

# CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN WASHINGTON

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## INTERNET FOR OUR COMMUNITY

### How University Heights Center is Connecting its Classes, Performances, and Neighborhood Services

By Nicolina Miller, UHeights Development Coordinator

If you've ever driven down the Ave in the University District, you've passed University Heights Center, a 1902 historic, landmarked building that is buzzing with activity. Together with our 11 resident organizations, UHeights welcomes and engages 216,670 people annually through early learning programs, K-12 specialized education, engaging arts, and culture events, and critical human services.

As Washington state moves forward with removing COVID restrictions, UHeights will seek to return to hosting our in-person arts and culture events and theatre performances; now with the added benefit of robust WiFi connectivity throughout the center. Through a partnership with Comcast, visitors to our center can take advantage of free internet access. The broadband service is being provided as part of a Comcast partnership with cities, community organizations, and local nonprofit partners to roll out WiFi-connected "Lift Zones" throughout Washington.

UHeights' mission is to uplift our community and becoming a Lift Zone gives us a practical tool to do just that. Internet connectivity will enhance the mission of UHeights and those of our resident organizations:



Students in the K-12 specialized education classes can more easily access materials online to supplement their schoolwork; the UHeights Theatre Alliance can augment their performances in The Auditorium, and the many local community and arts groups that are a part of UHeights' programs can host their events through a virtual/in-person post-COVID hybrid model that ensures continued accessibility and inclusion.

With the increased access Lift Zone provides, UHeights can empower our neighbors across generations, abilities, and socioeconomic status, helping us more fully fulfill our vision of being truly inclusive.

"We are thrilled to partner with UHeights and add robust WiFi coverage to this historic building that is a community-focused center for education, arts and culture, civic involvement, and more," said Rodrigo Lopez, Region Senior Vice President, Comcast Washington. "Whether connecting people to the Internet at home through Internet Essentials or providing free WiFi at community centers with our Lift Zones program, we're helping to ensure our community members have multiple options to get online."

Through its Lift Zone initiative, Comcast is establishing WiFi-connected safe spaces for those needing internet access in 80 community centers statewide by the end of 2021. The company has unveiled 30 Lift Zones in King, Snohomish, Pierce, Island, and Spokane counties since fall 2020. These locations offer Internet connectivity to students and families that lack broadband access in the home.

Each Lift Zone provides free connectivity inside the community center for the next three years and is run by a nonprofit, city, or business that is following Washington state and local rules concerning indoor gatherings and safety protocols around COVID-19. Some are open now with more expected to open in the coming months.

UHeights continues to offer our full roster of classes and workshops, such as T.I.P.S. for Teens, Poetry, and Thursdays@10, on our online platform. And we are excited to begin hosting Outside Zumba starting Sunday, June 27th. But don't worry, if you prefer the online Zumba classes, you can still sign up for those on Tuesdays and Saturdays. And with all our classes staying as pay-what-you-can, everyone can participate!

Visit our website at [www.uheightscenter.org](http://www.uheightscenter.org) to stay up-to-date on the re-opening of The Auditorium, our performance space for the UHeights Theatre Alliance, and to be the first to sign up for Queer Swing Dance or Chickadee Music classes, just a couple of the local community groups returning to UHeights starting in September.

## IMPACT ON THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

### OUR PROGRAM

Internet Essentials is the nation's largest and most comprehensive broadband adoption program for low-income households. Working alongside tens of thousands of partner organizations serving as a trusted voice in their communities, the program has connected millions to the power of the Internet at home. Our customers are a testament to the power of the Internet increasing equity in education, employment, and healthcare.

**internet essentials**  
FROM COMCAST

### RESIDENTS CONNECTED 560,000

cumulative low-income Washington residents connected to the power of the Internet over the lifetime of the program.

