

Corporate Giving: Connected Tennessee

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The Internet is an open window to the world, and equipping children with that tool is vital to them competing in a global landscape.

Which is why the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Memphis is so thrilled with its recent windfall of 35 Dell computers.

The organization, which serves more than 5,000 disadvantaged kids between the ages of 6 and 18, will use the computers in its six area clubs through a partnership between Connected Tennessee and CIBER Inc.

"This is an awesome day for our kids and their future," said Sabrina Anderson, Boys and Girls Clubs vice president of club operations. "Most of them do not have access to computers after school.

"They can now come here to complete homework, work research projects, surf the Web, and play educational games in a safe, enriching environment," she said. "Today is about providing them the opportunity to better themselves."

The U.S. Department of Commerce found that of the 40 percent of Americans not accessing the Internet, 22.5 percent said the lack of a computer at home is the primary reason. A similar study reported that 44 percent of those disadvantaged families in Tennessee were not on the Web because of no access.

Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen is a vocal proponent of Connected Tennessee and its Computers 4 Kids (C4K) program.

"I hope to see every Tennessean realize the benefits of technology, and C4K is a step toward that goal for some of our most important citizens," he said. "These are children who might not otherwise have the tools they need to access the abundant educational, informational and research resources available on the Internet."

Michael Ramage, Connected Tennessee executive director, said the Boys and Girls Clubs are the perfect place to make a connection.

"A computer is one of the vital tools required to be successful in today's wired world," he said. "Some assume that everyone has access to a computer and the Internet -- that's not the case.

"Our charter is to positively change a kid's life by providing them the tools they need to compete in a global economy," he said. "A report by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory said technology can and does help students develop diverse skills from the basics to higher-order thinking."

Connected Tennessee, based in Nashville, partners with technology-minded businesses, government entities and universities to accelerate technology, like CIBER, which has an office on Kirby Parkway in Memphis.

"The sky's the limit for these young people," said Ann Griffiths, CIBER regional vice president. "We are thrilled to be a partner to provide such needed computers to an incredible organization."

The Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 40 million Americans rely on the Internet as their primary source for science news and information.

Additionally, 128 million Americans and 87 percent of all Internet users in the U.S. have gone online for everything from researching a topic, comparing different theories, compiling resources to completing assignments for school.

"We must take care of our community's kids," said Julie Coffey, deputy administrator in Shelby County's Office of Early Childhood and Youth. "Providing them with cutting-edge technology tools is important. We must connect our kids to the world as they will be our future leaders."