

Eden Housing helping residents get connected

Scott Forstner • Staff writer | Posted: Friday, June 13, 2014 10:27 am

Jasmine Square Apartments resident Isabel Ceballos sat in the back row of the Community Center room among 25 or so Hispanic adults listening attentively Wednesday evening as Morgan Hill Police officers demonstrated how to navigate the City of Morgan Hill website.

The two officers—Greg Dini and Detective Mindy Zen—took turns speaking with Zen supplying the Spanish translation of Dini's directions. Then they moved to the MHPD's Facebook page—explaining to Ceballos and the rest of their audience what information is available for them to view.

Dini then took a “selfie” picture with some audience members in the background with his smart phone—demonstrating how he can post such images directly to the department's Facebook page in a matter of seconds.

The purpose of the officers' presentation—as well as an additional one by Communities Wired Project Manager Alisa Finch—is to help bridge the “digital divide” among affordable housing residents. The event, hosted by representatives of Eden Housing, is part of the Neighborworks Week 2014, an initiative that in part promotes digital literacy and broadband adoption across the variety of Eden-run affordable housing complexes such as Jasmine Square located at 16530 Monterey Road.

“This is the very first time some of my tenants have seen Facebook,” explains Rachel Castro, the Resident Services Manager for Jasmine Square Apartments. “So, it's exciting.”

As for Ceballos, who was joined by her daughter Paola Arellano, a sixth-grader at P.A. Walsh Elementary School, the purpose of her being there was “to learn more stuff about the Internet and how to get connected.”

Ceballos, whose daughter helped translate her comments in English, is more of a novice computer user, sometimes having to ask her child how to navigate the web.



Computer literacy workshop

Residents of Jasmine Square Apartments listen during Wednesday's computer literacy workshop with presentations by the Morgan Hill Police Department and members of Eden Housing as part of Neighborworks Week 2014.

“Our goal is to get everyone connected and get them low cost equipment as well,” said Jennifer Reed, Director of Fund Development and Public Relations for Eden Housing, a Hayward-based operation that merged with South County Housing, Inc. in January.

The two nonprofit organizations—now under the Eden Housing entity—have more than 75 years combined experience in the affordable housing industry. Since its founding in 1968, Eden Housing has developed or acquired nearly 7,780 homes and 73,069 square feet of adjoining commercial/retail space in 120 properties, according to Eden Housing staff. Eden provides professional property management and supportive resident services to families and individuals living in its portfolio of 7,500 apartment homes in 120 communities.

Among those communities, which span 13 counties including Santa Clara County, Reed explained that between 50 to 60 percent of residents have access to a computer and the Internet, depending on the area and kind of housing. The senior housing developments are much lower at 20 to 25 percent, according to Reed.

In Finch’s presentation, she asked her guests questions such as “Why is the Internet important to you?” Finch explained how Internet connects people, answers any questions a user might have, and helps take care of daily business.

Through efforts such as this presentation, Finch explained they have connected about 200 residents to the Internet who did not previously have access and trained more than 300 residents in digital literacy. At Jasmine Square, qualified residents—those with children enrolled in a school free lunch program—were being offered low cost monthly internet service deals, funded through the California Emerging Technology Fund, according to Finch.

“It’s critical,” said Reed of the importance technology plays in today’s society.

In addition to paying bills, conducting day-to-day business, purchasing items, applying for jobs, and staying connected to distant friends and family, Reed described how schools are using websites to inform parents of school events as well as to post student grades and homework assignments.

“It’s about a tool that helps people function in this society,” Reed said. “If (our residents) don’t know how to use these tools, then we’re not doing our part in helping them.”

For more information about Eden Housing, visit www.edenhousing.org.