

Business

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Dividends

*Local business
news and notes*

How 10 firms got linked to the Internet — for free

Ten Philadelphia-area businesses are getting free fast Internet service, but they won't have to wait for the city's ballyhooed wi-fi initiative to reach their neighborhood.

Covad Communications Group Inc., of San Jose, said last week that it gave away a year's worth of wired broadband hook-ups to the local entrepreneurs, plus \$500 apiece to help grease the wheels of entrepreneurial commerce.

The awardees were winnowed from about 40 applicants, half of whom were disqualified because their phone lines couldn't handle broadband, said Leslie H. Benoliel, executive director of the nonprofit Philadelphia Development Partnership.

Restaurants, a home remodeler, and a massage and reflexology service were among the 10 businesses in Philadelphia and Chester that received awards. Benoliel said they could not afford the \$40 monthly cost of broadband even though it could help expand their business.

Covad said this was the first year that it was offering the awards in conjunction with Philadelphia Development Partnership, which provides mentoring and micro-loans to small businesses.

— Akweli Parker