



Times-Standard

How to improve local digital literacy through Generation Zero Divide

By Sean McLaughlin and Sam Kaplan

Posted: 10/28/2010 01:23:11 AM PDT

Broadband stimulus will help Access Humboldt provide digital literacy and media training courses for hundreds of least-served Humboldt County students.

This year, Access Humboldt's award-winning broadband media initiative, called Digital Redwoods, will grow another ring. Just like our inspiring forests, the region's community media continue expanding local roots and canopy networks to build a stronger community of anchor institutions -- government agencies and community service districts, schools, health care, libraries, public safety, culture, arts, media and other community based organizations all helping to create healthy sustainable communities. The next iteration for the North Coast is Generation Zero Divide (Gen ZD), a digital literacy project supported by federal stimulus funding for sustainable broadband adoption.

Local efforts of Access Humboldt are part of a larger Gen ZD digital literacy project through ZeroDivide (zerodivide.org) a community technology foundation based in San Francisco. Gen ZD is designed to help eliminate the "digital divide," where many low-income and rural youth lack access to the digital media training necessary to get jobs in a global marketplace that increasingly demands

technologically savvy workers.

Digital literacy includes essential skills for people to effectively engage in community. The Knight Commission's 2009 report *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy*

in the Digital Age makes three overarching recommendations:

A. Maximizing the

availability of relevant and credible information;

B. Enhancing information capacity of individuals; and

C. Promoting public engagement.

The Gen ZD project is taking practical steps to meet these goals.

To expand local information capacity, Access Humboldt will coordinate a series of collaborative digital media initiatives to provide hundreds of least-served Humboldt County youth and their teachers with professional development in fields including live video production and editing, graphic and web design, animation, audio and radio storytelling, and documentary filmmaking.

Digital Redwoods' next generation literacy efforts will help to kick-start Humboldt County's information economy, providing a steady stream of trained workers with skills to develop our region's broadband media industries.

For the first step in this process, Access Humboldt will complete an inventory of Humboldt County's digital media resources. Working with community anchors including local media providers and other broadband connected businesses, the project will



Times-Standard

determine what areas of the region are most in need of digital media programs and what types of programs are most needed.

From there, Access Humboldt will work to strengthen existing programs that meet those needs, and help fill whatever gaps remain -- both with new programs and by helping local community based organizations to offer new digital media training.

Youth media activities will support local students developing digital media skills. As learning networks grow, youth will build and connect with the digital media industry, creating opportunities to earn income from their work while developing leadership skills and producing digital media content for the local marketplace of ideas. These youth will form the core of our next generation of producers, providing a new source of local programming to empower local voices.

Finally, to showcase this wealth of new, locally produced media content, Access Humboldt will be launching new online services and resources: a site for our new youth media producers, information on local digital media resources, and a digital portal for Humboldt County and the North Coast, gathering and presenting local media content (this last site has just launched as a trial: see www.accesshumboldt.mirocommunity.org).

Access Humboldt is a founding member of the Digital Pathways project funded through the County's Workforce Investment Board and diverse partners, including Northern California Indian Development Council, Eureka City Schools, Ink People Center for the Arts and others. Working with the Humboldt Regional Occupational Program (HROP), College of the Redwoods, HSU and diverse community anchor institutions is significant. Access Humboldt recognizes that a skilled workforce is

essential to building our local media industry and that digital literacy and media training are natural components of future vocational courses.

Digital literacy and media training are absolutely necessary in order to bring our educational and vocational curriculum into the 21st century and to give our young people the skills they need to succeed in a rapidly evolving global economy.

The same local investments in digital literacy that improve the marketplace of ideas also help to build a healthy and sustainable democracy.

Sean McLaughlin is executive director of Access Humboldt and a Knight Media Policy Fellow with New America Foundation. Sam Kaplan is a Digital Arts Service Corps member, working with Access Humboldt to develop Gen ZD and related digital literacy projects. Contact info@accesshumboldt.net or check <http://accesshumboldt.net> for more information.