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August 18, 2009

8/12/2009

Program Brings Computer Use Into Focus

More computers, more broadband technology and the opportunities that access to the Internet present are coming to the citizens of Riverbank and Stanislaus County.

Jacob Myers Park was the scene for a gathering of government and technology experts on Friday, some coming from as far away as Washington DC, San Diego and Los Angeles to promote a program called 'Bring It Home California' that is sponsored by AT&T, the One Economy Corporation and the California Emerging Technology Fund, CETF.

Riverbank and Stanislaus County have won a grant for encouraging computer technology and its designation as a 21st Century Community Partnership, being the only rural community to win the funding along with two other more urban local governments located adjacent to Los Angeles and San Diego.

"The technology tools, access and training this program will provide will help people find jobs, improve their educational skills, reach the latest health information and connect with a world of opportunity," said speaker Kathy McKim, AT&T President for External Affairs for the Sacramento Central Valley.

"Bring It Home California will provide thousands of families with the information and resources they need to improve their lives. Across California, these partnerships are transforming communities," said Mike Mantle, chief operating officer for One Economy. "People who live in 21st Century Communities have more opportunities to strengthen their lives ... they also have the tools they need to compete more effectively in today's economy as well as tomorrow's."

Riverbank Director of Economic Development Tim Ogden was called onstage to accept a plaque of recognition along with City Manager Rich Holmer and staff members Norma Manriquez and Melissa Holdaway.

Highlight of the meeting was the introduction of a dozen local high school and college students who are being trained to take the program into the community and teach residents how to obtain and use computers and access the Internet.

The "digital connectors" are Corinna Romo, Diana Ortiz, Israel Hernandez,

Jessica Garcia, Jill DeWitt, Manuel Castano, Monica Mendoza, Monica Perez, Perla Inzurriaga and Ryan Atwood.

Besides McKim, Mantle and Sunne Wright McPeak, president of the CETF, speakers included Stanislaus County CEO Rick Robinson, the county's deputy executive officer for economic development Keith Boggs, County Supervisor Bill O'Brien, and Holmer.

There are more than 17 million Californians without a broadband connection and more than 13 million without an Internet connection at home, numbers equal to the populations of the 5th and 8th largest states in the nation, according to a CETF pamphlet.

CETF's mission is to close the "Digital Divide" and ensure California is a global leader in the deployment and adoption of broadband. Today the ability to be "connected" instantly through the Internet to information, services and digital tools is increasingly critical for access to and success in education, jobs and economic opportunity.

The County of Stanislaus has already made great strides, according to program officials. It is entering its 10th year anniversary operating a digital inclusion program called Connect Stanislaus.

Holmer in his speech referred to the work of former Riverbank church minister Wainer Guimares who started the Networking With Technology (NET) program, taught computer use classes and arranged for industry to donate refurbished computers to low income families before returning to his native country of Brazil a few years ago.

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A new raccoon mascot representing Jacob Myers Park helped introduce local high school and college students who are being trained to take computers and broadband access into local homes. The "digital connectors," as they are called, are (not shown in order) Corinna Romo, Diana Ortiz, Israel Hernandez, Jessica Garcia, Jill DeWitt, Manuel Castano, Monica Mendoza, Monica Perez, Perla Inzurriaga and Ryan Atwood. JOHN BRANCH/THE NEWS



Television cameras and numerous reporters covered the event at Jacob Myers Park on Friday to promote computer technology and bring more broadband access to Riverbank and Stanislaus County. AT&T official Kathy McKim led off the speeches before numerous dignitaries for the 'Bring It Home California' campaign. JOHN BRANCH/THE NEWS

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