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Get Connected: Program provides means for families to use the Internet



Ronald Pennix, a cook at Finnigan's Wake restaurant, uses the family computer to download music. The Pennix children also use the computer.

Journal Photo by David Rolfe

By Mary Giunca | Journal Reporter

Published: June 1, 2010

Aricka Pennix found out that her family would be getting a free computer with three years of free Internet access right before Christmas last year.

"I was like, 'Yay! Christmas is done,'" she said.

The computer arrived at her apartment at the LaDeara Crest complex in April. Since then, Pennix said it's hard to think of a day that someone in the family hasn't gone on the Internet.

As president of the residents' council, she uses the computer to communicate with other residents; as an unemployed customer-service rep, she uses it to look for a job. Her husband, Ronald, a cook at Finnigan's Wake restaurant, downloads music. And daughter, Kayla, 8, uses it for schoolwork. Her son, Ron Jr., 4, likes watching Sponge Bob on the computer.

"It's just the way everything's going now," Pennix said. "Most jobs require you to have some kind of computer knowledge. It's a great way to network. It's a great way to find out things."

The free Internet access comes courtesy of One Economy, one of the sponsors of an initiative to bring Internet access to poor people.

One Economy was established in 2000 and has offices in 14 countries, said Sonja Murray, the senior vice president of strategic initiatives. The company becomes partners with local governments and organizations to bring broadband Internet and support services to poor communities.

In Winston-Salem, One Economy used money from an AT&T grant, LaDeara Crest's management and city government to provide Internet. The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system provided refurbished computers to residents with children of school age.

An estimated 375,000 homes across the U.S. have Internet access through One Economy and its partners, Murray said. In Winston-Salem, about 500 families have Internet access through the initiative.

One Economy will continue to track how the Internet is used at LaDeara Crest with surveys over the next two years, Murray said.

Poor families receiving Internet access don't need to be sold on its use, Murray said. Few of them have the sort of jobs that give them access to computers during the workday or the time to use them, and few of them have computers at home.

"When you don't have technology in the home, you know you can't compete," she said. "You can't compete. Your kids can't compete."

Before receiving their computer, the Pennixes would use a computer at their community center or in the public library, but they found that system time consuming and cumbersome.

"I can be here all day. I can cook and clean and watch the kids," Pennix said. "The computer's right here."

Out of just under 100 computer networks set up by One Economy, LaDeara Crest's is the fifth most actively used in the U.S., Murray said.

"Access to the Internet is extremely empowering to these families," she said. "There'll be academic gain, there'll be economic gain and there'll be many residents who have gone back to continuing ed through online classes."

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Posted by (YouCantHandleTheTruth) on 06/01/2010 at 08:16 am.

If he can afford to "buy" music on the internet he can afford to "buy" a computer. If he is "stealing" music, he is breaking the law and One Economy is assisting him.

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Posted by (devilsadvocate) on 06/01/2010 at 09:05 am.

Don't be ridiculous. A computer costs 500 times what a song costs. Though I agree buying music sounds like a luxury you shouldn't splurge on if you're having trouble making ends meet, that's no reason to label him a possible criminal.

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Posted by (Mustang) on 06/01/2010 at 10:06 am.

The money comes from grants, which come from revenue generated by paying customers. Just another example of someone being overcharged for a product so that someone else can get it for free.

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Posted by (bigles336) on 06/01/2010 at 10:17 am.

No one Purchases Music online anymore...Please...

I do feel the kids benefit from having a PC with Internet access in the home; they will learn alot just by having Internet in the home...

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Posted by (webgeek) on 06/01/2010 at 01:57 pm.

It's unfortunate that the Journal chose to highlight (through a photo) the downloading of music rather than the Internet uses by the mother and the children. Having consistent access to the Internet is a MUST if this country is to provide equal opportunities to all. The Internet has become as critical as the telephone (if not more so) and anything that can done to bring the Internet into people's homes at minimal cost should be applauded.

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Posted by (BaracksTeleprompter) on 06/01/2010 at 03:53 pm.

ATTENTION FOR A MESSAGE FROM THE WHITE HOUSE, PLEASE.

Good afternoon, my fellow Americans. Dis be yo' prezident speakin' at you. Oooops sorry about that. I should have pressed 8 for English.

I am very proud that I am able to use your tax money to buy computers for certain people who voted for me in 2008. The real purpose of my program is to bring the computer skills of certain ethnic groups up to standard. I think that by September 1 we will begin paying these computer "trainees" a salary of \$12. per hour so they will have enough money to purchase MORE online music and put gas in their cars and pay their cellphone bills. I am sorry if you don't like my new program, but Michelle made me do it. Michelle is the Assistant President around here, you know.

(^:)

Signed,

Barak Obama, Your Man In Charge of Everything

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Posted by (acercat) on 06/04/2010 at 12:33 pm.

Excuse me Mr Prez but they don't have cell phone bills. That is free also. Must be a wonderful life to be a leech.

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