

Computers part of Habitat help

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Habitat for Humanity, which for years has helped people move into new homes, is also helping some get computers.

A partnership among Habitat for Humanity Greater Columbus, AT&T and One Economy Corp., a nonprofit organization that connects low-income people with technology, is expected to give more than 40 Columbus families a computer and Internet access for two years.

About a half-dozen participants cruised through cyberspace this week, learning such Web skills as filing income-tax returns and helping their children with homework.

The class at the Godman Guild in Weinland Park was a requirement, along with an online-safety class, for homeowners to get the technology.

The program, which was announced Wednesday but launched nearly two years ago, is intended to erase the digital disadvantage among low-income families and boost their children's education, said Lindsay Miller, who runs the local program at Habitat for Humanity.

"At the library, there is a time limit or a line" to use a computer, she said. "And they would be rushed to do their homework and research. Now they can take their time."

In Columbus, 14 families have received computers through the program. Nationally, more than 900 families have received computers and Internet access, including 67 in Ohio. Organizers plan to help 3,000 Ohio families.

To be eligible, families are required to have closed on their Habitat for Humanity home between January 2006 and December 2008, lived in it at least 60 days and have AT&T phone service, Miller said.



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Lindsay Miller of Habitat for Humanity Greater Columbus helps Fadumo Farah, left, and Dahabo Mahamed in an introductory Internet class. Miller heads a program that has helped 14 Habitat families get computers, hoping to erase the digital divide.

Mahmoudou Alpha, 40, a pharmacy technician who moved into his West Side home in October, got his computer last month.

The father of five said it's important for his children to be able to use a computer because everything from paying bills to applying for jobs is done online. "Before, they weren't able to do it," Alpha said of using a computer. "Now, they can. They are learning very well. It's helping my kids. ... Being familiar with the computer is very important today."

Abdiwali Ali, 32, of the Southwest Side, has owned a computer before. But he is grateful to have an upgraded one (a Dell desktop model) for his four children to use.

"It means a lot," said Ali, a health outreach worker who moved into his Habitat home two months ago. "It's good to have two years of Internet for free."

For details about the computer program, call Habitat for Humanity Greater Columbus at 614-414-0427.