



Low-cost broadband comes to local families

Friday, December 12, 2008

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The Hillsboro Argus

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A partnership between Centro Cultural, One Economy Corporation and Cricket is poking another hole in the Digital Divide.

Families who came Monday evening to a training session at Centro Cultural were able to return home with a Cricket broadband modem and the promise of free Internet access for the next two years.

Under the partnership, the nonprofit One Economy had worked with Cricket to identify low-income families in the Portland region who already owned home computers. Centro Cultural agreed to help subsidize the cost of the modems for 25 of its families. This arrangement decreased the families' personal outlay from \$180 (the normal retail cost) to \$149.

Sabino Sardineta, executive director of Centro Cultural, said averaging this cost over the two years of free Internet service included by Cricket brings individual costs down to just over \$6 a month, a considerable savings over standard broadband Internet plans available elsewhere.

Sardineta said One Economy initially contacted Centro Cultural and asked for a list of possible participants in the program. He said, because they had only 25 allotted modems, he didn't push to recruit families. Still, by word-of-mouth only, 11 families signed up. "Now that we know we have a few more left, we are going to spread the word," he said.

One Economy and Centro Cultural have worked together on other projects to increase computer literacy and Internet access throughout the local community. One Economy's Digital Connector program, for example, trained local youth who in turn passed their knowledge on to about 450 Latino families.

The Digital Connectors used the bilingual Web site the Hillsboro Beehive, also developed by One Economy, which provides access to life-skill information. One Economy's staff have developed Beehives for communities nationwide.

During Monday's training session, Cricket representative Gustavo Diez, took new modem owners step by step through the processes of installing support programs on their computers and activating their modems.

Sardineta said support will not end there. About every six months a representative from either One Economy or Cricket will contact each participating family to check on any questions or concerns they may have with their Internet access and service.