



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES INNOVATIVE GRANT TO STRENGTHEN TECHNOLOGY LITERACY IN NORTHERN STATELINE REGION

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

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced that Northern Illinois University has been awarded an innovative technology grant under his *Opportunity Returns* program that will allow hundreds of Rockford residents to receive critical training in technology literacy. The grant program, known as *Eliminate the Digital Divide*, provides funding to local community technology centers in low-income communities to provide technology skills training and access to computers and the Internet. Since technology literacy today is a necessity to competing for and succeeding in well-paying jobs, this critical program teaches essential skills to people whom often lack access to important educational opportunities that will help prepare them for a 21st Century job.

“In our efforts to help ensure that all residents of the Northern Stateline region have the ability to compete for well-paying jobs in the 21st Century economy, we must provide greater access to technology and its economic benefits. The *Eliminate the Digital Divide* program is successfully teaching essential skills in computers use and technology literacy. Gaining these skills will increase opportunities to pursue a quality education and better jobs - producing long-term gains that will benefit the individuals, as well as the regional workforce,” Governor Blagojevich said.

Northern Illinois University will receive a grant for more than **\$43,000** that will be used to fund the purchase of new computer equipment, furniture, and staff time for a community technology center (CTC) located in the Concord Commons Housing Development in Rockford. The equipment will allow the center to offer increased access to computer classes and computer usage for the general public. Specifically, the staff will train over **200** adults and children to use Microsoft Office, GED preparation, family literacy, and basic computer skills, as well as offer experiences that integrate computer technology with other services.

“The Community Technology Center that NIU is working with is providing a critical educational resource. In today’s world, technology literacy is essential to succeeding academically and professionally. Increasing access to this fundamental education will strengthen the caliber of our future workforce and expand opportunity to more people in our community. I’m very pleased that the Governor has included this program as a part of his *Opportunity Returns* initiative for the Northern Stateline region,” said Rockford Mayor Doug Scott.

(more)

Northern Illinois University (NIU) runs an outreach office at Concord Commons Housing Development that is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the Community Outreach Partnership Program (COPC). Through the Center for Governmental Studies, NIU has been working with the women of Concord Commons over the last three years to better understand the effects of welfare reform on families. The programs and services offered through this effort are the result of working with women in the Residents' Council, Women United for Change, and NIU's chief partner, the Rockford Housing Authority.

"Education is the fundamental building block to creating a highly-skilled workforce and a more robust regional economy in which businesses have all the resources they need to thrive. The Community Technology Center at the Concord Commons Housing Development is acting as a vital educational resource by teaching critical computer skills and technology literacy to Rockford residents. In doing so, this program is opening doors to a vast number of career paths these students can pursue, expanding individual economic opportunity and strengthening the economic portfolio of the entire region," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

In addition to providing basic skills training needed to access and utilize computers and the Internet, a variety of technology access activities can be provided by the grant recipient including:

- Vocational skills training related to information technology occupations;

- 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;

- Computer based before and after school programs for academic enrichment and reinforcement; and

- Promotion of home access to computers.

In addition to the grant funding awarded to NIU, *Eliminate the Digital Divide* grants were recently extended to three other community technology centers in Rockford: The Rockford Public Library received a **\$36,000** grant; The Northwest Community Center, in partnership with Rock Valley College, received **\$33,000** in funding, and The Promised Land Employment Service, a not-for-profit education organization, received a **\$24,000** grant. Additionally, the Boys and Girls Club of Freeport, also located within the Northern Stateline region, received a grant for **\$38,000**. In total, Governor Blagojevich's *Eliminate the Digital Divide* program has provided **\$174,000** in funding in the Northern Stateline region.

The *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 for the region was the product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. *Opportunity Returns* contains tangible actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to business. This plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

Interview will be available at www.state.il.us/iisradio/ori.htm

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