

## Vernon Donates 'Computer Mobile' to Southeast Cities

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Tapping an idea that brought literacy to many school-age children years ago, the City of Vernon formally unveiled the Mobile Technology Center designed to increase Internet access for low-income residents in the Southeast cities.

Vernon officials were on hand at a community technology fair Jan 30 at Salt Lake Park in Huntington Park where residents were given a preview of the custom-built RV. The mobile lab will deliver computer-literacy classes for youth and adults living in the cities that surround industrial-based Vernon.



Mobile computer lab will serve school-age children in Southeast Los Angeles. (EGP Photo by Paul Aranda, Jr)

With its contribution of nearly \$500,000, Vernon Mayor Hilario "Larry" Gonzalez cited the mobile lab as another example of the city's efforts to support many of its workers who live in the communities that comprise the Southeast corner of Los Angeles County.

The mobile lab will serve: Maywood, Huntington Park, Bell, Cudahy, Bell Gardens, South Gate and the Walnut Park/Florence-Firestone area.

Vernon officially donated the mobile lab to the Southeast Community Development Corporation (SCDC), a non-profit agency created to address social and economic needs in the area. SCDC board chair, Ronald Garcia, poked fun at Vernon's act to sponsor the mobile lab.

"A lot of people think Vernon does these kinds of things to build that power plant," Garcia joked, referring to a stalled-project that has generated strong resistance from the same communities to be served by the mobile lab. Vernon's mayor also serves as vice president of SCDC.

"The mobile technology center, donated by the City of Vernon, will have a significant impact on our community, where lack of public access to the Internet and computers is extreme," Garcia said.

A recent study by UC Berkeley showed that residents of the Southeast cities are largely disconnected from the Internet due to the lack of broad access to computers, technical assistance and computer literacy education.

"Vernon is an industrial and economic resource," Gonzalez said during the presentation. "And we are proud to be a good neighbor."

With its infusion of cash to fund the project, Vernon's assistance provided SCDC the resources it needed to

realize a dream of its founder, former state senator, Martha Escutia. It was during a meeting between Escutia and Cesar Zaldivar-Motts, the SCDC executive director, where the concept of a mobile lab was first created.

"Dream big," Escutia recalled at Saturday's fair on what she told Zaldivar-Motts. "I want at least a \$1 million project."

Using the concept of the bookmobile that once traveled to elementary schools delivering books to disadvantaged school children, Escutia envisioned a "computer mobile" that would do the same for computer and technology training.

As a board member of the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF), Escutia is a part of the statewide effort to close the "digital divide" by delivering high-speed Internet access to underserved communities.

CETF has launched "Get Connected," a statewide public awareness program to educate targeted populations about the economic and social benefits of broadband connectivity. The California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) provided an initial fund of \$450,000 for the mobile lab.

With the funds in place, Zaldivar-Motts set out to find a vehicle platform. The result is a 37-foot-long brightly colored RV that can accommodate 15 computer stations and space and equipment for an instructor to lead computer-based classes. The vehicle comes with a wheel-chair lift, runs on energy efficient clean natural gas, and houses a bio-diesel generator as a power source.

Inside, there are 15 new Apple MacBook Pro laptops. An IT instructor can utilize a projector and screen to deliver computer-literacy courses wherever the vehicle is stationed. The mobile lab also features satellite communications technology. As a result, it can supplement the emergency command center vehicle shared by police departments within the Southeast cities.

In addition to computer-literacy classes, on-board instruction will include ESL education, financial literacy and occupational training. SCDC will partner with HUB Cities, Human Services Associations, Maywood PAL, Gage Middle School, Salvation Army, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, HP-Bell Adult School, and East Los Angeles College amongst other organizations.

For more information on where the mobile lab is scheduled to visit, contact Zaldivar-Motts at (323) 585-4579 or send an email to [motsscz@scdc.org](mailto:motsscz@scdc.org).

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