Whether you want to close the gap in Education, Jobs, Housing, or one of many other areas, they each depend on the Technology Gap, also known as The Digital Divide. Not much happens today that is not affected by some form of technology.

So persuasive is the impact of technology on our lives, that for the first time in our publication history (over thirty years) I have devoted seven entire pages to a single subject, that of Technology Education.

Because technology changes so fast, the challenge is not to think you’ve learned it all and consider your mission to be accomplished. The challenge is to become connected and stay connected with an organization diverse enough, dynamic enough, and historically proven to stay on the cutting edge of change. That organization is BDPA, a nationwide organization of Information System professionals dedicated to closing The Digital Divide. This issue of VISIONS focuses upon a one month period of activity of BDPA’s Cleveland Chapter. if you did not experience any of the events, the next best thing to do is to read on.

“Once a new technology rolls over you, if you’re not part of the steamroller, you are part of the road.”

- Stewart Brand at ThinkExist.com -
The Real American Idol . . .
May Be That Young Person That Lives With YOU! . . . By Henry Ford

By the time you read this, I will have experienced being a judge in the District Level Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Oratorical Contest. While I am grateful for the opportunity, there is something inside me that wishes I could wake up and find that all these young people have tied for 1st place. As I read the speeches, I see and “hear” those of varying talents, expressing youthful optimism that I pray will survive and blossom, despite where they may rank when the results are tallied.

In grade levels K-2, 3-5, 6-8 there are twenty-one contestants or an average of over two contestants for every individual grade. In grades 9-12 there are four contestants, a drop of more than 50%. Some of the questions that plague me include: (1) Why is there a greater than 50% reduction in interest at a time when students should have developed increased awareness and commitment? (2) What has happened to their vision, their goals, their dreams? (3) What can we as adults do to help this disturbing trend?

My non-scientific but hopefully logical conclusion is that in a society increasingly focused on winning, and increasingly focused on “Reality TV” that loves terms such as “You’re Fired”, “You’re Chopped”, “Pack Your Bags”, we unwittingly contribute to causing others to give up. We can help our youth (and adults) when they stumble. We can focus attention on what they do right, instead of criticize temporary weaknesses. Often faced with challenging home circumstances, negative peer pressure, and systems which do not always nurture, a strong effort by our young people should always be commended. Our young people need to know that it is at times such as this that they are the real American Idol. I only wish that at age six (or even sixteen) that I had the NERVE to stand before a audience.

My prayer for the upcoming contest, is that I make the wisest of choices, and more importantly, that those who fail to meet their own expectations (or those of their parents) will receive understanding, reinforcement, and constructive feedback. One of the important facts left out of contest results, is that even last place automatically finishes ahead of those who are not on the playing field.

I brought children into this dark world because it needed the light that only a child can bring.

~Liz Armbruster
By Henry Ford

In the spirit of Black History Month, the BDPA Cleveland Chapter “talked the talk” and “walked the walk” during the month of February. Even for an organization with a long and celebrated history of setting and achieving high and worthy goals, during February these technology leaders reached deeper into the minds and hearts of the Cleveland Community at all levels. With that reach, chapter members increased the comfort level of those they came in contact with, positively impacting their knowledge and understanding of technology.

In addition to weekly behind the scenes planning sessions, and numerous committee meetings by telephone and in person, chapter members stepped up the pace of fulfilling that part of their mission involving bridging the technology gap. The activities touched students, senior citizens, the church community and the general public in a variety of ways.

The SITES (Student Information Technology Education Scholarship) Program hit the ground running as Sylvia Calhoun and a dedicated team began training and grooming students from Cleveland area schools. Students received training not just in computer technology, but also in social behavior, professional image, and other areas that will help them achieve success and become contributing community members.

Because closing the technology gap is so basic to closing the educational gap and achieving economic parity, it is only fitting that during Black History Month, also celebrated is BFTAC (Black Family Technology Awareness Campaign). Formerly known as Black Family Technology Awareness Week, the founders realized that there was a need to extend this program and its important focus beyond one week a year. Once again, BDPA Cleveland stepped up to the plate and “hit a home run.”

The first event was a radio interview with Chapter President Henry Wiggins, who shared information about BDPA with Meryl Johnson on Radio Station WRUV, 91.1 FM. The station’s web site is www.wruv.com.

Not long after that broadcast, and operating with cutting edge performance, lightning speed and marathon-like form, BFTAC team leader Beverly Peterson, SITES Program team leader Sylvia Calhoun, Felicia Ivey and a very dedicated group of volunteers took the message of technology’s relevance and importance to the air waves, community centers, and churches in the Cleveland area. Among those events were:

Thurs., Feb. 17 – Tech Talk to Seniors at the South Euclid Community Center (see Page 5 for full article).

