprehensive computer literacy program and enhancing existing community service programs throughout the region.

"We're grateful for this opportunity to advance our community," said Ronald Garcia, president of the Southeast Community Development Corporation (SCDC). "For California to be a global leader in broadband, there must be a broader and deeper understanding among California policymakers, civic leaders and consumers of how broadband technology can improve quality of life, enhance economic prosperity and help reduce impacts on the environment."

This project is the first of many initiatives beginning statewide that will help

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underserved communities and populations get ahead by closing the Digital Divide through the use of high-speed Internet access and education. CETF's overall goal is to make a substantial and measurable impact on bridging California's Digital Divide in rural areas, urban disadvantaged neighborhoods, and among people with disabilities. Achieving this goal will require both the availability of broadband technology as well as the ability to access and use it.

The Southeast Cities Technology Collaborative will serve at least 1,700 residents, plus 500 students with the adult education training programs, and 1,000 children/youth over a three-year period. The Collaborative will develop eight Regional Technology Centers in eight communities by strategically locating 80 computer workstations in community facilities, providing space and staff members to enhance early learning skills for children, math and science skills for youth, career and workforce development and financial literacy skills for adults. A total of 500 adult students that successfully complete a three-month computer literacy class will receive a free refurbished computer and two years of free AT&T DSL service.

A mobile computer lab with 15 laptops and a projector will be established to provide life-skills, health awareness and job development classes at on-site locations that want to offer classes yet cannot accommodate a learning center. The Collaborative will partner with East Los Angeles Community College (South Gate Branch), Southwest Community College and Huntington Park-Bell Adult School and will refer students for advanced classes.

"By supporting this project, Vernon will be a part of truly transforming and improving the quality of life for residents in nearby cities," said Leonis Malburg, Mayor of Vernon. "The mobile lab will mean that people living in the southeast cities will have access to the Internet and technology like never before."

About the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF)

The mission of the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) is to close the Digital Divide and ensure that California is a global leader in the use of broadband technology (high-speed access to the Internet). The California Public Utilities Commission directed the establishment of CETF in approving the mergers of SBC-AT&T and Verizon-MCI in 2005. AT&T and Verizon are contributing a total of \$60 million in seed capital to advance broadband deployment and adoption. CETF is a non-profit public-benefit corporation. For more information, please visit <http://www.cetfund.org> or call (415) 744-CETF.

About the Southeast Community Development (SCDC)

The Southeast Community Development Corporation is a nonprofit organization focused on improving the economic, social, and educational development of the residents of Southeast area of Los Angeles County. For more information, please visit <http://www.scdcorp.org> or call (323) 585-4579.

About The City of Vernon

For more than 100 years, the City of Vernon has served as an industrial and economic resource for surrounding communities in Southern California. Vernon's businesses provide jobs for 50,000 people, many who live in diverse adjacent communities including Bell, Bell Gardens, Boyle Heights, Commerce, Huntington Park and Maywood.

SOURCE California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF)

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