

# The Daily Herald.

## Program provides computers for underprivileged

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BY Chris Graham

Tracy Bradford wanted to get her 11-year-old son, Dakota, the perfect gift for his birthday. She was surprised when she found out she was getting a brand new computer, which will ultimately become Dakota's present.

"I'm going to be the best mom out there," Bradford said, thinking of what her son might say.

Bradford's family as well as more than 78 underprivileged and disadvantaged families from Maury, Marshall and Giles counties were presented with brand new computers through the Computers 4 Kids program at the Department of Human and Children Services.



**Michael Ramage, executive director of Connected Tennessee, speaks at a conference promoting a program called Computers 4 Kids. After the meeting, Dell computers were given away to 79 underprivileged families. Staff photo by Chris Graham**

Various leaders spoke at a press conference including State Rep. Tom DuBois, R-Columbia, and Paul Jennings, vice president of planning and development for Columbia State Community College. They talked about the importance of having computers.

"Our primary goal is to get high speed internet in as many households as possible," said Michael Ramage, executive director of Connected Tennessee, an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Tennesseans get connected to the Internet.

Ramage said the group hopes to give out 3,000 computers during the next three years.

"We asked ourselves, 'how can we make a difference?' To have kids who have computers at home," he said. "That was the catalyst for our program."

DuBois said the program isn't a hand-out, but rather a hand-up and was happy to be a part of the initiative.

"I'm excited to see the program and legislation come to life," he said after the meeting. "You see it all on paper, but to see it first hand makes it all worthwhile."

After the meeting, the recipients of the new Dell computers were beaming.

Amanda Brown, who works for Complete Caregivers of Columbia, said she is going to use the new computer to homeschool her two sons.

"It was great to hear the news," she said. "I was very surprised."

Her son, Austin, 8, only needed one word to explain how he would use the computer.

"Games!" he said.

Holly Garner, 28, said she is going to use her computer to get through classes at Columbia State Community College.

"I'm really amazed at how this all came together," she said. "It's a tremendous blessing."

A study conducted by Connected Tennessee found almost half of disadvantaged families do not have a computer at home. The Pew Internet & American Life Project recently found that 40 million Americans rely on the Internet as their primary source for science news and information.