

EMU partners with Wireless Ypsi to provide free Internet access to 2 low-income housing developments

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Two low-income **Ypsilanti** housing developments now have free wireless Internet access because of an initiative spearheaded by an [Eastern Michigan University](#) program and [Wireless Ypsi](#).



Eight youths participated in the project. Courtesy of Jack Bidlack

EMU's [Business Side of Youth](#) program, **Digital Inclusion**, partnered with Wireless Ypsi to provide Internet access for [Hollow Creek](#) and [Paradise Manor](#) housing developments.

The [Ypsilanti Housing Commission](#) is footing the bill for the Internet services, which will amount to \$50 per month for each location, according to Interim Director **Eric Temple**.

Hollow Creek, at 124 S. Grove Road, has 20 housing units and Paradise Manor, at 944 W. Michigan Ave., has 36 units.

[Digital Inclusion](#) is a youth development program and a social enterprise mostly for ages 16-19, although this particular project had participants in the 14-22 age range.

Participants in the program are trained by EMU students in computer refurbishing and software installation. The youths go through an 8-10 week training session to familiarize themselves with the software.

The Southside Ypsilanti Wireless Project occurred Aug. 14 and was supported by the [James A. and Faith Knight Foundation](#) and the **Workforce Investment Act**.

Jack Bidlack, director of the B. Side, said the nearly \$16,000 grant from the foundation covered the costs for the project. The program is self sustainable, Bidlack said, and only seeks additional funding for projects they're unable to afford.

"It's a very gracious amount," Bidlack said. "With that money, we were able to do this."

Bidlack, along with eight Digital Inclusion students and Wireless Ypsi co-founder **Steve Pierce** spent the day installing and testing the new wireless expansion.



Paradise Manor
Courtesy photo

Pierce trained the youth, and each participant had the chance to see an installation done, perform an installation and teach the next group how to install the routers.

Ten wireless repeaters were installed on the two sites, allowing residents access to the Internet.

The day after the initial installation, Bidlack said they returned to do some troubleshooting and were surprised to see how many people were utilizing the services.

"In the one community alone, there were 77 people that logged in," Bidlack said.

Pierce said the installations were the most he's ever done in one day. The installation took nearly 10 hours.

"It's rocking away now," Pierce said. "Sometimes we'll have up to a 100 using it a day."

Pierce said he volunteered his time for this project so that Wireless Ypsi will continue to reach more parts of the community. Currently, more than 1,500 people use the free Internet service.

"It's critical," he said. "That's why I wanted to get it in public housing."

Bidlack said these two communities were chosen because it's important to "bridge the digital divide."

"If we don't keep our communities and kids up to par, they're going to fall way behind," he said. "If you can't get to the Web, you can't do your homework. We're trying to get them to the place that everything is taking place, which is online. I think it's fantastic that we're able to do this work in some of the most desperate areas."

Wireless Ypsi Founder Steve Pierce helped install the wireless Internet at the two locations. **Courtesy of Jack Bidlack**

Looking toward the future, Bidlack said he would like to expand access throughout the community.

"We'll continue to look for possibilities," he said. "If there's a funder out there who wants to fund the project, we'll gladly go out there."



Before school begins, Digital Inclusion and its youth staff will return to Hollow Creek and Paradise Manor as well as the [Parkridge Community Center](#) to update the computer labs. All three communities have learning centers on site and the youth will completely revamp all of the systems.

Many of the young people involved in Digital Inclusion come from low-income communities, which are some of the ones they are servicing through their work.

"This is what the program was designed for," Bidlack said. "(The participants) take this knowledge back to their communities."

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