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Valley campuses plug into faster Net

K Kaufmann
 The Desert Sun
 October 24, 2006

Palm Desert's three college campuses celebrated their new high-speed Internet connection Monday by using the system to beam in Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger by satellite hookup.

"We talk about transportation infrastructure," Schwarzenegger said, speaking from a school in Glendale. "The greatest highway we're constructing (is) the high-tech highway and communicating from school to school."

Schwarzenegger was one of a bevy of state and local officials who turned out - mostly in person - for a news conference to officially announce the system Monday at the Palm Desert Campus of California State University, San Bernardino.

Made possible with a \$3.4 million grant from the H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation, the new system means students at Cal State, College of the Desert and the Palm Desert Campus of the University of California, Riverside will have access to libraries and data bases nationwide.

"Any university in the U.S., (I can) go into their online catalog and see what they have," Shirley Bigna, head librarian at the UCR Palm Desert Campus, said later in a phone interview.

Bigna said the university is also looking at offering local businesses research consulting through the system for a fee.

The link, which allows super-fast downloads, is already being used for video conferencing and video streaming at the campuses, along with providing the technical backbone for multimedia classrooms.

The system will be available only to students, faculty members and staffers at the three campuses, but its impact will go far beyond, said Jim Dolgonas, president of the Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California, the nonprofit organization that runs the network.

"The beginning of economic development in any area is education," Dolgonas said. "The Internet in general and research and education can be a great equalizer."

Local politicians also hailed the link as being the first step toward bringing a full four-year university to the valley.

"For too long, people have left the valley (for education)," said Palm Desert Mayor Jim Ferguson. "Having high-speed Internet takes geography away from the equation."

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