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Nebraska Library Commission and Bloomfield Public Library Celebrate Kickoff of \$3.6 Million Grant to Increase Availability of Internet throughout State

(LINCOLN) – Library advocates and supporters, librarians, and partners came together in Lincoln this week for a two day celebration that launched the Nebraska Library Commission’s Broadband Technology Opportunity Project. Jennifer Lauck, attended the event to represent Bloomfield Public Library.

The U.S. Department of Commerce awarded the Library Commission a \$2,416,403 grant to fund Nebraska’s public computer center project, *Library Broadband Builds Nebraska Communities*. The three-year project is designed to expand broadband capacity; upgrade public computing resources in libraries; and advance access to employment, learning, health information, and E-Government services. The Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), provides funding to expand broadband access and adoption in communities across the U.S. In addition to the federal grant, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will provide \$1,251,786 in matching funds, including a grant and technical assistance to support the project. The total project budget is \$3,668,189. Funding for this Kickoff launch meeting was provided by Connected Nation through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“The broadband technology grant presents an unprecedented opportunity for many Nebraska public libraries to upgrade their public computing capacity for serving community residents,” said Rod Wagner, Nebraska Library Commission Director. “Technology enhancements will result in measurable increases in use of library computers for E-Government, learning, employment information, and more. The ultimate benefit goes to the many Nebraskans who will have greater access to library computers and high-speed connectivity networks for personal, education, and job-related needs.”

Special guests at the event included Bill & Melinda Gates, Sarah Chesemore, Senior Program Officer with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Sally Gardner Reed, Executive Director of the national organization *Citizens for Libraries* and an internationally-recognized library advocate; and Congressman Lee Terry, 2nd District of Nebraska and member of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet.

Providing fast Internet service in Nebraska’s rural areas remains a challenge, but the Nebraska Library Commission is working with local libraries and a variety of partners to make the technology and educational programming available in more places across the state, as it launches

its \$3.6 million, three-year program to better equip library public computer centers in 147 library buildings across Nebraska.

Attendees listened to presentations on the future of libraries and technology, as well as panels on how partnering organizations plan to utilize libraries in the future to assist their customers do everything from starting small businesses and filing government forms, to seeking employment.

“Nebraska libraries, by providing free access to information and opportunity for all Nebraskans, play a vital role in Nebraska’s education and economic futures,” said Jennifer Lauck, director of Bloomfield Public Library. “As access to the Internet becomes more and more vital, Nebraska libraries will play an even greater role in maintaining our communities’ way of life, while contributing to future community economic development.”

To learn more about the project, see *Library Broadband Builds Nebraska Communities* at <http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/lbbnc>. To learn more about the grant in Bloomfield, contact Jennifer Lauck, Bloomfield Public Library. 402-373-4588 or plibrary548@yahoo.com