

## **“Community Connect” Program Leverages Tachyon Portable Broadband Satellite Connectivity to Bring the Digital World to Underserved Communities**

*“eBus” Fleet Brings the World Wide Web and Computer Learning to Local Neighborhoods*

### **Innovation in Community Service**

The Community College Foundation (TCCF) is a Sacramento-based nonprofit organization that is dedicated to excellence in education and the enhancement of communities. Founded in 1983, the organization’s nationwide Community Connect program began in 1999 to help teachers learn about technology. It educates and provides training to underserved communities through the use of the Internet, computers and advanced technology.

In today’s competitive job market, those literate in technology are in a better position to succeed. Recognizing this, TCCF took a novel approach toward bridging the digital divide and began offering technology learning – literally from the back of a bus.

### **In the Beginning**

eBus0 was TCCF’s first mobile educational endeavor. In 1999, the recreational vehicle was equipped to deliver technology instruction to California public school teachers and outfitted by TCCF with Macintosh computers. In the last five years, the bus has trained more than 35,000 teachers on multimedia and computer technology so that computers deployed in schools can be used more effectively in classrooms.

With the success of the teacher-training program, TCCF realized the potential of providing computer training to communities at large and organized eBus1, which operated in Los Angeles from 1999-2003. Sponsored by Wells Fargo, eBus1 was a 40-foot converted city bus outfitted with 20 computer stations.

The bus provided free services to underserved communities in Los Angeles, providing technical outreach and training. TCCF initially formed relationships with Los Angeles County libraries, bringing librarians on board the bus to lead computer training classes, one-to-one tutorials and other classes focused on digital media. This novel approach to education was so well received that it won a Los Angeles County “Top Ten Award” in 2001 for outstanding educational programs.

Today, TCCF coordinates a fleet of 10 buses and has touched more than 200,000 clients in 32 states since its Community Connect program started just five short years ago. This innovative program has truly broadened public perception of the role technology can play in the delivery of education, information and training.

### **The Genesis of Expansion: Internet Connectivity via Portable Broadband Satellite**

With the growing pervasiveness of the Internet in the mid to late 1990s, TCCF recognized a myriad of opportunities for broader training and outreach applications beyond just how to use computers and programming. But the organization was faced with a problem – how to get reliable high-speed broadband connectivity into the neighborhoods it served. After researching

several options, TCCF selected Tachyon Networks Incorporated (“Tachyon”) in 2000 to provide portable high-speed Internet access on board each bus.

Aimee Sherman, TCCF’s director of community connect program operations, says Tachyon’s portability and reliability are invaluable to the program’s needs. Taking education and training on the road day after day cannot be done unless the technology can be set up easily, with the promise of reliable transmission speeds once the equipment is set in place. “With eBuses traveling across the United States, it has been critical to our staff to have dependable 24-hour service support. Tachyon has provided that for us.”

As for the power of the satellite technology to deliver TCCF programs, she says, “There is huge flexibility when you can provide Internet access in remote areas and areas that don’t have access to technology. When we bring people on board our buses, we can show them how technology and the Internet can provide them with information about home buying, voting, health care, the job market – just about everything.”

### Bringing Life Skills to Disadvantaged Communities



*Pearson Digital Learning Bus with Tachyon equipment in use. Photo courtesy of Tachyon Networks Incorporated.*

With Tachyon providing portable broadband access to the Internet, Community Connect has expanded its reach. Community Connect has outfitted more than 10 city buses with computers and Tachyon’s broadband satellite units that set up in less than 45 minutes, allowing end-users access to the Internet from inside the buses. The success of TCCF initiatives has led to exponential growth of programs, including expansion to nine full-time regional buses and the national Pearson Digital Learning Bus, eBus4, which visits 35 states annually, providing reading literacy to children in grades K-3.

By far, two of the most far-reaching regional initiatives have been sponsored by Wells Fargo and Freddie Mac.

Wells Fargo has had three buses on the road since 1999. Each bus operates differently, depending upon the unique needs of the community it serves. Programs span from providing life skills workshops for attendees at local YMCA chapters to programs designed to help students at alternative high schools in California learn to look for a job and find an apartment online.

Additional outreach involves partnerships with the League of Women Voters to encourage voter registration in underserved communities and among young adults ages 18 to 25. Recent outreach includes partnerships with California college campuses and music promoters to increase voter registration among the young.

TCCF is also responsible for putting a partnership in place between Wells Fargo and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to raise awareness of the earned income tax credit (EITC) in underserved communities in Alameda County, California. The program helps those eligible families learn about and file for an electronic refund over the Internet. Depending on the number of dependents and income levels, some participating families have been able to take advantage of online EITC refunds of up to \$12,000. Due to the overwhelming success of this initiative, TCCF will be incorporating this service to other programs in the eBus fleet.

To encourage low-income and minority high school seniors to register for college, TCCF has developed a partnership with the California State University system. With a Saturday morning recruitment program in place, a Wells Fargo bus began visiting more than 12 high school campuses in northern California in the fall of 2004 to encourage students to apply to college. Another initiative benefiting high school students involves eBus information sessions to determine if students are eligible for California educational grants for college.

Freddie Mac has jumped on the mobile education and training bandwagon as well. Freddie Mac has outfitted four buses with the technology necessary to help financial lenders and community-based homebuyer assistance programs bring homebuyer education to underserved families across the United States. The Freddie Mac "Homeownership Mobiles" provide comprehensive counseling, ranging from credit checks to affordability calculations, loan information and financial counseling. The Homeownership Mobiles even allow potential homeowners to surf the Web to see homes available for sale in their communities. Freddie Mac currently sponsors eBuses in California, Texas, Florida and the Midwest region. In 2005, the company will deploy another eBus to provide homebuyer education to the East Coast.

### **Six Years of Innovative Educational Outreach**

David Springett, president of TCCF, emphasizes the program would not have been possible without the critical communications technology component that was missing. Tachyon brings to TCCF portable high-speed broadband satellite connections that provide mission-critical, real-time access to the Internet.

"The real-time aspect is absolutely critical," emphasized Springett. "Once people see what they can do in one regard, they look for other ways to use the Internet in their lives. You can really see people's lives change with this technology in place."

Sherman agrees: "The technology that Tachyon provides is critical to the success of our program. We are now able to expand our services nationwide and provide Internet access to communities without the infrastructure in place. We look forward to a continued partnership with Tachyon and the development of new applications to enhance our efforts."