

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: Paul Hixson at hixson@uc2b.net or Charlie Smyth at smyth@uc2b.net

Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband (UC2B) announces first Community Benefit Fund Allocations

Urbana-Champaign -- UC2B, the local not-for-profit organization representing both cities and the University of Illinois that helped bring fiber optic internet connectivity to Champaign-Urbana has announced their first round of awards from the Community Benefit Fund. A total of \$112,668 to 11 local applicants has been granted for programs that are aimed at addressing problems of digital access and digital equity for low-and-moderate (LMI) income residents in CU.

Speaking on behalf of UC2B, Board Chair Charlie Smyth stated, "Getting the Community Benefit Fund up and running has always been a major goal of the Board. We received excellent help and support from the local community in evaluating and launching this 2018 Awards Program and those folks deserve many thanks. We had fantastic responses and great programming ideas from the local organizations that applied." Paul Hixson, UC2B Board member and chair of the CBF committee noted, "Unsurprisingly, the needs in our community far outweigh the resources of our Community Benefit Fund".

Within the group of 11 award winners, there was considerable variety in the types of programs supported by these new grants. Three awards will be going to support community computer labs sponsored by neighborhood churches in LMI areas. Two awards are for programs aimed at preparing LMI youth for a future in IT, one award was won by a prisoner re-entry education program, two awards will help programs for immigrants and refugees in our community, one award will help a housing complex for LMI residents provide shared wireless access to residents, and two projects will help provide needed IT services to medical programs that serve LMI clients.

The winners for 2018 are: St. Luke CME Church (\$6,300), New Hope Academy (\$11,770), Champaign Church of the Brethren (\$16,497), Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center (\$24,410), Ghetto Genius (\$12,343), First Followers (\$16,490), University YMCA New American Welcome Center (\$14,058), ECIRMAC – The Refugee Center (\$2,000), Homestead Apartments (\$1,200), Promise HealthCare (\$3,600), and Avicenna Community Health Center (\$4,000).

The idea for the UC2B Community Benefit Program originated from suggestions that first surfaced in the local Black community in 2009 in a series of grassroots meetings aimed at exploring how new IT capabilities might empower those within lower income communities to improve their own situation. That original concept was carried forward by the founders of the UC2B non-profit organization and funded by contributions from UC2B's private buildout partner (originally iTV3, and now, i3Broadband). Mr. Smyth concluded by stating that "now that this

has finally gotten off the ground, we are pleased to announce that this will be just the first year out of many for the annual awards program”.

About UC2B

UC2B is a not-for-profit organization created by the Cities of Urbana and Champaign and the University of Illinois to oversee the UC2B fiber optic network throughout the community. UC2B started as an intergovernmental consortium in 2010 to build and operate the UC2B fiber-optic network using federal and state grants with local matching funds. For more information about UC2B, visit www.uc2b.net or contact Paul Hixson at hixson@uc2b.net or Charlie Smyth at smyth@uc2b.net

About i3 Broadband

i3 Broadband is UC2B’s private partner that provides TV, Voice and Internet services through UC2B’s 100% fiber optic network and is in charge of building out additional connections to individual homes throughout the Champaign-Urbana community. For more information, visit www.i3broadband.com or call 877-976-0711.

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