

TULSA WORLD

City seeks to improve Web, computer access

By BRIAN BARBER World Staff Writer
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With Oklahoma's work force ranking 43rd in the nation in home access to personal computers and Internet services, Mayor Kathy Taylor on Thursday announced a new initiative to bridge the digital divide.

The three-tier "Bring IT Home" program is a partnership between the city and One Economy, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that uses technology to help low- to moderate-income families improve their lives.

"This will enable our citizens to build better life skills, career opportunities, learning capacity and educational attainment at an affordable value for families," Taylor said at a news conference.

First, One Economy is working to identify underserved areas of the city to establish free wireless Internet service to about 700 households, along with providing access to affordable computers.

One Economy Program Director Donovan Mouton said north and west Tulsa are key areas, particularly in public housing complexes.

Second, a program is being launched to help people buy computers through the use of payroll deductions, essentially amounting to no-interest loans.

Two participants in the pilot program are the city of Tulsa with its 4,000 employees and Nordam, with 2,700 employees.

Eventually, it is hoped other Tulsa-area companies will offer the program to their workers.

Third, the Tulsa Beehive, a new Web site at www.beehive.org, will launch early next year to connect residents to information about health, money, education and family.

The multilingual site also will offer links to job services, resume building, insurance information, family and community education, housing and financial management tools.

"This is really a monumental effort to make sure our work force has the tools to be prepared in this global economy," Taylor said.

The mayor will host a technology summit in 2009 to review case studies of the impact made by the initiative.