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Comcast program will help close digital divide

Comcast's Internet Essentials give internet to low-income families

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By Janiah Adams



Six-time Olympic medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey is helping to close the digital divide.

She travels around the country talking to families about getting connected to the internet. She does this as a spokeswoman for Internet Essentials, which provides internet and computers to low-income families at a low price.

It is an initiative of Comcast, and Joyner-Kersey came on board to help level the playing field, to transform and change lives, she said.

“Bridging that gap is so important,” Joyner-Kersee said. “You don’t want to have a reason to block someone from not being able to continue to excel in life.”

The digital divide can be defined as the gulf between those who have ready access to computers and the internet, and those who do not. According to a Pew Research Center study done in 2016, the lower the income bracket, the less people have access to home broadband.

To help combat this issue, Comcast launched Internet Essentials in 2011. The company announced on Aug. 15 that it is expanding its program for low-income senior citizens from five cities to 12, which now includes Miami. Internet Essentials will be partnering with Elevate Miami, a program that educates senior citizens ages 55 and up in technology. Internet Essentials will also be donating 25 laptops to help create a mobile computer lab. About 50 cards will be given to low-income seniors that will give them six hours of free internet access.

“We’re announcing today that now in six years, we have connected over four million low-income Americans to the internet, most of them for the first time in their lives,” said David Cohen, senior executive vice president and chief diversity officer of Internet Essentials.

Cohen said the program has connect about half a million Floridians, with 200,000 from Miami.

“That’s real impact and real progress and we’re just determined to continue the battle,” Cohen said. “Continue to connect more and more low-income Floridians, more low-income residents in Miami and low-income Americans to the internet.”

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami, the host of the press conference, were big winners, too.

Some of the young mentees part of Big Brothers Big Sisters were present at the press conference and were surprised with a free laptop.

Jefferey Williams, a 13 year old Miami Gardens resident, said the laptop will help him a lot.

“I really didn’t have a device at home, so now that I have one, I’m able to do homework,” Williams said. “My old computer is old and it has viruses, so now that I have mine, I won’t need to use that computer. It helped me a lot, to be honest.”

Williams was also excited to see Joyner at the press conference, and Superintendent Alberto Carvalho.

“I never expected to see an actual Olympic gold medalist,” Williams said. “My uncle told me about her, but I never expected to actually see her. And then the superintendent, he came to my school earlier this year, but it’s crazy to actually see him in person because he never came to my class. It’s kind of a big deal in my community.”

Families have the opportunity to apply for the program online at internetessentials.com. Members can get high-speed internet for \$9.95 per month and a computer for less than \$150, Cohen said.

As Joyner travels the country, she said that she has seen senior citizens be intimidated by the internet.

“I’ve heard from seniors at first being intimidated but to the point of wondering what’s coming out of that box, how they’re coming out, to the point of ‘wow,’” Joyner said. “It’s magic and that’s why I love how they were able to connect with their loved ones from across the world and knowing that this capability exists, because my great great grandmother couldn’t relate, but they realize that it is another form of communicating.”