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### **Pratt gets \$500,000 donation to install Wi-Fi**

By Liz F. Kay

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The Bank of America Charitable Foundation announced a \$500,000 donation to the Enoch Pratt Free Library yesterday to provide free wireless Internet access at the Central Library and five other branches across Baltimore.

The foundation is providing the money because it says about 40 percent of city households don't have access to the Internet.

"For most of them, the only way to go online to get information they need to live and grow is to use one of the 500 public-access computers here at the Pratt libraries," said Pratt CEO Carla D. Hayden. "Starting very soon, they'll have more options."

To celebrate, Hayden and Bank of America CEO Kenneth D. Lewis cut the wires connecting two laptops at a news event yesterday.

The gift is one of the largest contributions to the library in its 126-year history. The library system is spending this month celebrating the 200th birthday of Enoch Pratt, whose donation of more than \$1 million led to the creation of the library.

There is wireless Internet in the Central Library's annex now, but not in the main building. The five branches that will also benefit have not been selected.

By the end of the year, Central Library staff will dedicate space on the main floor currently used to showcase new and notable books for a new "Pratt Cafe." Coffee and Wi-Fi will be available, as well as laptops that library patrons may check out.

Readers will be able to bring their drinks - in containers with lids - and laptops throughout the library and continue their research.

"You can get your bestsellers and have a cup of java," Hayden said.

Sandra P. Gohn, president of the library's board of directors, said the donation will help patrons.

She read a card left by one family at a library in honor of Pratt's birthday that said: "It's a lifesaver because I don't have the Internet right now. It opens a world of information to me and my family."

Nationwide, 60 percent of library visitors say they go there to access the Internet, said Pratt staff.

Lewis said the donation would have a major impact on an organization that provides many services to Baltimore.

"We hope it does contribute to more people gaining access to knowledge that will allow them to compete in a very, very tough environment," he said.

Sculptor Brianne Williett, 21, said wireless Internet would be a valuable resource. "You don't feel the pressure to buy things [at libraries] like you do at Internet cafes," she said.

Eric Beitler, 20, was pleased about plans for new computers. The waiter bought his tickets for a yearlong trip to Europe, the Middle East and Asia using library computers. Yesterday, he was researching vaccinations for travel to India and Nepal.

"There's always a wait to get onto the computer," he said. "It will just help me get to work on time."

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