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New Partnership Brings Improved Internet Access to Families in Southeast Michigan

The Huron-Clinton Metroparks, The Library Network and Suburban Library Cooperative are working together to provide 100 new hotspots to underserved communities.

The Huron-Clinton Metroparks have teamed up with The Library Network and the Suburban Library Cooperative to form an exciting new pilot partnership that aims to provide equitable access to wi-fi hotspot service for students in southeast Michigan.

In the best of times, inequitable access to the internet is a major problem in the region. The Covid-19 pandemic shined a light on this problem, as schools shut down and moved to remote learning. It was difficult for many to provide the necessary data service and the bandwidth needed for virtual learning. Libraries serve as a community staple for people to have access to computers and the internet, however they were required to close during the pandemic, meaning residents could no longer come into the library and utilize their internet access. Some libraries still are not open, but are continuing to provide curbside (contact free) or grab-and-go pick-up service and have also shifted to more online programming.

“The Metroparks are excited about the possibilities of this new partnership. Working collectively, we can provide more internet access to families in our region and improve connection to virtual education and resources. Some families have not been able to experience the benefits of virtual field trips and virtual content because of a lack of data service, and we hope this program helps bridge some of those gaps,” says Metroparks Director, Amy McMillan. Expanding internet access also expands access to the digital resources and virtual programs the Metroparks are sharing to keep residents of the five counties connected and engaged with the outdoors – even when they can’t physically visit a Metropark.

This partnership is expanding access to library locations that had limited or no hot spot availability previously. With this one-year pilot partnership, the Metroparks have provided 100 hot spots, in the five-county service region, to be checked out through the library partners for use in underserved areas. The libraries where these devices are available for check-out were selected to focus on underserved areas where hotspot usage would make the greatest impact on the surrounding community. These hotspots will provide unlimited highspeed internet to users by using broadband connectivity with T-Mobile data services.

Steven K. Bowers, the Executive Director of The Library Network, explains “The Library Network is extremely excited about this new partnership and the opportunity to work



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together to support our region. Our two library systems [The Library Network and Suburban Library Cooperative] represent over 100 libraries. Although these new hot spots have been delivered to specific library locations, any in-network library user in the five-county region can request access to the hotspots at their local library. That's a large footprint we are able to reach." As pandemic safety precautions continue to be top of mind, Steven explains that "When a hotspot kit is checked out and returned, the instruction sheets are disposed of and replaced, the kit is sanitized and quarantined a minimum of 24 hours before becoming available for the next user."

The list of specific libraries where these hot spots are available includes:

- Fowlerville District Library
- Hamtramck Public Library
- Leanna Hicks Public Library (Inkster)
- Melvindale Public Library
- Oak Park Public Library
- Pontiac Public Library
- Waterford Township Public Library
- Wayne Public Library
- Ypsilanti District Library
- Lenox Township Library
- Mount Clemens Public Library

The program has initially seen 18 check-outs since February and libraries are already receiving positive feedback. Tammy Turgeon, Director of the Suburban Library Cooperative explains that, "In addition to supporting the data needs of students, providing Hotspots is increasing equitable access to virtual programming by organizations such as the libraries and the Metroparks; expanding opportunities for residents searching for employment and completing virtual interviews; assisting with telehealth care and so much more." She shares a story of a recent hotspot user "a resident needed to visit their doctor but was told it had to be a virtual appointment and was worried that would mean they couldn't access their doctor. The hot spot program allowed them to complete a virtual appointment that they otherwise could not have done. Those are not the type of appointments you can have while sitting in a public library."

Libraries participating in this program are excited because they previously couldn't fund this technology, and now they can better serve their communities. Bowers explains that one location in particular can't say enough positive things. "Oak Park Library is one of our libraries that was extremely excited about the program from the very beginning. Their location is directly next door to a Forgotten Harvest distribution center that



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provides families in need with fresh and nutritious food free of charge. Now the library will be able to share this access to the internet with those families as well.”

This pilot partnership started in December of 2020 with the hot spots being available starting February 2021. The program will be assessed in September 2021 when partners will discuss the opportunities to continue the partnership.

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About Huron-Clinton Metroparks

One of America’s premier metropolitan park systems, the Huron-Clinton Metroparks have served the people of Southeast Michigan since 1940. Managed by the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, the Metroparks are made up of 13 properties in Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties. Available activities include fishing, swimming, boating, hiking, nature study, biking, golf, winter sports and more. The Metroparks also provide educational resources on science, nature, history and the environment. Learn more at Metroparks.com.

About The Library Network (TLN)

[The Library Network \(TLN\)](#) is a public library cooperative serving member libraries in southeast Michigan as well as other libraries throughout the state. Through library cooperatives the Michigan State Legislature is empowered to equitably distribute state aid to libraries to maximize the impact of shared funding for services to Michigan residents and visitors. The mission of TLN is "To offer, provide and facilitate quality library and related services, by means of cooperation and collaboration among libraries." The Library Network is “Libraries Working Together.”

About The Suburban Library Cooperative

The Suburban Library Cooperative was formed under PA89 of 1977 to support public libraries in our service area. The Cooperative provides a delivery system, centralized purchasing, group discounts, training, and an automation system. Member libraries include the Armada Free Public Library, Center Line Public Library, Chesterfield Township Library, Clinton-Macomb Public Library, Eastpointe Memorial Library, Fraser Public Library, Harper Woods Public Library, Harrison Township Public Library, Lenox Township Library, Lois Wagner Memorial Library (Richmond), MacDonald Public Library (New Baltimore), Mount Clemens Public Library, Ray Township Public Library, Romeo District Library, Roseville Public Library, St. Clair Shores Public Library, Shelby Township Library, Sterling Heights Public Library, Troy Public Library, Utica Public Library and the Warren Public Library. For more information about the SLC, visit www.libcoop.net.