

Connected Senior Program bridges generational divide through technology

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GOLD BEACH, OR - The Connected Senior Program successfully launched in Gold Beach last week. This collaborative effort, spearheaded by Beacon Broadband's Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Bill Gerski, and Soroptimist Club of Gold Beach President, Debbie Knight, aims to equip senior citizens with essential digital literacy skills, empowering them to navigate the digital world confidently.

The program's inaugural class in Gold Beach saw enthusiastic senior citizens eager to embrace new technological skills. Paired with tech-savvy high school student volunteers, the seniors embarked on their digital journey, beginning with basics like using a trackpad, powering on a computer, and exploring various applications. The classroom buzzed with intergenerational connections as conversations flowed easily between the seniors and students. Lively discussions about high school football filled the air, while at another

table, family histories were shared. This intergenerational learning environment fostered connections between different age groups, allowing participants to share their unique perspectives and experiences. Notably, Oregon State Representative Court Boice's mother, Meryl Boice, was among the enthusiastic participants.

Under the guidance of instructor Kassandra Marley, Beacon Broadband's Technical Services Representative, the seniors diligently absorbed the foundational lesson. The program's curriculum, designed to increase in complexity week by week, promises to equip participants with a comprehensive understanding of digital tools.

The Connected Senior Program addresses a critical need in Curry County, where 26% of the population is over the age of 65, the highest percentage in Oregon. By empowering seniors with digital literacy, the program aims to help them stay connected with family and friends through video calls and online platforms, utilize telehealth services for remote consultations and health monitoring, manage finances conveniently through online banking, access government services online, and enjoy the convenience of online shopping, which is particularly beneficial for seniors in rural areas.

The Connected Senior Program is a shining example of community collaboration. Key partners in this effort include Beacon Broadband, the driving force behind the program, providing resources and expertise to bridge the digital divide; the Soroptimist Club of Gold Beach, instrumental in organizing and supporting the initiative, reflecting their commitment to community betterment (Tracy Ellenbecker, Tricia Bartlett-Iverson, Harmony, and Debbie Knight were specifically involved) and the Curry Health Foundation, a vital partner that recognizes the program's potential to improve seniors' access to healthcare resources. Support was also provided by the Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative, Inc., which offered administrative support; Calix, where Arizona Parker contributed valuable educational resources to enhance the program's effectiveness; and Gold Beach High School, with Carly Write facilitating the participation of high school student volunteers.

The program has garnered significant community support, including donations from CoBank, Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative, Inc., Beacon Broadband, and the Curry Health Foundation, which have been allocated to purchase Chromebooks for the classes. The Connected Senior Program is poised to make a lasting impact on the lives of Gold Beach's senior citizens, fostering digital inclusion and strengthening community bonds. As the program evolves, its positive ripple effects are sure to be felt throughout the community. For information about future Connected Senior Program classes, contact Bill Gerski at: billg@beaconbroadband.com.

About Beacon Broadband

Beacon Broadband, powered by Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative, Inc., is constructing highspeed fiber internet across the south coast of Oregon. With a focus on delivering fast and reliable service, Beacon Broadband is utilizing the latest fiber optic technology that caters to the needs of both residential and business customers.

