

The OCCN Notebook



Winter 2008



OCCN NEWS by Eric Lowe

MITCHELL NAMED TO BROADBAND

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The Ohio Community Computing Network (OCCN) is a nonprofit statewide, membership based alliance of community technology centers (CTCs).

OCCN is committed to creating a society in which everyone has equal opportunity to gain equal access to computer and network technology for life-long learning and personal and community empowerment.

Sharon Barrett-Mitchell, director of the Dakota Center, Inc. in Dayton, OH and OCCN Board Member, was named to Governor Ted Strickland's Ohio Broadband Council on December 4. At the introductory meeting of the council members, Governor Strickland thanked Barrett-Mitchell and the other appointees.



The OCCN Board of Directors submitted Barrett-Mitchell as its representative on the council, which will spearhead an effort to connect all of Ohio residents to broadband.

As a member of the Broadband Council, Barrett-Mitchell will collaborate with leaders from the government, non-profit, and private sectors to implement Connect Ohio. This three-year initiative will strive to meet the following goals:

- *Affordable broadband for all Ohioans through public-private partnerships.
- *Improve use of computers and the Internet in the state.
- *Regularly map coverage areas and marketing opportunities to providers.
- *Establish eCommunity teams in every Ohio county,
- *Improve public services and economic development
- *Remove educational and technological barriers to broadband.

Barrett-Mitchell says she is excited about being on the Broadband Council. "I am pleased that our own OCCN Board of Directors have confidence in my appointment." She adds, "I look forward to representing the many community technology centers in Ohio, with a voice on the council."

The Ohio Broadband Council will begin meeting quarterly in March, 2008 at the Riffe Center in Columbus.

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Expanding Internet access throughout the state is becoming more of a reality than a mere possibility.

On July 27, Governor Ted Strickland's chief information officer, Steve Edmonson, announced that the governor had signed Executive Order 2007 - 24S, creating an Ohio Broadband Council and Broadband Ohio Network. On hand to witness the announcement were more than fifty technology activists. They came from Coshocton, Mansfield, Dayton, Cleveland, Steubenville, Toledo, Cambridge, Cincinnati, and a dozen other communities represented at the State Library for ONE Ohio's second statewide gathering in 2007.

"We also shared some local broadband deployment success stories, discussed ONE Ohio's broadband access mapping project, and did a whole lot of networking," Cleveland DigitalVision director, Bill Callahan says.

"All in all, a successful and informative gathering."

According to Edmonson, the council will extend access to the Broadband Ohio Network by allowing the public and private entities to tap into the statewide network. The goal is to expand access to high-speed Internet service into parts of the state that do not have access.

On December 17, Strickland announced a new initiative the Broadband Council is pushing forward - Connect Ohio.

The three-year initiative will feature a public-private partnership between Internet providers and the state. Connect Ohio will determine where there is no broadband access and determine an area's needs.

Ultimately, the goal is to show where demand exists and encourage Internet providers to expand service into the lacking areas, as well as creating new job and educational opportunities for those who are lacking.

It is unknown for sure what percentage of Ohio lacks broadband access because Internet providers are reluctant to share information for competitive reasons. However, the first task of the initiative is to map where the digital gaps in Ohio are. Connect Ohio will set up "e-community teams" in all 88 counties to implement a plan on broadband access in all counties.

An initial \$2.9 million was approved for the project through the fiscal year of 2009. Strickland proposes an additional \$3.9 million for the 2010-11 fiscal year.

Strickland hopes the federal government will provide additional funding while Internet providers help pay for the initiative and items such as computers for areas of need.

More information about the Ohio Broadband Council can be found at <http://www.ohiobroadbandcouncil.org/>.

by Eric Lowe and Gary Lambert

YOUTHBUILD WINS

Opportunities await those who are in the most need.

YouthBuild, an educational and job training program, was awarded \$1.3 million, thanks to a grant from the Zanesville Metropolitan Housing Authority. The award includes \$500,081 for the first year and an additional \$401,177 based on congressional approval.

YouthBuild provides classroom and practical work experience for 16-24 year-old students without high school diplomas. Participants receive required hours of class work to brush up on basic reading and math skills. The students then engage in hands-on job training by constructing and repairing housing for low-income families in their own neighborhoods. In addition, they will also attend weekly seminars on job seeking and retention skills, resume writing, and interview techniques.

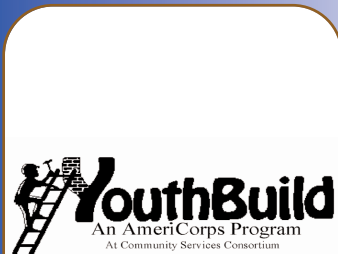
Life skills such as nutrition, budgeting, credit counseling, health issues, and home financing are also included. In order to achieve a high success rate, YouthBuild plans to help students with day care, postsecondary education training, personal counseling services, and home intervention assistance whenever necessary.

