

## **A whole new wide world Internet allows convenience at new Habitat For Humanity homes**

By ANGELA WARD  
May 05, 2008

Like many teenage boys, 14-year-old Luis Vazquez enjoys surfing the Internet.

"I've got a lot of interests, and I research possible careers," he said. "I'm considering becoming an actor, lawyer or architect. The main search engines I use are Google and Yahoo."

Surfing the Internet got easier a few months ago for Luis and his mother, who own a home they helped build through Habitat for Humanity. A program between Habitat, AT&T and One Economy Corp. afforded the family a computer and access to high-speed Internet. The computer occupies a place of honor in their sparsely furnished living room.

"Luis can get his homework done easier and on his own schedule," said mom Patricia Vazquez. "Before, we were having to work around times when we could go to the public library or friends' houses for him to use their computers."

Luis uses a variety of programs on the computer, including word processing and card-making. He's bookmarked a number of sites. Some deal with subjects he's researching for school, such as Thomas Jefferson and Karl Marx, while others focus on his personal interests, such as the chord-reading site he's using to teach himself to play the guitar.

"I've got a MySpace account, but I'm careful with it," Luis said. "I've learned the basics of computer safety, including not giving away too much personal information online."

Vazquez said having home Internet access for the first time has enhanced her family's quality of life.

She and Luis have e-mail, which they use to keep in contact with his teachers, as well as friends and family. Vazquez said she also uses the Internet to pay her bills and check on upcoming activities in the school district.

"His teachers noticed an improvement in the quality of his work and his grades once we had Internet access at home," Vazquez said. "He could do a better job and take his time with assignments once he wasn't always trying to hurry and get done on the computer so we could go home."

Cheryl Webb, family services coordinator for Habitat for Humanity of Longview, said nine local families have benefitted from the program since it began in 2006. Only two of those families had computers before participating in the program.

"In this day and age, a computer is pretty much a necessity," Webb said. "It's something children need for school and adults can use to broaden their own knowledge base and make contacts that will help them in the workforce."

The computers are installed in Habitat homes by One Economy Corp., a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organized to get computer access to low-income Americans. AT&T provides free high-speed Internet access for two years, and community volunteers work with Habitat residents to teach them computer and Internet basics.

"Everybody's been very enthusiastic about having computers in their new homes," Webb said. "Even some of the older adults who didn't have much experience with computers were excited about the idea of learning to use them."