

# The Fresno Bee

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### Complexes to get free wireless Internet

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Next spring, the Villa Guadalupe and Sand Creek apartments in Cutler and Orosi will be equipped for wireless broadband Internet service, and the connections will be free to all apartment residents.

Under an innovative program announced last week, up to 1,000 homes in Cutler and Orosi in rural Tulare County could get free broadband connections.

It's free for the first two years, and will remain free for the apartment renters. Others in the community will get regular DSL connections, which will be free for two years and then charged a reduced rate still to be negotiated.

Families that don't own computers can buy them at a discount.

"The idea is to bridge the digital divide," said Michael Lane, management analyst at Self-Help Enterprises, a nonprofit low-income housing organization in Visalia.

Studies show that low-income families are much less likely to use a computer or the Internet, but usage increases dramatically when a program like this comes in.

The California Emerging Technology Fund, created by the California Public Utilities Commission to bring information technology to areas that can't afford it, is covering the cost. AT&T and Verizon are putting \$60 million into the fund.

The fund hired Economy One Corporation, a nonprofit that works with low-income people and that selected four communities in California -- three urban and one rural -- for its 21st Century Communities program, using \$2.5 million from the fund. Self-Help was asked to join in and proposed Cutler-Orosi.

Cutler-Orosi has been wracked by gang influence, so the anti-gang part of the program is to hire local students to teach adults and children how to use computers and hook up to the Internet.

"For parents, that includes Internet safety," said housing specialist Esmeralda Santos.

Funding to hire 15 teens is still being worked out, but an antigang grant from Tulare County has been sought.