YouthBuild will mentor 30 students. Eighty percent will reportedly improve literacy and math skills while 65 percent will earn a GED or diploma. 70 percent are projected to obtain jobs or a post-secondary education.

OCCN VISTAs Eric Lowe, Donica Beckett, and Candace Parsons were among the parties who helped to write the grant proposal that led to the funding.

In a three-day intensive exercise, the VISTAs took a war room approach to discovering the elements, defining the problem and then suggesting solutions, pitfalls, and how to prevent them. The VISTAs' effort was to summarize and feed into the proposal at Zane State College, who combined our efforts with the proposals submitted over the last three years to HUD that were not awarded. The grant was fine tuned and submitted by Zanesville Housing Authority.

The YouthBuild grant was made possible by the Appalachian Center for Collaborative and Engaged Learning; One-Stop Career Center/Workforce Investment Act Policy Board; Community Build!; Mid-East Adult Center for Education; Zanesville Housing Development Corporation; Zanesville Civic League; Habitat for Humanity; Muskingum County Business Incubator; Zane State College; and mCentury National Bank.



by Eric Lowe

OCCN welcomes back Marsha McDevitt-Stredney, who rejoins us as our Board Secretary.



McDevitt-Stredney is the current marketing director for the State Library of Ohio. She previously served OCCN as grants officer. Among her many tasks, she provided communications, outreach, asset mapping, needs assessment, grant projects, strategic development, and higher education support. In addition, McDevitt-Stredney also worked in art education, computer graphics animation, and various educational boards.

With more than 20 years experience in a wide variety of fields, McDevitt-Stredney will provide valuable administrative assistance to OCCN. Her success in marketing and fundraising figures to enhance OCCN's profile and its mission to close the digital divide.

On her role as Board Secretary, McDevitt-Stredney mentions the relationship between libraries and other technology centers, "Many of the programs and services we provide to Ohio's public, college, and school libraries can also be used at community technology centers. Free public access to information and library resources are closely aligned with the goal of expanding technology access and training. I look forward to working with the board as OCCN works to build its sustainability and improve membership services."

TECH MIX CONFERENCE HELD IN COLUMBUS

The Ohio Community of Development Corporations hosted the Tech Mix Conference at the Crowne Plaza North Hotel in Columbus, OH. Representatives from non-profit organizations around Ohio attended the morning and afternoon workshops, held on November 28. 20 presenters facilitated lively discussions on the state of Ohio's community technology.

The workshops addresses an aspect of the importance of technology in community development. "Affordable Housing and Economic Development" focused on integrating broadband with job searches and small businesses, technology for community organizing and housing development, and sustaining community technology centers and environmentally affordable housing. "Technology 101" dealt with day-to-day website management and fundraising for technology while "Nonprofit Technology" featured seminars on the Ohio Benefit Bank, information technology and communications for non-profit organizations, and real-world knowledge in the virtual classroom.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Rick Voithofer, associate professor of technologies of instruction and media program at Ohio State University, spoke about about how public policy affects equitable access to technology within school systems.

OCCN Executive Director, Gary Lambert, was the speaker at the "Superior Tech Proposals: Getting Innovation Funded" workshop. Lambert talked about tricks of grant writing and funding for technology centers. OCCN Board Chair and Cleveland Digital Vision president, Bill Callahan, gave a talk on integrating technology into community strategic plans and Asbury Senior Community Services director, Wanda Davis, shared her experiences on starting and sustaining a community technology center.

OCCN VISTA Leader, Robb Ebright, attended the "How to Start and Sustain a Community Technology Center" seminar. He says, "Wanda Davis' presentation was both informative and inspirational, breaking into steps on how to create and sustain a community technology center as an important neighborhood resource."



OCCN VISTA Leader Update

FreeGeek Columbus and the benefits of free software

FreeGeek Columbus is one of the latest members of OCCN, with a new VISTA coming on board to help coordinate its volunteer-driven community technology program. The program involves volunteers who gain hands-on computer experience and in the process, earn a free computer. The way it works is this: FreeGeek takes donations of hardware from individuals and businesses who have upgraded. A lot of the older hardware is still useable with the right software and know-how. This is where the free and open software comes in. FreeGeek installs an operating system known as Ubuntu Linux, which provides many of the same features as Microsoft Windows installation and a lot more, all at zero cost to the user.

