

LAFOURCHE PARISH PUBLIC LIBRARY TO PROVIDE LAPTOPS FOR CHECKOUT

Laptops available for checkout at Thibodaux and South Lafourche Branches beginning July 1

Thibodaux, LA – While it may be difficult to believe, many people still do not have computers or Internet access in their homes. Beginning July 1, however, the Lafourche Parish Public Library will begin addressing that problem by allowing patrons to check out laptop computers just as they would check out books.

The laptops will be available, on a first-come, first-serve basis, at the Thibodaux and South Lafourche branches of the Lafourche Parish Public Library.

Through the State Library of Louisiana, the Lafourche Parish Public Library is able to provide these laptop computers to parish library cardholders through *Louisiana Libraries: Connecting People to Their Potential* project, which is funded by an \$8.8M Broadband USA grant secured by the State Library last year.

The Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, or BTOP, is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. These grants provide support for the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas including enhancing public computer centers and encouraging sustainable adoption of broadband service. Public libraries are the primary public computer centers for Louisiana.

The Lafourche Parish Public Library is one of Louisiana's 337 public libraries with whom the State of Louisiana is partnering. The Thibodaux and South Lafourche branches will provide the laptops for checkout beginning July 1. Any library patron who is at least 18 years old and has no lost library materials or overdue fines on his record may check out a laptop by showing his public library card and valid government-issued picture I.D.

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The laptops have been installed with Microsoft Office 2007, among other programs. Students completing homework projects, adults conducting research or who are job hunting, and those who are simply curious what all the fuss is about will be able to check out the laptops and finally experience what it is to use a computer and work in the comfort of their homes. All laptops are wireless-enabled, so they can access the Internet from any public hot spot.

"Public libraries have always been critical and central points of access to information. In the 21st century, this includes much more than books. Without computer or internet access, the most needful of our fellow citizens will not be able to fully and completely participate in today's world. Access to information

levels the playing field for all of our citizens and opens up opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable,” says State Librarian Rebecca Hamilton.

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