

City officials open new Jamaica Gigabit Center offering high-speed internet access to help bridge digital divide

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LinkNYC, in partnership with the NYC Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI), ZenFi Networks and community leaders, launch the Queens Gigabit Center at the Allen Community Senior Citizens Center in Jamaica on Friday, Dec. 2. (Photo by Jennifer Mallowney Studio Inc.)

LinkNYC, in partnership with the NYC Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI), ZenFi Networks and community leaders, launched the Queens Gigabit Center at the Allen Community Senior Citizens Center in Jamaica on Friday, Dec. 2.

New York City Chief Technology Officer Matthew Fraser joined LinkNYC CEO Nick Colvin and NYC Department for the Aging Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez to announce the Queens Gigabit Center at a press conference held at the senior center, located at 166-01 Linden Blvd.

The Gigabit Center — the first-of-its-kind in Queens — offers free high-speed internet access for all Queens residents, powered by LinkNYC’s public Wi-Fi network. The Gigabit Center will also provide digital literacy training and free access to laptops, tablets, computer workstations, and other services to help bridge the digital divide.

LinkNYC opened similar Gigabit Centers in Manhattan and the Bronx earlier this year and additional centers are planned for Brooklyn and Staten Island in the coming months. These efforts come as 2 in 5 NYC households lack either a home broadband connection or mobile broadband through cell service and 22% of Queens households lack a home broadband connection. Amongst NYC seniors, 42% lack broadband internet access at home.



(Photo by Jennifer Mallowney Studio Inc.)

“In Queens and across the city, millions of New Yorkers still find it too hard or expensive to get online, which is simply unacceptable in 2022,” Colvin said. “Our Gigabit Centers across New York City will play a vital role in connecting New Yorkers with broadband connectivity and the digital literacy they need to thrive in our online society. The opening of the Queens Gigabit Center marks another important milestone in our efforts to bring digital connectivity to New Yorkers across the five boroughs, and we are excited to bring this important resource to Queens residents.”

Earlier this year, OTI, in partnership with LinkNYC, began deploying 2,000 next-generation Link5G kiosks that provide New Yorkers in more neighborhoods with free high-speed Wi-Fi and even faster, more reliable 5G mobile broadband service. In addition, installing the fiber optic “backbone” infrastructure everywhere LinkNYC kiosks are deployed makes it easier and cheaper for New Yorkers to get high-speed broadband internet access at home.



(Photo by Jennifer Mallowney Studio Inc.)

According to Fraser, older New Yorkers suffered avoidable social, health care, and economic hardships during the pandemic due to the city’s digital divide.

“With one-fifth of our city’s residents over 60, this administration’s digital equity efforts by necessity have a strong focus on enhancing the lives of this important population,” Fraser said. “This new Gigabit Center will serve as a vital hub for increasing access to free high-speed internet, computers, and digital literacy training. I thank Mayor Adams for his unparalleled commitment to leveraging technology to ‘Get Stuff Done’ for New Yorkers and our partners at CityBridge and the Allen Community Senior Citizens Center for their tireless efforts to deliver empowering opportunities to Queens.”

With the expansion of online systems and the rapid population growth of older New Yorkers, there is an increased need for older adults to be adept at navigating the digital world, according to Cortés-Vázquez.



(Photo by Jennifer Mallowney Studio Inc.)

“The Queens Gigabit Center, located in the Allen Community Older Adult Center, is another major step forward in bridging the digital divide among those living in Southeast Queens,” Cortés-Vázquez said. “I applaud our City’s Chief Technology Officer Matt Fraser, Queens Borough President Donovan Richards, and the other key partners for their mutual commitment to reducing the digital divide, and creating an even more age-inclusive city.”

During the event, Hugh O’Kane Electric Company also announced a donation of \$5,000 towards the purchase of tablets for seniors at the Allen Senior Center, ensuring their ability to stay connected to senior programs and services. The Center of Hearing and Communication also offered seniors free hearing screenings.

“Hugh O’Kane Electric is proud to have partnered with ZenFi since the inception of the LinkNYC project to bring broadband telecommunication services to all areas and neighborhoods in New York City as we continue to help bridge the digital divide,” said Hugh R. O’Kane, president, Hugh O’Kane Electric Co. Inc. “We are especially proud of our involvement in helping build the Queens Gig Center.”

Donna Atmore-Dolly, executive director of Allen Community Senior Citizens Center, said they’re excited to be chosen as a CityBridge Gigabit Center in collaboration with LinkNYC and ZenFi to bring high-speed internet services to the senior population in southeast Queens.

“The COVID pandemic has caused many of our seniors to shift to virtual activities to remain active and social. A special thank you to Hugh O’Kane Electric Company for their generous donation of \$5,000 towards the purchase of tablets for our seniors ensuring their ability to stay connected to our senior programs and services,” Atmore-Dolly said.



(Photo by Jennifer Mallowney Studio Inc.)

Southeast Queens lawmakers thanked partners at LinkNYC, OTI, the Allen Senior Center, and everyone who made the new community resource a reality.

“In this era full of advances in connectivity and technology, the digital divide is still leaving far too many families behind, while worsening inequities across the spectrum of society,” said Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr. “Bridging such a divide means connecting all our families to countless economic, educational and communal opportunities, and I look forward to all the good that the Queens Gigabit Center will do for our borough.”

According to Assemblywoman Vivian Cook, seniors are among the most digitally-disconnected populations, an isolation that was only exacerbated by the pandemic.

“Technology is not a luxury, it’s a necessity. The Queens Gigabit center will go a long way in helping close this digital divide and provide thousands of seniors from across Queens with the access, training, and services they need,” Cook said.



State Assemblywoman Vivian Cook (l.) (Photo by Jennifer Mallowney Studio Inc.)

Senator Leroy Comrie said high-speed broadband provides a gateway to information, resources, and connectivity — all crucial to collective civic life.

“The Queens Gigabit Center at Allen Senior Center will play an essential role in uplifting tech literacy and assist older adults in taking full advantage of online resources. I welcome this investment and the partnerships forged that will well serve older adults and our shared Queens communities,” Comrie said.

Councilwoman Nantasha Williams said the center will provide a welcoming environment for senior community members to explore current technological advances and provide them with access to computers, high-speed internet, and digital literacy classes.

“Whether you’re a beginner or an expert, this will be a safe space for our community members to create, learn, and share,” Williams said. “In a city where millions of New Yorkers have difficulties navigating the technological world, this space has a mission to foster a community where New Yorkers, especially older adults, have easier and cheaper ways to get high-speed broadband access even at home. I am incredibly excited to have this center in the community and look forward to a continued partnership.”