By Jan Rahn
Managing Editor

As part of Chamber's Christmas open house event, the public is invited to Hastings Memorial Library to view new equipment, enjoy light refreshments and take in a book sale and craft vendors who will be on site.

From 4-6 p.m. Thursday (today) Nov. 15, come check out three new desktop computers, two laptop computers, a new black and white printer, a scanner, and a projector and projection screen for use in the community room.

"Having a public computing center of this caliber in Grant is a real asset for our community," said Library Director Robin Quinn. "Not everyone has access to a computer and/or an internet connection at home. The library makes it possible for everyone to have equal access to the same information no matter their situation."

The value of the computers, software and equipment—funded by the Library Broadband Builds Nebraska Communities project—is nearly $7,250.

The new equipment is installed and ready for use by the public and can be used free of charge for people to access court records, find health information, take advantage of educational opportunities, hunt for jobs, explore small business options, etc., said Quinn.

During the open house event, some brief remarks will be made at 4:30 p.m. by Richard Miller, library development director at the Nebraska Library Commission.

Come check out the many ways Hastings Memorial Library serves the public by keeping up with the latest technology, offering its accessibility at no charge.

Background of Funding

The U.S. Department of Commerce awarded the Library Commission a $2,416,403 grant to fund Nebraska's public computer center project, Library Broadband Builds Nebraska Communities.

The three-year project is designed to expand broadband capacity; upgrade public computing resources in libraries; and advance access to employment, learning, health information, and E-Government services.

The Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), provides funding to expand broadband access and adoption in communities across the U.S.

In addition to the federal grant, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will provide $1,251,786 in matching funds, including a grant and technical assistance to support the project. The total project budget is $3,668,189.

Providing fast Internet service in Nebraska's rural areas remains a challenge, but the Nebraska Library Commission is working with local libraries and a variety of partners to make the technology and educational programming available in more places across the state, as it launches this $3.6 million, three-year program to better equip library public computer centers in 147 library buildings across Nebraska.

"The broadband technology grant presents an unprecedented opportunity for many Nebraska public libraries to upgrade their public computing capacity for serving community residents," said Rod Wagner, Nebraska Library Commission director. "Technology enhancements will result in measurable increases in use of library computers for E-Government, learning,

employment information, and more. The ultimate benefit goes to the many Nebraskans who will have greater access to library computers and high-speed connectivity networks for personal, education, and job-related needs."

The project is designed to upgrade public computing resources in libraries, expand broadband capacity, and advance access to employment, learning, health information, and E-Government services.

The grant funding allows the Nebraska Library Commission to partner with critical education, business, health, and E-Government resources to ensure that Nebraskans across the state can benefit from enhanced technological capabilities in our local communities.

Training programs will be provided by key project partners–such as Central Community College, Nebraska Department of Labor, Nebraska Court Administrator's Office, Nebraska Community Foundation, Center for Rural Affairs, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, University of Nebraska Medical Center, McGoogan Library of Medicine, and the National Network of Libraries of Medicine.

Library computer center locations will serve as the delivery platform for these programs, providing Nebraskans with access to audio and video webinar content and interactive computer-based training.

About the Nebraska Library Commission

As Nebraska's state library agency, the Nebraska Library Commission is an advocate for the library and information needs of all Nebraskans.

The mission of the Library Commission is statewide promotion, development, and coordination of library and information services–"bringing together people and information."

About the American Recovery Act

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) with $7.2 billion to expand access to broadband services in the United States.

Of those funds, the Act provided $4.7 billion to NTIA to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure, enhance and expand public computer centers, encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service, and develop and maintain a nationwide public map of broadband service capability and availability.

About the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives.

In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty.

In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life.

Based in Seattle, Wash., the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.