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Sacred Wind Communications helps kick off statewide Internet training program with art contest

Submitted by Barbi Cappel on Wed, 09/22/2010 - 9:22am

By Debra Mayeux

AZTEC, N.M. – Sacred Wind Communications was developed as a company that would “bridge the digital divide on Navajoland and in Rural America,” John W. Badal said Saturday, Sept. 18, at the Aztec Public Library.

He spoke as part of the statewide kick-off celebration for Fast Forward New Mexico, a three-year, grant-funded program to bring free computer education to people in rural New Mexico. Classes will be offered at 16 libraries in the state, but there is something special about the program in Aztec and Gallup.

“We will offer an Internet class with a Navajo interpreter in those locations,” said Carla Rachkowski, marketing director for Fast Forward. Sacred Wind Communications is providing the Navajo interpreter and sponsoring the classes.

Sorraine Hot, who works in the Bloomfield, N.M. office of Sacred Wind Communications, will teach the class in Navajo. “Basically, I provide translation. I try to put everything in Navajo,” Hot said.

Teaching computer literacy in Navajo can be challenging because there is more demonstration involved. “I try to do a lot of one-on-one,” Hot said. She works closely with the Navajo elders, who sometimes have a more difficult time than the younger generation. “They’re scared to touch something, afraid something might go wrong.” Hot works to reassure the elders and let them know that a computer is not as breakable as it might appear. She encouraged anyone with a willingness to learn to sign up for the free class that will be offered from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Oct. 19 at the Aztec Public Library. Esther Hoskie, of Window Rock, said she would be interested in taking a class in Navajo to have a better understanding of how to use her computer. “It’s amazing, the young people know how to use it,” Hoskie said.

She was at the event in Aztec, because her granddaughter Jasmine Sylvester, 14, was one of two Navajo students to receive a free laptop from Sacred Wind Communications. The other was Angelina Anderson, also 14. Both girls entered an art contest sponsored by Sacred Wind Communications. Their art was selected to hang in the Bloomfield office. Their prize was one Gateway laptop each. “Sacred Wind outfitted them with an operating system,” Badal said.

The art contest was open to children ages 8 to 18.

Sylvester’s pencil drawing of the Four Sacred Mountains was completed by the young artist in less than 15 minutes. “I didn’t have time to think about it, so I just decided to draw the Four Sacred Mountains,” said Sylvester, a freshman at Bloomfield High School. “Ever since she was little she was always scribbling,” Hoskie said proudly.

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Angelina Anderson's mother Sharon Anderson said she didn't even know her daughter could draw. "I was surprised when they called and said she won the contest," Sharon Anderson said.

"I was surprised too," said Angelina, who lives in Lower Fruitland and is a freshman at Kirtland High School. "I will use my laptop when we travel and when I have school projects.

Undoubtedly, both girls will use their laptops to surf the Internet for information, which Badal said is important in everyday life. That is why this company decided to support Fast Forward New Mexico.

"I view this as more than Internet training. We're bringing opportunities to people to seek employment and economic opportunities," he said. "Without access to the Internet is like sitting in a library without a library card or the ability to read."

Sacred Wind Communications, voted the most inspiring company in America by NBC and American Express, also has taken Internet training to chapter houses in the past. With Fast Forward, people can receive free Internet training at their community libraries.

For more information about Sacred Wind call 505-821-5080. For more information about Fast Forward training, log onto www.fastforwardnm.org.

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