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FEATURED

Provo teaching its seniors the wonders of YouTube as part of digital inclusion efforts

Genelle Pugmire Daily Herald May 9, 2018

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Ruth Nielsen, left, and Tyler Allan, right, utilize YouTube during a Digital Inclusion Week session put on by Provo City, the United Way, and Google Fiber at the Provo Recreation Center on Tuesday, May 8, 2018, in Provo. Allan is the sales manager for Google Fiber in Provo.

Evan Cobb, Daily Herald

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Provo senior citizens are a little bit more digital savvy now.

May 7-11 is National Digital Inclusion Week and on Tuesday that inclusion program came to seniors at the Provo Recreation Center.

Digital Inclusion Week “teach-a-skill, learn-a-skill” events are scheduled throughout the week for special populations, and individuals and students can win prizes donated by local businesses if they teach or learn a digital skill and post selfies with #ProvoGotSkills on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Only 25 of the more than 75 seniors in attendance for their daily lunch program said they knew how to find and use YouTube for informational, educational and entertainment purposes.

“More than 60 million people in the U.S. don’t use the Internet, and without web access, it’s increasingly difficult for people to connect with family, apply for jobs or access crucial resources,” said Bill Hultstrom, president and CEO of United Way of Utah County in a press release. “That’s why we’ve worked with several community partners to provide opportunities for seniors, school children and adults to learn and share digital ‘how-tos’ throughout the week.”

Provo Mayor Michelle Kaufusi was the guest teacher to show those attending how to log on to YouTube and find nearly everything. She taught the group how to find information on topics including: how to fix a faucet, how to play piano, healthy foods on a budget, and Elvis Presley singing.

She also admitted for the first time that she had never taken a selfie photo before and that it was her turn to learn that aspect of her phone.

“I’ve never taken a selfie,” Kaufusi said. “This is my first public selfie – ever.”

With help, she took a selfie including those in attendance.

One of the more YouTube-experienced seniors in the crowds was Retha Bartola, 69.

“I mostly use YouTube for music,” Bartola said. “I used it one time to find the words to a Rascal Flats song I needed.”

She said she found the song and the words on YouTube using her phone rather than a larger device.

"I do most everything on my phone," Bartola said. "It's a wonderful resource. We've seen so much in our lifetime."

Bartola said she used to have to ask her children for help, now she uses the internet.

"Today's goal is to help everyone learn a new skill," said Claire Warnick, United Way of Utah County Volunteer Center manager. "The internet isn't just for fun, but is educational and for everyone."

Warnick and several young adults volunteered time to teach the seniors just how to maneuver through YouTube. Google provided laptop computers for the event.

Aura Martinez, 66, said she doesn't have a computer but her children have one and she can use it, when the kids aren't on it.

"I can see today what I can do," Martinez said. "I learned today what I can do."

When asked what she liked about learning about YouTube, Martinez said it was the music and videos and dancing. She said she loves all kinds of music, but her favorite is Michael Jackson and she'll be watching more of him.

"Anyone can participate in Digital Inclusion Week. It takes just a minute to open up the online world to a friend, family member or neighbor. You might teach a senior to use email, show grandparents how to video chat, teach children to use the internet safely, or help a friend create an online resume," Hulterstrom said. "And we're making it fun for anyone to participate with our #ProvoGotSkills social media campaign that offers great prizes from more than 15 local businesses including restaurants, eateries, movie theaters and family recreation venues, for those who participate."

Brett MacCabe, with the Provo City School District, said Google and the United Way included the schools in pushing digital inclusion over all age groups.

"There are 183 classrooms that have 131 devices (Chromebooks)," MacCabe said. "We want students to be producers not just consumers."

Sara McAfee works with the STEM program in the district and gives great credit to Keith Rittel, Provo District superintendent, who pushed to get technology in the hands of the students and teachers.

“We want to highlight good learning,” she said. McAfee said her students were learning everything from coding to animation and that the district has provided nearly a 1-to-1 ratio between student and device.

Teachers and students who post their online learning experiences will be part of a drawing. Five schools will receive awards from the United Way of Utah County to be used for the classrooms.

For Digital Inclusion Week, the United Way, through a Google Fiber sponsorship, will be providing up to \$5,000 in tech supplies to Provo schools and classrooms.

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Digital inclusion events

Other activities during the week include:

Wednesday

Google Fiber and Mountainland Head Start will host a Family STEM Night, held at the Provo Recreation Center, 320 W. 500 North. The event will be devoted to teaching and learning STEM skills with Head Start families from 6 to 8 p.m.

Thursday

There will be A Teen Tech Night, Change the World, The Magic of Working in Tech, that is slated for May 10, at the Provo City Library, 550 N. University Ave., from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. A special guest from Google Fiber will talk about working at Google, the tech industry, start-ups and how we can use technology to help others.

Friday

Google Fiber and The United Way will bring Google Expeditions, a virtual reality learning experience, to students at Franklin Elementary School from 9 to 11 a.m. and 2 to 2:30 p.m. A Google Fiber representative will present a hands-on Makey-Makey demonstration to faculty members during their Teacher Technical Professional Development session. Makey-Makey is an online program developed by MIT students to help teachers engage their students in using STEM skills to invent things.

Genelle Pugmire

A 36-year veteran of covering news in Utah County, Genelle covers Provo, Orem, Vineyard, Faith/Religion, including the LDS Church and general assignments.