At this point, many computer users have heard of Linux, but a brief history is in order. Ubuntu Linux is derived from the Debian Gnu/Linux distribution, which is basically a complete set of software that is developed by a community of volunteers and independent companies around the globe. The way it stays free is due to a legal concept known as copyleft, which inverts the concept of copyright. With copyleft, anyone is able to run, copy, and modify the software so long as they share their changes with the community. This keeps everything open and allows for the software to be developed by a larger number of contributors without a single entity controlling it. What this means is that users can distribute it to their friends. Also, if they are inclined to do so and have learned some basic programming skills, they can make modifications and alter the program to do what they think it should. The way the relationship typically works is that users can contribute simply by providing the feedback to the programmer through reporting crashes and making feature requests. With open-source projects the programmer is typically available via email or a forum compared to getting stuck speaking to an outsourced helpdesk for hours.

Now that you've heard about the history of Ubuntu, here is a little bit more of the features that make this program so potentially useful to community technology programs. Linux is for the most part virus-free, which means that you can safely connect it to the Internet and surf the Web and your computer will run indefinitely. Many people who are new to computers and get a Windows box can testify that after a few days of Web surfing, and downloading, they find their computer inoperable due to a virus.

But with Linux, your computer can continue to run, and if you are able to connect to the Internet you can easily download the latest software patches for all of the programs you are running from one place built into the operating system. With a typical Windows installation, you will need to both download your programs and patches from the provider of each, where as due to the free nature of free software typically all of the programs you will want to run are available in a central repository.

The great thing about free software is that it is free to try and distribute. FreeGeek Columbus provides a certain number of hardware grants to non-profits based primarily in central Ohio, where if your organization is in need of upgraded computers, you can contact us via our website at FreegeekColumbus.org. If you are interested in Ubuntu Linux, you can try it out on your computer without even installing it. Just set your computer to boot from the CD-ROM and put in an Ubuntu CD and you should have it up and running. To download or order a free CD, go to ubuntu.com or contact me at occnleader@ohioccn.org to ask any question you may have.

Robb Ebright has been the OCCN VISTA Leader since July, 2007. His interests include improving communities through open source technology.

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profiles of four current vistas

by Eric Lowe

Four VISTAs have made commitments and continue to serve their communities around Ohio.

In July, Kelvin Craft, Maynard Love, Sydney Olson, and Frank Pitts, Jr., were sworn in as VISTAs and accepted positions at OCCN-affiliated community technology centers. They provide indirect service and support work for the CTCs, building infrastructure and resources that will help OCCN close the Digital Divide in their neighborhoods. OCCN is pleased to feature four of our VISTAs.

Kelvin Craft works for the Ohio State University Extension, where he has represented his site at various meetings and conferences. He also administers the food bank at Indianola Middle School for families of students who participate in after-school programs such as 4-H, sports, and college clubs. Kelvin recruits for several programs and works with the Godman Guild to help people in the University District find jobs. Prior to becoming a VISTA, Kevin was a conductor for Union Pacific Railroad before returning to his hometown, Columbus. He has two children, Jackson and Isley. Kelvin says he enjoys the experiences he has as a VISTA. "I've always wanted to help, mentor, and give back and the AmeriCorps program has given me the opportunity to do just that. It's really nice to have a job that you enjoy doing."

Maynard Love is the VISTA at the St. John Learning Center in Columbus, where he helps the site maintain various training courses, including literacy and basic to advanced computer classes. Maynard, having previously served as the center's Treasurer and Executive Board member, shares OCCN's vision of equal access to technology. "I am committed to creating a society in which everyone has equal opportunity to gain access to computer and network technology for life-learning and

personal and community empowerment."

Sydney Olson is serving at the Oberlin Community Services and The Bridge (the OCS technology center) as coordinator of math tutoring and youth programs. She graduated from Oberlin College in May, 2007. Her interests include short fiction, zombies, and kittens. On her work in Oberlin, Sydney says she hopes to keep the tutoring programs operational. In order to do that, she says, "I hope to create a method of transition between VISTAs that will make this job less chaotic for the next VISTA."

Frank Pitts, Jr. works as the technology program assistant at Adventure Central, a youth development center advocating science and nature. He helps educators and students implement technology in the classroom, as well as provide opportunities for the youth and families outside of the program such as clubs and camps that bring them closer to nature. Previously, Frank worked as a youth education apprentice for two years. His hobbies include football, basketball, bowling, graphic design, writing, and reading. He hopes to use his time as a VISTA to foster long-lasting relationships for the youth at Adventure Central. "VISTA is a great opportunity for growth and maturity in various areas. It is an opportunity to serve and make an impact."

In December, eight more VISTAs began service around Ohio. They will be featured in OCCN's spring newsletter.