Technology For All receives award
Together with SBC (now ATT) Technology For All receive Leadership in Action award for work at Astrodome after Katrina

HOUSTON, March 10, 2006 – Recently, Technology For All (TFA) and SBC Communications Inc. received a Leadership in Action award from Leadership Houston (www.leadershiphouston.org) for their work together at the Astrodome with Katrina evacuees. Upon hearing that Katrina evacuees were coming to the Houston Astrodome, Technology for All (TFA) immediately contacted SBC Communications Inc. (now AT&T Inc.) for assistance in creating a computer lab for evacuees. Within thirty-six hours, computers, phone lines, DSL connections, and furnishings were installed in a portion of the basement of the Astrodome, which was built nearly forty years ago. This space, which became known as the ACT Center (Astrodome Community Technology Center), serviced an explosive demand for wired, wireless and Internet technology to help evacuees search for lost family members from whom they had become separated during the hectic evacuations.

With the combined assistance of more than 800 volunteers, who provided almost 26,000 hours of volunteer service, the two organizations helped evacuees make free local and long-distance telephone calls, set up personal voice mail boxes, use the Internet to register or to find missing loved ones, register online for government assistance, locate employment and housing, and gain the computer skills necessary for assimilation into their new life in a new city. Additional partners, such as Reliant Energy, SimHouston, CompuCycle, Yahoo!, HP, Motion Computing, Advanced Micro Devices, Plains All American Pipeline, Trend Micro, were quickly recruited to come on board to expand the reach and scope of the ACT Center.

Community Impact – One person's story

Holding her baby in the make-shift computer room at the Astrodome, Raina Leon was one of thousands of anguished evacuees separated from their loved ones. She was helped to one of the 205 computers TFA installed at the Astrodome and Reliant. With assistance from a volunteer, she registered her and her baby online, then entered the names of her husband and sons into the "search" field. Moments later, their names popped up, noting they were safe at Reunion Arena in Dallas. She cried, then screamed a huge sigh of relief, pent up from two days of fear and misery. She was quickly handed a phone to call the Dallas shelter to reconnect with her husband (who also had been searching for her online in Dallas). By midnight, the Leon family was finally reunited. "Happy-ending" stories like theirs were repeated thousands of times during the week from inside the Astrodome as evacuees were provided a new kind of TLC (Technology, Leadership, and Compassion) in their quest to reconnect with lost family members.

Goals and Objectives

In natural disasters, experience demonstrates that wired and wireless telecommunications can serve as lifelines for victims, relief workers, FEMA, and other public safety entities.

* At the first reports of evacuees coming to Houston, the TFA-SBC team immediately assembled and assessed and met the most crucial communications needs for evacuees, American Red Cross, FEMA, and other relief agencies by coordinating efforts with local officials and installing additional phone lines, telephones, high-speed (DSL) broadband service for Internet access, desktop computers, cell phones and voice mail.

* SBC installed 1,000 *additional* telephone lines and 300 high-speed broadband (DSL) lines for evacuee phones and Internet access.

* Over 200 computers were provided for evacuees to use at the Astrodome and Reliant City

* With assistance from Yahoo! the team created an online evacuee "registry" and "search" function to help evacuees find their loved ones, and to "register" themselves and their location. Utilizing "crawler" technology to "search" 53 Web sites (e.g., NOLA.com, craigslist.com, redcross.com, fema.gov, and others), evacuees were able to search for multiple sites for registered persons in one stroke.

* The ACT Center enabled evacuees to set up e-mail accounts, which was required to check the status of FEMA applications online. As FEMA phone lines were overwhelmed, applying over the Internet expedited the process.

* When evacuees located missing loved ones in the ATC Center, they were invited to ring a cowbell. Evacuees came to recognize the sound of the cowbell as a symbol of hope, support, and celebration.

In addition to the ACT Center, TFA collaborated with Yahoo! personnel to quickly code and network the paging system in the Astrodome, which delivered announcements for individuals seeking to locate shelter residents.

Thanks to the TLC of SBC and TFA, thousands of evacuees were reunited and could decide for themselves the direction their lives would take next.

* More than 2,000 evacuees, like Raina Leon, searched online and found their spouses, their children, and other family members as a direct result of the **support provided by SBC and TFA.**

* **22,560 evacuees** logged onto the Internet from the computer center. Yahoo! reports that its "Crawler" search site received more traffic over the Labor Day weekend after Katrina than at any other time in Yahoo! history.

* **TFA and SBC's leadership**, in cooperation with the American Red Cross, enabled a faster reduction in evacuees at the main shelters in Houston. After five days, the **number of evacuees housed there dropped by 66 percent** as evacuees used the communications systems to connect and reunite with family.

Community Impact – Ongoing Support

* TFA developed an interactive Web site with links to resources to assist hurricane evacuees and volunteers: katrinasupport.techforall.org.

* Upon the closure of the ACT Center, TFA initiated the Community Technology 2.0 project which is focused on building the capacity of Community Technology Centers (CTCs) in seven of Houston's poorest neighborhoods. This new project will expand the capacity of CTCs to better serve the needs of existing clients, as well as additional clients (Katrina evacuees) who now live in the neighborhoods.

* TFA has already implemented the Community Technology 2.0 project in three sites located in the Sunnyside neighborhood, which is located just south of the Astrodome.

* TFA is in the midst of recruiting and placing seven (7) AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteers into service for a twelve-month commitment to the Community Technology 2.0 projects.

About Technology For All

Technology For All (TFA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit initiative focused on empowering low-income and underserved communities through the tools of technology. By aggregating and sharing resources TFA is creating educational, economic and personal opportunities for America's underserved. In the Houston area Technology For All has helped create and develop over 180 community technology centers (CTCs)

in collaboration with community-based organizations across the region. Nationally TFA provides supportive services to over 350 individual CTCs in fifty-six U.S. cities. TFA's administrative office is located at 109 North Post Oak Lane, Suite 425, Houston, Texas 77024. Its program office is located at 2220 Broadway, Houston, Texas 77012, Phone: 713.961.0012. Technology For All and the Technology For All logo are trademarks of Technology For All. All other company and product names may be trademarks of the respective companies with which they are associated.

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