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YOUR IDEAS: A NEW PLAN FOR CHICAGO

Tech training centers

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It is my belief that any future plan for the success of Chicago must include solid job skills training for the inner-city community residents. This training must have technology as its foundation.

Here's my story and how I arrived at this proposal: In 2000, my wife worked as a counselor for the now defunct "Cradle to the Classroom" program in the Chicago Public Schools. One night she received a call from a very distraught young lady who exclaimed that her fiancé was sitting on the side of the bed crying. This young lady knew that I was a minister so she asked my wife if I could talk to him.

I spoke briefly with him on the phone and learned that he was on the verge of giving up. After submitting numerous job applications with no success, his inability to provide for his family had simply wearied him. He sat there contemplating his next move. He informed me that daily he was offered money to "deliver packages to people" on the streets, but he was not raised like that and didn't want to tune to that life. But, as he exclaimed, with no job, no job prospects and no money, that appeared to be all he could do to provide for his family.

I asked him to try one more thing. Let me teach him some computer basics then try again for employment. It worked out pretty well for him, and I eventually lost touch. But as I was driving him home one day I noticed a lot of boarded up buildings. I realized that if technology helped this young man, it could help many more in the community.

I approached the owner of one of the buildings and he allowed me to use his building, but I had to fix it up and secure it. So I did, and my wife and I formed Charity in the Community and started training people in the Englewood and Auburn Gresham communities in technology. It provided numerous community residents the skills necessary to obtain gainful employment.

So many times I hear people talk about the millionaires that reside in the Silicon Valley; the people who have developed a tech tool, tech toy, or application that has made them wealthy. But there is very little focus on the very well compensated support careers created for those who support the tools, toys and/or apps. I know many people in the Silicon Valley who are living well and enjoying life because they work in this support arena. This is the key to stabilizing the inner city communities and providing a growth path for the residents of Chicago.

I propose that Chicago establish a network of career-focused community technology training centers. We need to have these centers in locations where community residents can come and learn the technical components necessary to become self-sufficient. I know we have the City Colleges of Chicago, but many people are intimidated by or afraid of attending a formal educational institution. Also, the community tech centers should spend the needed time to provide knowledge sharing and support.

Today, every cash register in the store is a computer, banking is done via the Internet, bills are paid online, and even our telephone and television services are delivered via the Internet. Everything is driven by technology. Until community residents become technically savvy, the communities will continue to be blighted, hopeless and full of despair.

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