



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

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news

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GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES INNOVATIVE GRANTS TO STRENGTHEN TECHNOLOGY LITERACY IN NORTHWEST ILLINOIS

SPRINGFIELD – Thanks to Governor Rod Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* plan, two Northwest Illinois communities are a step closer to eliminating the digital technology divide and improving the caliber of their local workforce. The *Eliminate the Digital Divide* program grants funding to local community technology centers in low-income communities in order 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.

"Internet access now dominates almost all facets of life from shopping, to banking, to reading the newspaper, to paying bills or searching for a job. Jobs involving computer use pay over 40% more on average than jobs that do not. Building proficiency in computer use and aptitude on the Internet is really about giving people the tools they need to compete in the digital economy. This is an essential first step toward creating a more educated and highly skilled workforce and strengthening the local economy," Governor Blagojevich said.

The Illinois-Iowa Center for Independent Living in Rock Island (IICIL) is receiving a grant for more than **\$43,000** to provide Internet access, upgrade basic computer training, and run a 24-hour information line using the most advanced adaptive technology. These funds will also allow IICIL to purchase new equipment and software that will help the center prepare persons with disabilities for job opportunities and resources to improve their independent living skills. An estimated **320** individuals will participate in the training.

Sauk Valley Community College in Sterling is receiving a grant for more than **\$24,000**, which will be used for a yearlong project to provide training in keyboarding, mouse basics, Internet, word processing, spreadsheets, presentation tools and data base skills to **150** participants. Sauk Valley Community College's Adult Education Department Community Technology Center serves the Sterling/Rock Falls communities. Over 25% of the households are below the poverty level, have less than a high school education, speak predominantly Spanish, and have limited job and computer skills. Through the success of the *Eliminate the Digital Divide* program, Sauk Valley hopes to encourage a greater proportion of this population to attain needed computer skills.

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In total, the more than **\$67,000** in *Eliminate the Digital Divide* funding will provide training to an estimated **470** individuals in low-income communities in the Northwest region.

“A decade into the movement, current programs to bridge the digital divide have made some inroads addressing this serious problem, but a significant portion of the population remains isolated from information technologies and their associated economic benefits. The *Eliminate the Digital Divide* program is really a response to the demands of the labor market. Access to a quality education and better paying jobs produces long-term gains for the individuals as well as the entire regional workforce,” 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.

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 Northwest region was the product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The more than 30 projects that the Governor announced last October for Northwestern Illinois are designed to be flexible and effective. This plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

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