



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 5, 2004

CONTACTS:

Cheryle Jackson	312/814.3158 (office)
Angelynne Amores	312/636.6148 (cell)
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158 (office)
Andrew Ross	312/814.7168 (Opp. Returns)

GOVERNOR IMPROVES TECHNOLOGY LITERACY IN ROCKFORD

'Eliminate the Digital Divide' Grants Will Prepare Workers for Better Jobs

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod Blagojevich announced today that Rockford will receive three technology grants as part of his *Opportunity Returns* plan for creating jobs throughout the Northern Stateline region. These grants, known as the *Eliminate the Digital Divide* program, fund technology centers in low-income communities in order to provide technology skills training and access to computers and the Internet. This program provides the critical skills that employees will need to succeed in today's high-tech workplace.

"Jobs that involve computers pay an average of 40% or more than jobs that do not," Governor Blagojevich said. "Those who do not have accessibility to the Internet or computer learning are at a fundamental disadvantage when it comes to obtaining important information and services that would put them on a more level playing field with their peers. Teaching technology literacy skills gives people the tools they need to compete in today's economy. This is an essential first step toward creating a highly skilled workforce and strengthening the local economy."

The Rockford Public Library will receive a **\$36,000** grant. The library will provide more than 550 free public classes on basic computer skills training up to 1,700 people. Rockford residents will also enjoy free access to computers with Internet access at any time during library hours. This grant will benefit all Rockford residents, especially the more than 20,000 who live below the poverty line and are less likely to have a computer at home.

The Northwest Community Center, in partnership with Rock Valley College, will receive **\$33,000** for the expansion of their community technology center. The center will now serve low-income residents in the 61101 and 61102 zip codes. Rock Valley College will provide basic computer, Internet, and advanced job-training skills instruction to 65 at-risk youth and 50 adults. Public access will be provided to more than 16,000 residents.

The Promised Land Employment Service, a not-for-profit education organization, will receive a **\$24,000** grant. These funds will be used to provide critical skills technology training to low income, unemployed and/or underemployed homeless individuals, as well as other economically disadvantaged residents.

(more)

In total, Governor Blagojevich is awarding more than **\$92,000** in *Eliminate the Digital Divide* funds that will provide training and technology access to thousands of Rockford residents.

“The Governor is preparing our workforce to excel in the 21st century economy,” Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Director Jack Lavin said. “But to aid that effort, we must work to ensure that technology and communication resources are available to all residents of the Northern Stateline region. Without them, workers will not be able to meet the demands of today’s businesses. Thanks to these grants, thousands of Rockford residents will have easy access to these vital skills and more higher quality job opportunities.”

In addition to providing basic technology skills training, grant recipients can provide a variety of technology-related services, including:

Access to career information, employment opportunities, and related Internet job searches

Computerized instruction in basic literacy skills, GED preparation, and English as a Second Language instruction, including distance-learning options

Professional development opportunities related to technology for teachers

Before- and after-school technology programs for students

Promotion of home access to computers

Governor Blagojevich’s *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois’ history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn’t work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort is a product of significant outreach over several months throughout each region, with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The 30 specific projects that the Governor announced in October for the Northern Stateline Region are designed to be flexible and effective. These economic initiatives are designed to be flexible and effective. Each plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

####

