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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **C-U MOBILIZING TO EMBRACE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

As the Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband (UC2B) \$30 million high-speed Internet network infrastructure is constructed throughout Champaign-Urbana, organizations and community members throughout Champaign-Urbana have come together in an effort to discuss and develop ways to use this technology to support and enhance all sectors of our local population.

Over 250 people have attended public events on community technology in Champaign-Urbana organized by the eBlackChampaign-Urbana project on November 5 and 6, 2010, and January 8, 2011. The full record of these events is available online at eBlackCU.net. In an effort to capitalize on the momentum and excitement generated from these events, another event will be held March 19 to involve more people in the process of incorporating digital technology into our local community.

"We are here because we want to make sure we are at the table at the beginning. This community has too long been a reacting community that waits until a crisis hits before we come together to address the problem. We want to make sure that as new technology changes our world that we the church make sure that we are part of that change so that the change is in the best interests of the communities we serve," said Rev. Charles Nash of New Hope Church of God in Christ, representing a group of ministers in North Champaign-Urbana that presented a letter to UC2B at the January 8, 2011, eBlackCU meeting.

The next event in this series will be held at the Champaign Public Library, Robeson Room A & B, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 19. This event will feature informational discussions on UC2B ([www.uc2b.net](http://www.uc2b.net)) and the eBlackCU digital library ([www.eBlackCU.net](http://www.eBlackCU.net)). There will also be sessions on jobs and technology, youth and technology, and religious institutions and technology. Light refreshments will be served.

Computer stations with volunteer instructors will be set up for the public: 1) Get an e-mail or Facebook account if they don't have one and want one; 2) Learn how to digitize information and take home a free CD of their digitized material. Interested individuals are welcome to bring in their own material (scrapbooks, flyers, photographs, books) or digitize texts provided by eBlackCU.

"I believe discovering and documenting the history of African-Americans in Champaign-Urbana would not only be beneficial to the African American Community, but to the community as a whole. Utilizing digital technology to research and record this history would allow for its

preservation and ready accessibility to the entire community," said Carol Lewis, president of the local National Council of Negro Women (N.C.N.W.) chapter.

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### **About eBlackCU and UC2B**

**eBlackCU** - Since January 2010 the eBlackChampaign-Urbana has gathered over 30,000 pages and over 4 days of audio/visual material on the local African-American experience. The project is based out of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science/Department of African-American Studies, with grant funding from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement, all at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

The project's latest initiative is to find ways to utilize the most common information source that every community has: Yearbooks. The project team has digitized the Cotillion Yearbooks, a program of Gamma Upsilon Psi that since 1972 has organized college scholarships for young African-American women in the community. The Cotillions were started by Phi Beta Sigma and Zeta Phi Beta in 1972, under the leadership of Alvin Griggs, Willie Summerville and others. In 1974, Kathryn Humphrey and Margaret Smith founded Gamma Upsilon Psi Society to assist the fraternities with the Cotillion. In 1977 Gamma Upsilon Psi became the sole sponsor of the program, and has continued it to the present day. Visit the Society's website for more information on their upcoming Ball, to be held April 23, 2011, <http://www.gesociety.com/>.

The Yearbooks of these events are an amazing resource, as every year they feature not only biographies of the Debutantes and their escorts, but also brief notices from area churches, businesses and individuals who sponsor the young women's education. These digitized files will be backed up at local archives and libraries for long-term preservation.

"When we scanned stuff or looked up stuff on the internet or made it public on the internet I found a ton of people I know from the local community," said Champaign Central Senior Deidre Murphy, one of seven local youth hired by the eBlackChampaign-Urbana project as Summer Interns in 2010 who helped digitize these Yearbooks and make them publicly accessible.

The project team is currently working to make this very large collection of digital information more accessible. The digital yearbooks contain nearly 10,000 pages on local African-American history and experiments are ongoing with various ways to index the collection, which is already full-text searchable, so that individuals can access them by name, church, school, or business.

In addition to making what has already been digitized more accessible, eBlackCU is also looking to extend its work by beginning a project to digitize an even larger source of information, the high school yearbooks of Champaign and Urbana public schools. This project is just getting started and for its completion we will require people and organizations in our community to step forward to carry the project forward and embrace it as an institutional function. The eBlackCU project team would be happy to lead digitization workshops for groups to continue this process of bringing our community's memory and culture online.

**UC2B** - In March of 2010, the UC2B Consortium was awarded American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant funding to construct a fiber optic broadband network throughout the Champaign-Urbana metropolitan area. The UC2B Consortium is the governing body in charge of constructing the fiber optic network and providing connectivity to, among other entities, the community's Anchor Institutions. It consists of representatives from the University of Illinois, the cities of Urbana and Champaign, and several public and private community partners.

The UC2B network will be an open access network and will accommodate multiple providers of Internet services, including Internet, phone, and TV, security, and storage. Various Internet service providers (ISPs) will compete on price and customer service over this shared fiber optic infrastructure, which has the potential to result in a win-win for consumers and businesses throughout the community. Furthermore, the direct value to the Champaign-Urbana community is immense, both for short-term economic stimulus and for long-term regional economic development.

For more information, go to the UC2B web site ([www.UC2B.net](http://www.UC2B.net)).