

SOUTHEAST AGENCY SEEKS TO CLOSE DIGITAL DIVIDE



Sara Coughley, standing left, the instructor of a free computer class at Hub Cities Career Center in Huntington Park, oversees some of her students along with Cesar Zaldivar-Motts, executive director of the nonprofit Southeast Cities Technology Collaborative, which sponsors the computer program; and Ron Garcia of Southern California Edison, chairman of the Southeast Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit organization which oversees the Technology Collaborative, both based in Huntington Park. (Photo by Arnold Adler)

By ARNOLD ADLER, Staff Writer

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HUNTINGTON PARK — The Southeast Cities Technology Collaborative, a private nonprofit group based here, has set up computer classes at five locations in the Southeast area and plans for another five in the near future, according to its director, Cesar Zaldivar-Motts.

Those locations are the Salvation Army and YMCA buildings in Huntington Park, the Salvation Army facility in Bell, the Bell Youth Center and Ford Park in Bell Gardens.

Another five are planned in the coming weeks at locations in South Gate, Cudahy, Bell Gardens and Vernon, Zaldivar-Motts said.

“We plan to set up 10 to 15 centers. We are trying to breach the digital divide,” said Zaldivar-Motts, referring to the term used to describe the division between computer literacy and the low-income, mostly Latino population of the six-city Southeast area.

Funded by the San Francisco-based California Emerging Technology Fund, which has contributed \$476,000; and the city of Vernon, which donated \$301,000, the collaborative was formed last Sept. 11 with the intent to bring computers, computer literacy and the Internet to the Southeast area. Michael Peevey, president of the state Public Utilities Commission, is the chairman of the California Emerging Technology Fund.

Currently the collaborative, headed by a board of directors, is looking forward to receipt of a recreational vehicle, now being built and expected to arrive in late August or early September. The collaborative will use the Vernon donation to purchase and equip the Vernon Mobile Technologic Center, a 37-foot motor home with 15 laptop computers and projectors. It will visit various parks, youth centers and isolated neighborhoods, offering satellite Internet connections. The mobile computer vehicle expects to serve about 1,500 with 1,040 hours of operation a year, Zaldivar-Motts said.

It also will be a site for job training and health education, he added.

With the arrival of the motor home, the collaborative will stage the first of six computer fairs, planned in the Southeast area. The fairs will be aimed at making the public aware of computer technology. The collaborative is affiliated with the Southeast Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit agency formed in the 1990s to provide services to area residents.

Both are based at the Salvation Army facility in Huntington Park. Zaldivar-Motts, executive director of the community development corporation, has taken on the job of heading the collaborative, overseen by representatives of the cities to be served.

Zaldivar-Motts said the Southeast Cities Technology Collaborative plans to serve at least 1,700 residents, plus 500 students with adult education computer training programs, and 1,000 youngsters in the three-year, bilingual program.

The collaborative plans to provide space and staff members to enhance early learning skills for children, math and science skills for youth, career and workforce development and financial literacy skills for adults at the computer centers, Zaldivar-Motts said.

A recent study conducted by UC Berkeley has shown that area residents are largely disconnected from the Internet due to the lack of broad public access to computers, technical assistance and computer literacy education.

This reality, often referred to as the digital divide, is a concern for California's future global competitiveness, Peevey said last September.

"The California Public Utilities Commission directed the establishment of [the California Emerging Technology Fund] in approving the mergers of AT&T and Southern Pacific Bell and Verizon-MCI in 2005," Peevey said.

He noted that AT&T donated \$45 million to the state group while Verizon has contributed \$15 million. "This project is the first of many initiatives beginning statewide that will help underserved communities and populations get ahead by closing the digital divide through the use of high-speed Internet access and education," Peevey said.

A total of 500 adult students that successfully complete a three-month computer literacy class will receive a free refurbished computer and two years of free AT&T Broadband service, said Ron Garcia, a representative of Southern California Edison and president of the Southeast Communities Development Corporation.

Board members of the Community Development Corporation are Dr. Martha Andrade of South Gate, Angela Gibson of AT&T, Vernon Mayor Pro Tem Larry Gonzales, Assistant City Engineer Pat Fu of Huntington Park; George Cole of Bell; and Andy Carrasco, from the Gas Company.
Information: Zaldivar-Motts at (323) 585-4579.