

## Education groups in state get \$635,000 from Verizon

BY NANCY COLE

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Two educational nonprofits were among the recipients Monday of grants totaling \$635,000 from the Verizon Foundation, the philanthropic arm of New York-based Verizon Communications Inc.

Jobs for America's Graduates Inc. received \$250,000 to expand in Arkansas to three Delta school districts: Earle in Crittenden County, Forrest City in St. Francis County and Lee County.

One Economy Corp. also received \$250,000 to establish its first "Digital Connectors" programs in Arkansas at three high schools in the Delta.

In addition, the Arkansas Department of Education received \$135,000 in grants: \$100,000 to improve technology at Little Rock Central High School and train all of the school's teachers to use technology in their classrooms, plus \$35,000 to train kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers statewide in the use of Thinkfinity.org, a Verizon Foundation Web site that contains free educational resources.

"We are committed to being a leader and making a difference here in the state of Arkansas," said Steven R. Smith, president of the south central region for Verizon Wireless.

In January, Verizon Wireless completed its acquisition of Little Rock-based Alltel Corp.

The Verizon Foundation targets grants in the areas of education, literacy and family safety, said David Russell, the foundation's vice president of external affairs for the south- western United States.

"Last year our foundation invested over \$68 million in grants to programs throughout the nation and another \$26 million in matching money for personal donations and volunteer work by our employees," said Russell, a graduate of Forrest City High School and the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Verizon's grant to Jobs for America's Graduates will make it possible for three new Jobs for Arkansas' Graduates programs to be established in the state, said Marylene Tate, who manages the program for the Arkansas Department of Workforce Education.

Established in 1980, Jobs for America's Graduates is designed to keep at-risk students in school and provide workbased learning experiences that lead to career advancement or postsecondary education.

"We teach [11th and 12th graders] basic soft and hard skills to get jobs," such as how to prepare for an interview, how to dress for an interview and how to prepare a resume, Tate said.

Based in Alexandria, Va., Jobs for America's Graduates entered Arkansas in 1996 and operates 39 programs statewide.

The Verizon grant to One Economy will enable the Washington-based nonprofit started in 2000 to establish its first Arkansas programs, said Donovan Mouton, One Economy's Midwest program director.

Since 2001, the group's "Digital Connectors" program has trained more than 2,500 young people in technology and helped them build leadership and workplace skills by sharing what they have learned with their families and friends, donating more than 50,000 hours in community service, Mouton said.

The three Delta high schools where the program will be offered have not yet been selected, Mouton said.



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/STEPHEN B. THORNTON Steven R. Smith (right), president of Verizon Wireless' south central region, passes an oversized check Monday to Little Rock Central High School Principal Nancy Rousseau (second from right) and Little Rock School District Superintendent Linda Watson. At left is U.S. Sen. Mark Pryor, D-Ark., and in the background is David Russell, the Verizon Foundation's vice president of external affairs for the southwestern United States.