

Geek Squad City honored as state's best new business

By THOMAS J. BARR, Editor

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HILLVIEW - Last May, Gov. Ernie Fletcher remembered walking a 165,000 square foot shell of a building.



But on Thursday, he returned to the same location and this time honored Geek Squad City with the 2007 Governor's Technology Award for a new Kentucky business.

Fletcher went through the lunchroom talking with the special "agents" and then presented ambassador Michael Rodgers and mayor Wes Snyder with the technology award.

The rapid rise of Geek Squad City is much akin to the state's rise in its push for technology, said Fletcher.

When he took office, Fletcher said the state was far behind in technology. Only 60 percent of Kentuckians had access to the faster, broadband internet. That number is now over 91 percent.

At the Geek Squad, which is the computer repair arm of Best Buy, employment has risen to over 630 with plans to add another 270 by the end of the year.

The payroll has now exceeded \$23 million.

Snyder said the "agents" have repaired over 200,000 laptops since opening Oct. 25, 2006.

"Bullitt County has been great to us," said the mayor. "We have a unique culture here."

And he said those who wear the white shirts and black ties are helping to spread the word in the community about the advantages of technology.

The computer repair community has a goal of reducing the time it takes to receive a laptop to fix and to get it back to the consumer.

While the industry average is 27 days to return the repaired computer, Geek Squad City has a goal of a three-day turnaround.

The governor said he noticed how well the employees enjoyed their jobs and that was important for a successful company.

He said the state has become a leader in technology and those advancements must continue.

"You don't know how important it is to the state of Kentucky and to Bullitt County for you to be here," Fletcher told Geek Squad officials. "Economic development hinges on technology."

March 1 was Tech Day and several companies and individuals were honored. With the focus on technology, Fletcher said the state has created thousands of new jobs.

"There's a lot of people excited about the opportunity to work here," said Fletcher.

Knowing the importance of technology, the state has started a No Child Left Off-Line program. Old computers to be surplus have instead been repaired and given to children who may not have a computer at home.

The governor said children who don't have computers at home feel left out and can fall behind.

On the other hand, Fletcher said the state is working on anti-bullying programs. With the increase in internet usage, Fletcher said there must be more safeguards in place and he is looking for any comments on what could be done to make it safer.

One of the agents questioned Fletcher about the future of computer labs in all Kentucky high schools.

Money is the big problem, said Fletcher. Although over \$70 million has been spent on technology, the governor said that is not enough. Not only are the computers costly but also they quickly become outdated, said Fletcher.

He hopes there will be more partnerships between the business sector and the schools to increase the number of computers.

Fletcher and Brian Mefford, president of ConnectKentucky, which was formed to spread the availability of broadband service, were presented with keys to Geek Squad City.

Mefford said the story of the Geek Squad shows how Kentucky has been successful.

"It is truly a shining star for Kentucky," said Mefford.

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