Arnold, CA
At 8:50 AM PST
Light Rain
37°F
SW 10 G 21 MPH
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Coming Soon...

Tuesday, Jan 12

06:00 PM Movie Night

06:00 PM LARGE "TOWN HALL BINGO"!

Wednesday, Jan 13

11:00 AM Calaveras County Garden Club Meeting

12:30 PM The Grandparent Project

06:30 PM Wines of the World at Murphys Historic Hotel

Thursday, Jan 14

12:30 PM The Grandparent Project

05:30 PM ACBA's Winter Wonderland Dinner

06:00 PM City of Angels Planning Commission Meeting

06:30 PM Mark Twain School Board Meeting

Saturday, Jan 16

09:00 AM AMA Ponytail Softball Sign ups

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ATCAA Central Sierra Connect Community Forum and Board of Supervisors update~by Michelle Shelton

ATCAA completes five-county technology planning grant $250,000 aggregation of demand study maps out future for high speed Internet in rural Sierras Final community forums set for January & February. ATCAA Central Sierra Connect, a regional project including Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa and Tuolumne Counties, has completed work on an 18-month, $250,000 project funded by a grant from the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF). CETF, created as part of private telecommunication company ......

mergers, is charged with "minimizing the Digital Divide by accelerating the deployment and adoption of broadband and other advanced communication services to unserved and underserved communities". This project was 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.

"Ultimately, we all want high-speed Internet to be as universal as telephone service and easily accessible for all residents, including low-income, senior and disabled people," said Project Manager Michelle Shelton. "That is vital to the future of our communities." Shelton will present the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors a project update and the Final Report and facilitate a community forum hosted by Golden State Cellular in Angels Camp to present a broadband update and survey information for Calaveras County to local residents.

The CETF grant paid ATCAA to lead an 18-month planning effort to pave the way for local ISPs to build a business model to provide rural high-speed internet, as well as apply for millions of dollars of public funding for infrastructure, education and adoption.

The main goals of the project were to:
· Appoint a five-county task force and executive committee with representatives from public and private agencies and businesses across the region. Applications for this task force will be available at the April 30 forum.
· Map current high-speed Internet coverage and detail the region's telecommunication "backbone," identify gaps and recommend a variety of projects that will help each county reach 100 percent coverage. Currently, project leaders estimate about 45 percent of households in the region have access to high speed Internet, and many areas have only very high priced options available.
· Survey residents to identify interest and demand for high tech services, and use results to market and call for bids for the most promising projects and services.
· Recommend public policies for each county to help reach 100 percent coverage.
· Identify ways to increase access to technology for disabled, low income and senior residents, and increase their use of Internet services in the region. An action plan was created to seek funding for a variety of projects including adding more Neighborhood Information Centers at libraries and other public sites, expanding telemedicine and improving the region's "Infonet" websites for on-line "information and referral" services.

Each county contributed time and funding to the project, and each will be able to develop its own more detailed plans for future projects using the data collected during the project.

Shelton coordinated the Central Sierra Connect project. She worked with a set of committees with more than 50 representatives from all five counties to complete the project. "The process was very smooth," Shelton said. "All of the partners have been motivated to get this groundwork done, and timing has been critical because follow-up funding is coming through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that may help us actually put plans into action."

"The Broadband Demand Aggregation project has had a direct impact on the Camanche community, by connecting us with a broadband grant opportunity with California Virtual Campus. This grant will supply a dedicated T-1 line to the community center, providing the opportunity for community members to connect with online education options and support," says Shannon Mosher of the Camanche Lake Community Center.

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% 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."

"CETF is a valuable funding program to communicate the value and importance of using Internet and Communication technology in rural regions, " Said Ben Hulet from Mother Lode Internet. " MLI looks forward to working with ATCAA (through its CETF award) to expand broadband in the Mother Lode and to create our region as a flagship Community that uses technology to take our economy into the future while preserving the amenity and quality of life of the Mother Lode region."

"The award of the CETF grant is a huge step forward for our entire five-county region," said Tuolumne County Supervisor Teri Murrison. "The first step in any project, and especially one as ambitious as ours, is to make sure we know what infrastructure already exists, what will need to be added, and what areas lack access to Internet Broadband. The importance of having received this grant is in laying critically important groundwork for the next step – actually building a system to serve many currently un-served rural areas."

Sharon Crost from Social Media Alive in Tuolumne County and a project participant said "Central Sierra Connect is more than connections in infrastructure. The project has already connected fantastic, motivated folks around the region to work on adoption programs and has connected local service providers with funding sources to bring affordable high speed internet to unserved and underserved communities. The momentum is building and it's exciting to see our region set plans in motion to

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thrive in the new economy."

Mariposa County rancher Ken Pulvino, a committee member representing the Northside Communities Coalition, said the possibilities are exciting for all residents.

"Here in Mariposa County our hats are off to ATCAA and Michelle Shelton for pulling the Sierra Foothills region together on this vital project for the health and prosperity of our communities. For the older folks who will gain the benefits of telemedicine, the younger neighbors who will be more competitive in pursuing careers and enrichment as well as the many tourists who might hesitate planning a trip here without high-speed internet access, the success of this high-speed broadband project will be a godsend."

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"People can also get a lot more information on our website: www.centralsierraconnect.org."

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The Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency is a public agency created in 1981 under a Joint Powers Agreement between the counties of Amador and Tuolumne to meet the needs of youth, families and the elderly. A-TCAA's mission is:

"to help individuals in Amador and Tuolumne Counties toward self-sufficiency; to support local residents in becoming involved and contributing members of our community; to promote family and other supportive environments so that children, youth and elders can achieve their maximum potential; and finally, to form partnerships and coalitions within the community to meet these needs."

A-TCAA today has a professional staff of more than 125 people, a 15-member community board managing nearly 30 projects in two counties. A-TCAA programs include the food bank, emergency and transitional homeless shelters, Family Literacy Centers, HeadStart preschools, youth programs, energy assistance, information and referral services and more. More than 800 volunteers give thousands of hours each year in food programs, shelters, mentoring, youth programs and more, and ATCAA secures public and private grants and donations to support its projects and programs.

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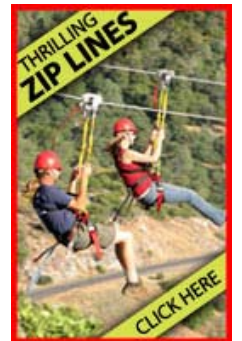
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