Fri., Feb. 18 - Tech Talk Community Program at Zion Chapel Missionary Baptist Church (see Page 6 for full article)

In addition to a strong physical presence and sharing the message of technology over the airwaves, chapter members also participated in Q&A sessions on-line.

During the week of Feb. 13, technology questions and answers were posted on-line on the Cleveland Chapter’s Blog that was set up specifically for BFTAC. Also posted on that blog at www.askbdpa.blogspot.com were helpful tips about Internet Security and Safety, Warnings about Internet Spam, How To Keep Your Children Safe, and many other helpful hints. After evaluating the success of this effort, the chapter may extend the program.

Another chapter member used BFTAC as an opportunity to help a senior citizen get beyond the confusion of “all those wires” and the challenge of hardware/software incompatibility. In an exercise of patience that covered nearly two days, the successful printer selection and computer-printer hook-up turned massive frustration into a happy senior who is now ready to “connect with the world.” Also, the BDPA member gained valuable, transferrable knowledge from the experience.

At the Tues. Feb. 15 Chapter meeting, member Lavelle Blackwell shared news of an Internship opportunity at Cleveland’s Federal Reserve Bank. Another chapter member responded immediately. It was another testament of the networking value BDPA Cleveland members enjoy; the chance to connect need with opportunity. Without both chapter members being present at the same meeting and at the right time, the connection would not have been made. Without taking you on a spiritual journey, I will just state that I don’t believe this encounter was an accident.

Also, during the same meeting, Lavelle and chapter member Theo Fielding stepped forward to accept additional chapter responsibilities. Several other members also accepted the challenge to use recently increased momentum to expand the chapter’s existing reach and increase its positive impact in the Cleveland community and beyond. All this and more activity occurred during the shortest month of the year, while at the same time the chapter continued to move forward on many other fronts.

In addition to their attendance at several meetings, chapter founder Norman Mays and long-time key members including Ken Wilson, George Williams, and Demo Solaru were constantly being tapped for their background, experience, and valuable insight that led to many previously successful efforts. These members continued to reach out, often behind the scenes to engage leaders in the corporate and educational communities to insure a continued strong and vibrant BDPA Cleveland.

Much of coordinating the massive effort to step up the pace of programs while improving the effectiveness of medium term and long term planning fell upon the shoulders of long-time member David Ford. His ability to multi-task was great challenged, and admirably executed.
TechTalk to Seniors at the South Euclid Community Center

Yes we know its Black Family Technology Awareness Campaign, but understand that BDPA Cleveland is an organization that serves all who express a willingness to learn, regardless of race, nationality, gender, socio-economic status, age or any other self-imposed or short-sighted perceived limitation.

The seniors at the South Euclid Community Center proved that age was no barrier as they bombarded BDPA Cleveland Member Beverly Peterson with technology questions. Beverly’s in-depth knowledge of technology and how BDPA serves the needs of the community proved to be up to the challenge as she fielded questions quickly and effectively. The seniors praised her for her knowledge, personable interaction, and for helping them with questions ranging from “How do I get into my Email” to questions about Internet Security and Genealogy Searches.

As seniors do, even when they are not trying to, they taught several lessons in the course of asking questions. One important lesson is that education does not stop at any particular age, and infirmity does not disqualify one from the desire or ability to learn. They came on canes, and walkers, sometimes in discomfort from various physical challenges, yet they came because they understand that mental activity contributes to mental longevity. A ninety year-old on a cane asking questions and questioning answers takes away my excuse to think that I know it all. If that statement makes you think, it is supposed to!

Resources for Seniors Shared by Beverly Peterson

Beverly Charles, Senior & Health Care Liaison, Office of Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge, 216-522-4900,

Benjamin Rose Institute, Greater Cleveland Access to Benefits, 216-373-1650.

Cuyahoga County Dept. of Senior & Adult Services, 216-420-6750, www.dsas.cuyahogacounty.us

Ohio Benefits Checkup, 216-420-6840

Ohio Senior Health Insurance, Information Program (OSHIIP), 800-686-1578, www.ohioinsurance.gov, 216-420-6840

Above: Beverly Peterson; Explanation by example. Below: a question answered, a bond created!

Thoughts about “I’m too old”

• Grandma Moses began to paint after age 80.
• After age 75 Rosa Parks founded an organization to help young people.
• Mother Teresa continued to change the world well past “retirement age.”
Community Program at Zion Chapel Missionary Baptist Church

You wouldn’t expect a scheduled two and a half hour Friday evening session on Technology to be at the top of one’s “I want to do this list.” After all, Friday evening is a time of partying for many, and resting for many others. Despite what you might expect, over fifty people jammed the Tech Talk Session at Zion Chapel Missionary Baptist Church on Fri. Feb. 18. No one was disappointed as BDPA Cleveland Members Felicia Ivey, Beverly Peterson, Tisha Bradshaw along with volunteers Phyllis Richards, Freida Luckett and others treated the audience to an evening of technology information, including break-out sessions, question and answer periods, door prizes and more.

