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VOICE OF THE PEOPLE SINCE 1876 — A PART OF PATRICK COUNTY'S HERITAGE

PCEF survey finds most have technology access

Responses to a Patrick County Education Foundation technology access survey "suggest that Patrick County citizens are enthusiastically embracing computers and the Internet," according to a PCEF news release.

The PCEF conducted the survey during March 2006 in collaboration with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

"Response by Patrick County residents to our survey was excellent," said Jerry Hughes, foundation executive director.

Two separate survey instruments were used. One was mailed to every county residential address and the other was distributed to

Patrick County High School students in grades 9 through 12. The response rate was 7.4% for the residential survey and 68.8% for the student survey.

"We want to express our appreciation to all those who took the time to respond to this survey," Hughes said. "Our response rate was well above that which is normally expected. The people of Patrick County really came through for us and we want to thank everyone who participated. Now the responsibility is on the foundation and SREB to take their responses and use them to develop online educational programs and opportunities that will benefit our citizens."

Over 98% of respondents to the residential survey were 25 years of age or older. Of those, 90.4% reported that they had at some time used a computer. A 2003 U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report (*Computer and Internet Use in the United States, 2003*) stated that 64% of adults had used a computer during that year.

In the PCEF/SREB study, more than 79% of Patrick County residential respondents and 88% of students said they have access to a computer at home, compared to 62% of households in the 2003 Census report.

When asked if they have Internet access at home, (See SURVEY page 2)

Survey

(From page 1)

82% of county adults and 77.5% of students responded "yes." Two 2006 surveys of Internet use by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 73% of all American adults use the Internet, the news release stated.

The majority (54.4%) of adult Patrick County respondents reported that they have dial-up Internet access at home, while 11.2% have DSL and only .8% have a cable modem. Among all adult respondents, 62.4% reported that they use the Internet daily or a few times per week and 59.4% reported that they use e-mail with the same frequency.

Among all student respondents, 68% reported daily or "a few times a week" use of the Internet, while 62.7% reported daily or a few times a week use of e-mail.

Adult use of the Internet for job search activities was low among county respondents. Of those responding to that question, nearly 50%

said they had never used the Internet for that purpose.

When asked if they had ever used their computers and Internet connections for an online course, 61% of those responding said "never." However, when asked "have you ever taken an online course?" 60% of respondents aged 18-24 said they had.

"The higher the county respondents' income and educational level, the more likely they are to have taken online courses," the news release stated.

"There is a tremendous amount of useful information in this study," Hughes said. "But what is most exciting for the foundation and SREB is the level of interest our respondents expressed in learning more about using the computer and in taking online courses."

Hughes said the majority (52.7%) of adult respondents indicated that they are interested in taking online coursework and 48.6% said they would like

to learn more about using the computer.

"By looking at these responses by age group and income and educational level, we will be able to target educational programs and do a better job of serving the county's citizens," Hughes said. "The foundation and SREB are currently reviewing the survey results and determining what we can do together and individually to maximize our citizens' access to educational opportunities.

"With the cost of gas going up, this study seems particularly timely," Hughes said. "It shows that we have a critical mass of residents in Patrick County who are interested in online courses and who have the ability to take advantage of them. We are both surprised and pleased at the high level of interest in computer-assisted learning. Working with SREB, the foundation will devote considerable effort in the future to helping Patrick County residents to access training in computer use and find the online coursework they need."