

## Local families get free computers

### National program also provides free Internet access

By [Melissa Mixon](#)

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ROUND ROCK — Cherinet Cherinet keeps up with the goings-on in his home country of Ethiopia with his computer.

From his Round Rock home, he listens to online radio stations that broadcast in his native language, Amharic.

"This news is being listened to in my country as I'm listening here," Cherinet, 40, said.

His wife, Tsige Workneh, uses the computer to fill out job applications, something she wasn't able to do before.

They are one of five Williamson County families that received computers and two years of high-speed Internet access for free. The families got the computer package through a national program aimed at giving low-income families and underserved communities more access to education and technology.

The program is led by AT&T, which set aside \$100 million to give the packages to up to 50,000 families from 2006 to 2009. AT&T is partnering with One Economy Corp., a global nonprofit organization, and the two have teamed up with local organizations, including Williamson County's Habitat for Humanity.

"For several of our families, (the computer package) is a resource for their kids, and that's what they're most excited about," said Linda Sloan, community involvement director for Williamson County's Habitat for Humanity. "Another family I know, the woman said she was excited to have it because she used the computer a lot but had to go to the library. This helped with her employment and education."

Five more Williamson County families are expected to get similar packages this spring, Sloan said. They were selected based on their income, living conditions and the number of people in their household. Each package is valued at \$1,550, said Jodi Bart, a spokeswoman for AT&T.

For Cherinet and his family, the computer has been a link to the world they left behind eight years ago.

Cherinet and Workneh came to Texas from Ethiopia in 2000 after they were separately picked in the U. S. State Department's annual Diversity Visa Lottery, or "green card lottery." The lottery is held each year, and winners can apply for an immigrant visa to enter the U.S.

The two met in Dallas and moved to Round Rock almost three years ago to pursue jobs making medical supplies. At a friend's suggestion, the couple and their 2-year-old son, Isaac Moges, got a house through the county's Habitat for Humanity organization.

Cherinet has only been back to Ethiopia three times since leaving, but he follows the news there daily with his computer. With increased fighting in his country and in neighboring Kenya, he said the area is getting more volatile. His father recently came to visit and was impressed with his son's new life.

"He was very happy," Cherinet said. "Everything was so green."

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*Cherinet Cherinet and his wife and son, at home in Round Rock, were among five Williamson County families who received a computer package in a national program to spread the technology to low-income households. Five more area families may be chosen to receive the gift in the spring.*



*Thanks to a program spearheaded by AT&T, Tsigie Workneh, with her son Isaac Moges, has the tools to apply for jobs from her Round Rock home.*