

Digital equity boosts the American dream in Southern Chester County

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What is American Self-Actualization? It is the idea that the individual possesses the freedom to define him/herself and, to determine what he/she desires to be, to accomplish in all aspects of life.

And that through grit, determination, perseverance, resilience, and a strong work ethic each individual can realize and achieve their life aspirations and goals – be that a stone mason, a master carpenter, a master mechanic, a business entrepreneur, a community leader, or an elected official.

Most of us know the famous inscription on the Statue of Liberty. But it is a small section of a poem by Emma Lazarus titled “the New Colossus” which eloquently expresses the America that we know and cherish. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_Colossus

One of the cornerstones of self-actualization is freedom of choice. And for many Americans it is manifested in all aspects of life: some examples — where to live, what schools to attend, what jobs to apply for, what food and culture to embrace, what music and arts to follow.

In the latter part of the 20th century and the first 22 years of the 21st century another choice has become paramount, and critically essential, to providing a pathway to realizing the American dream – the choice to have access to and the skills/literacy to take full advantage of all of the varied aspects of the Internet.

For many of us this has become second nature. We use the Internet as a reference tool, a dictionary, a restaurant guide, to check on availability of medicines, to arrange appointments, to chat with friends and family, and a myriad of daily activities to enhance our lives. It has become an integral part of our toolkit to realize and achieve all that we want out of life in America.

But for many Americans, and sadly for the most vulnerable, the ones who might need the Internet for critical life issues, they have no Internet choice. Because of where they live, their age, their income level, and a host of other factors they cannot access the Internet. They live in areas where there is no Internet access, or the Internet speed is so poor it is virtually unusable.

And even if they have Smartphones, their cellular coverage may be so poor that they are forced to travel the county looking for “bars” of cellular coverage.

In Southern Chester County, there is a grass roots community initiative to start to address lack of Internet availability. Two projects have been launched with widespread community support.

One is to get a true and accurate assessment of where in SCC there are areas of no or limited Internet availability. An Internet Broadband Assessment survey is currently underway, led by the Chester County Intermediates Unit and the consulting firm of Magellan Advisors.

The second project is a pilot program to teach basic Internet skills/literacy to members of the SCC community starting with those most vulnerable –seniors, low income, living in rural areas.

The skills/literacy project is led by the RSVP group and is executed through several SCC local community service organizations who have great reputations with the community and are trusted community partners.

Both of these initiatives have received widespread support from the SCC Detail Equity Coalition – Chester County Commissioners, local municipalities, school districts, public libraries, and a cross-section of SCC community service organizations.

Digital Equity has become so much more than just a technology initiative. It is embedded in many varied aspects of what makes a community a thriving and vibrant place that welcomes all citizens. A place of culture, diversity inclusion.

Digital Equity has become the foundational backbone of community life – education, health, housing, social services, climate/nature, workforce development, retail, business/commerce. All are enabled and enhanced via digital equity – both access and skills/literacy.

If you are interested in joining the SCC coalition, and actively supporting current projects – both the Broadband Assessment project, and the Skills/Literacy project — please reach out to Joan Holliday (dochollisv@aol.com) and Jim Mercante (vjmercante@gmail.com).