The evening was livened up even more by the presence and support of Zion Chapel’s Pastor George O. Stewart who began the evening with prayer and thanks, but also maintained a relaxed atmosphere. As the program began, Beverly Peterson shared information about Black Family Technology Awareness Campaign (BFTAC), the relevance of Black History Month to BFTAC, the BDPA Cleveland Mission, Technology Terms, Do’s and Don’ts of using of the Internet with an emphasis on the Don’ts. Some of the Don’ts included; don’t share passwords with others, don’t share personal information, don’t meet people in person that you have “met” on the Internet, don’t download Term Papers with the intent of putting your own name on them (hint: there are software programs available to detect that kind of cheating!).

The audience was then treated to the first round of door prizes, followed by a break to enjoy the huge food spread provided. After the break, two breakout groups were formed, one for adults, and another for teens and preteens. This enabled the presenters to focus more effectively on each group’s respective needs and concerns.

Above: Adult Breakout Session
Below: Youth Breakout Session
During the breakout session for adults, Felicia went into more detail about computer safety, particularly as it related to the use of Social Networks such as Facebook. She also provided tips on how to use Facebook effectively.

Cleveland Chapter Founder Norman Mays briefly shared the Chapter Vision, Charge, History and the expectations for the future. In about five minutes, the audience understood and embraced BDPA’s community involvement.

Before closing the program, more door prizes were given away, followed by thanks and prayer from Pastor George Stewart. A BIG THANK YOU to everyone involved in the fantastic program.

If by chance you missed the exciting events mentioned in this article, do not be dismayed. Based upon a long history of achievement, the events I have attempted to describe, and the demonstrated need for the vision, passion, and content of what BDPA Cleveland has to offer, there is even a brighter tomorrow!

Black History Month 2011 is now history. The Black Family Technology Awareness Campaign, a revolution of sorts that in the words of the songwriter probably “will not be televised,” is nevertheless, alive and well. Our young people continue to need our intervention and inspiration. Seniors and families still need to understand and in some cases be protected from the misuse of technology. Corporate Leaders still need to understand the value a strong BDPA has on their bottom line. Unless you have no needs, no challenges, nothing to contribute, nothing to lose, and no heartbeat, you too can benefit from what BDPA Cleveland has to offer.

In the ongoing story of a people who have always met and overcome challenges, seized opportunities, and created legacies, we have met the authors of the current and coming chapters of a glorious Black History, and they are us, as in you and I. For information about BDPA’s services and programs, visit www.bdpa.cleveland.org or www.bdpa-cleveland.blogspot.com.
What is that we “communications experts” think about the appropriateness or usefulness of today’s technologies, as a means of expressing ourselves? The answer may well be that regardless of what we individually think, we must all realize there is a continual need to establish communication links between all members of our global society. Enhancing technology capabilities is a universal and timeless pursuit.

Every generation has its share of “new fangled gadgets”, changes in behavior, and ideas that accompany them. Every generation debates whether the changes will unravel the customs they have come to rely upon in their daily routines. As creatures of habit and routine, we resist change even as we seek it, but change is an inevitable and never-ending reality; especially when it comes to enhancing technology capabilities.

It has been said, that each age group progressively pushes the envelope and the outgoing generations generally fight changes to the sacred cloth each of them has woven in their time. As long as we the people remain curious, we will continue to search out new adventures and possibilities until our imaginations run dry. Wow! Do you ever see that happening? I think not. Look at the high tech communication devices in use today: Texting, Smart-Phones, IPods, I-Pads, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and the list goes on and on. What will be the next technological breakthrough, intended to make our lives less cluttered and more productive.

Arguably, an abundance of communication technologies can increase and strengthen our “where-with-all”. But how and when these technologies are utilized is a matter of individual choice and responsibility. Social networking sites expand personal networks to find people with similar experiences and to share information. These sites expand our personal networks, awareness, connect and reconnect us to friends, family, and businesses and even create real-time news.

So – What’s up? It is my belief that we should not talk of a limit on social networking technologies. The debate is not about communicating but rather not communicating; therefore, we should continue our pursuit to enhance and increase our social networking technologies. Why? Because social networking technology advancements have made all of us communication journalists, and allows us to share and discuss globally in seconds. Is that a good thing or an indifferent thing? You decide…………..

Writer’s note: I enjoyed sharing the above information with you, the reader, about the ever-changing field of “Technology” and Social-Networking, and hope you find value in what is presented. (**Please write to the Editor and ask him “not” to give me such hard assignments.)