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Digital Inclusion store opens

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By [Lisa Swearingen](#)

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new location of Eastern Michigan University's Digital Inclusion store took place on Monday, Nov. 25 at Sill Hall in the College of Technology between noon and 2:00 p.m.

The DI is now located in the lower level of Sill Hall, and is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The DI provides the opportunity to obtain computer hardware and software training. It is operated by the Business Side of Youth, or the B-Side, which started in 2007. The B-Side promotes the reduction of the technology gap in low-income areas of Washtenaw.

“Digital Inclusion is our way of saying, if you’re going to walk the walk and talk the talk, you should be able to do it,” director of the B-Side and DI Jack Bidlack said. “We’ve distributed more than 350, almost 400, computers to the community. A lot of those going to low-income and at-risk [people], but at the same time, we’ve also provided services and equipment to faculty, staff and students.”

DI also has labs set up at the housing departments in Ypsilanti.

EMU computer science major Ryan Dixon helps with the refurbishment of computers at the DI. He said that after refurbishing, the computers are often either sold or donated to low-income families, but they can also be sold to anyone.

The DI doesn’t just help within the community. The group also helps EMU students to learn a little bit more about using technology efficiently.

“There are people who are very tech-savvy or there are people who don’t have any skills,” Dixon said. “Sometimes, that’s because they don’t have that technology available. Our mission is to be able to get these machines to those families.”

The DI used to be located in Rackham Hall, a building on campus that is fairly lacking in foot traffic. Dixon said because of the former location, most people on campus were unaware of DI.

“With this new location right here [in Sill Hall], we’re hoping to attract more foot traffic and in a sense, get our name out there so people can understand what we do,” he said.

The intake consultant for the Michigan Small Business and Technology Center, Kory Scheiber, said he is “lovingly involved with the Business Side of Youth.” He has been a volunteer with the B-Side since 2008 and teaches classes on programming at a multitude of workshops.

Scheiber said DI is accomplishing three different goals. The first of these goals is to interact with, train and provide community members with low-cost technology. The second and third goals are to provide a training environment for youth to learn about repairing and refurbishing technology and in turn, training experience providing college students the opportunity to teach.

Wade Tornquist, interim dean for the COT, said he likes that the DI is now located in the COT because the college has a computer engineering technology program that could benefit from the work the DI does with the computers.

“We think that Digital Inclusion is a great program that augments our academic programs,” Tornquist said.

Joey Blaszczyk, membership sales representative with the Ypsilanti/Ann Arbor Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber helps local businesses in the community ranging from nonprofit to academic environments.

“What we do is really welcome them into the community,” he said. “With Digital Inclusion opening up on campus here, we’re here to support that opening, formally welcome them into the community and ultimately wish them continued success.”

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