

Foster month kicks off with laptop giveaway



Bernard Naquin shows off the new laptop he was awarded Monday morning at the Nevin Center. Naquin said he plans to use the new computer to complete homework assignments and to study for upcoming finals. The computer comes with Windows 7, Office Home and Student, Word, Powerpoint and Excel. (Photo by Tyler Orsburn)

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Richmond High graduate Bernard Naquin, 19, won't have to look too far to find a computer these days. The Contra Costa County teenager and Diablo Valley College student was awarded a brand new Dell laptop Monday morning at the Nevin Center. "I was surprised when they told me I was going to receive the computer," Naquin said. "Out of everyone in the county, they chose me. I didn't expect it."

The laptop didn't just fall from the sky. The laptop giveaway was organized by Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia, California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) president Sunne Wright McPeak and iFoster founder Reid Cox.

CETF granted iFoster, a California-based non-profit, \$300,000 to expand its technology-based child welfare program in seven California counties. The idea is to provide foster children, those like Naquin, who have recently left the foster care system, access to low-cost computers and high-speed Internet connections.



iFoster founder, Reid Cox, from left to right, and Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia present a new Dell laptop to Bernard Naquin as California Emerging Technology Fund president Sunne Wright McPeak looks on. Naquin said he is going to use the computer to help him study for upcoming finals. (Photo by Tyler Orsburn)

“Computers and Internet are priced out of range for a majority of families raising vulnerable children,” Cox said. “Our intention is to help their children succeed at school and enter the work force.”

According to Cox, iFoster has already provided over 1,000 low-cost computers, helping over 2,500 students and young adults complete their schoolwork and secure employment.

Contra Costa Supervisor Gioia said the Nevin Center ceremony was symbolic and illustrated how the new partnership will work. “There are about 1,000 children and youth in the Contra Costa County foster care system, many of whom will benefit from the program,” said Gioia. “We want to make sure they have the best support possible to be successful when they emancipate out of foster care,” a term used for leaving the system after reaching age 18.

Closing California’s digital divide for children and families is what concerns CETF president McPeak. “It’s important to get technology, computing devices and access to the Internet into the hands of people that don’t have them today,” McPeak said. “For foster kids and their families they have many challenges. Not having access to a computer is just one more [challenge].”

Naquin is no stranger to challenges. It was his passion for football that motivated him to go to college. This fall Naquin will transfer to Sierra College in Rocklin, California. He’s even contacted their football coach to see if he can put on the shoulder pads.

Ultimately Naquin plans to study kinesthesiology at a four-year university. He wants to use his degree to help athletes achieve their dreams. “I told myself once I retire from football I want to come back to Richmond High and coach,” he said.

Now with a new laptop in hand, Naquin can go anywhere his mind and the World Wide Web will take him.