Data through December 21, 2020

Internet Essentials households in Washington include:

**70%** students

**21%** seniors

**27%** people with disabilities

**3%** veterans

**77% of low-income** Washington households had broadband at home in 2019 compared to **58% in 2013**.

**91% of all** Washington households had broadband at home in 2019 compared to **79% in 2013**.



For more information about Internet Essentials and Comcast's commitment to education and digital equity, please visit:

<https://corporate.comcast.com/education>. To apply, visit [www.internetessentials.com](http://www.internetessentials.com) or call 1-855-846-8376 for English or 1-855-765-6995 for Spanish.

## Digital Tools and Resources Coming for Local Residents

### Comcast Rolls Out Investment Plans in Washington

By Rodrigo Lopez, Region Senior Vice President, Comcast Washington

There is a major challenge in cities across Washington state, big and small: it's called the digital divide and it's here in King County. It's something we're working hard to fix through Internet Essentials – the state's largest and most comprehensive broadband adoption program.

Working in collaboration with our network of local nonprofit partners, over the last 10 years, we have connected more than 336,000 low-income residents in the Puget Sound area to broadband Internet at home, many for the first time.

Internet Essentials solves the barrier to internet adoption through wraparound programming that includes free digital literacy training resources, the option to purchase an Internet-ready computer for less than \$150; and low-cost, high-speed Internet service for \$9.95 a month plus tax. Through this three-pronged approach, our company has been able to bridge the digital divide and connect students, families, and communities in need of affordable internet resources.

We also unveiled new plans this year to support low-income residents with more digital tools and resources over the next decade, as a part of a \$1 billion nationwide initiative to impact 50 million people. This commitment consists of local investments in Washington state that include distributing more than \$750,000 in funding, as well as computer and technology donations, to nonprofits serving disadvantaged Washingtonians.



And while connectivity in the home continues to be our top priority, and the number one solution for our residents to access online resources, it is not the only answer.

As the state's leading internet provider, we recognize that our company plays an important role in helping connecting people online, and that includes offering solutions both in and outside of the home. Thousands of Washingtonians depend on community centers for access to the internet, and our Lift Zone initiative aims to address that need.

Eight months ago, we announced plans to equip more than 30 community centers in the state with free internet service to help students get online, participate in distance learning, and do their homework. Now, we are expanding our Lift Zone commitment in both size and scope to establish WiFi-connected safe spaces in 80 community centers statewide by the end of this year.

This includes more than a dozen Lift Zones in King County that will help individuals and families who, for a variety of reasons, may be unable to connect to the internet at home, or who just want another place to access online education, healthcare, and employment resources.

Our Lift Zone partners include YWCA, University Heights Center, El Centro de la Raza and more.

Each Lift Zone provides free connectivity inside the community center for the next three years and is run by a nonprofit, city, or business that is following Washington state and local rules concerning indoor gatherings and safety protocols around COVID-19. Some are open now and more expected to open in the coming months. Open Lift Zones in your area may be found at [www.internetessentials.com](http://www.internetessentials.com) Other key metrics about the Internet Essentials program and its impact statewide include:

- Increased Internet Essentials speeds six times, from 1.5 Mbps in 2011 to 50 Mbps today, without increasing the price of the program, which has remained \$9.95/month.

- Participated in the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction K-12 Internet Access Program to help students and families connect to school online during the 2020-2021 school year.
- Opened more than 70,000 public WiFi hotspots for people to connect to during the current pandemic.

- Developed an Internet Essentials Partnership Program that offers subsidized broadband service through hundreds of schools to help connect thousands of students to the Internet during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Offered 60 days of free Internet service to any new Internet Essentials customer who needed to get online during the coronavirus outbreak.

- Built an online learning center that includes more than 200 digital literacy training videos, guides, and reports that are free to anyone to use, including non-customers.

- Developed a national employee network of 3,000 Internet Essentials Ambassadors who volunteer their time to help spread the word about the program in their communities.

These Comcast commitments are projected to impact as many as 50 million Americans over the next 10 years. In 2021 alone, Comcast estimates students throughout the nation will be able to complete more than 25 million hours of remote learning lessons to further address the "homework gap" at the hundreds of Lift Zone locations.