



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF
ADAM J. BELLO
MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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**MONROE COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM
LAUNCHES MULTI-PRONGED DIGITAL EQUITY INITIATIVE
BEGINNING WITH FREE COURSES ON DEMAND WITH UDEMY**

“Wired for Opportunity” is a \$3.1 million digital equity initiative, funded by Monroe County using American Rescue Plan Act Dollars

Rochester, NY – Monroe County Executive Adam Bello and Director of Monroe County Library System Emily Clasper today announced that Udemy, an online learning platform with more than 250,000 courses and 73 million students, is now available to all Monroe County Library System (MCLS) users. The Udemy launch is the first piece of a new \$3.1 digital equity initiative, made possible through Monroe County’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

Udemy provides a wide range of courses on a variety of topics including: business, technology, health, and even cake decorating. These self-directed learning resources are available both in-library and by remote access, at no cost to library card holders. Using this self-directed learning resource allows users to learn and master new skills, helping them hone their hobbies, fix things around their homes, or make them more competitive in the job market.

“The self-directed learning opportunities available through Udemy allow students to learn at their own pace and at times that are convenient for them,” **said Jen Byrnes, who leads the digital equity initiative for MCLS.**

With the initial support of ARPA funds, the Library System also instituted a mi-fi program. Mi-fi units are the most popular items that are checked out of libraries, with 5,256 check-outs of mi-fis in 2024. There has often been a waiting list for the units, but with the additional mi-fis provided by the grant, the wait time for a mi-fi will be cut in half.

“We are building digital equity throughout our community. Whether its helping people access high-speed affordable internet, helping residents become better acquainted with technology, or by providing access to innovative platforms like Udemy, our goal is to ensure everyone in our community has access to the resources and opportunities that will help them grow and thrive,” **said Monroe County Executive Adam J. Bello.** “I am grateful to Congressman Morelle and Senators Schumer and Gillibrand for providing our

community with the funding for this project, and their commitment to increasing digital equity throughout or region.”

Udemy, along with the expansion of mi-fis, are part of the Monroe County Library System’s *Wired for Opportunity* initiative. Funded with \$3.1 Million in American Rescue Plan Act Funds, *Wired for Opportunity*, seeks to eliminate the digital divide and ensure Monroe County residents can utilize and benefit from new and emerging digital opportunities

“As a young man, I spent countless hours in the Sully Branch of the Monroe County Library—reading, learning, and growing my appetite for knowledge, and with the addition of Udemy, library patrons can take their learning to even greater heights,” said **Congressman Joe Morelle**. “I’m proud to have helped secure federal funding to support this project, and I’m grateful to County Executive Bello for continuing to utilize federal funds to break down the digital divide and make opportunities like these more accessible for Rochester families.”

“In today’s digital world, access to reliable internet is a necessity for work, school, healthcare, and staying connected,” said **U.S. Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer**. “When I passed the *American Rescue Plan*, I made sure it would deliver real results for Monroe County, and that’s exactly what’s happening with ‘Wired for Opportunity.’ This \$3.1 million investment is putting affordable broadband within reach for thousands of residents, with the expansion of Mi-Fi hotspots that can be checked out from one of the many local libraries in the county. Thanks to this federal funding, Monroe County is closing the digital divide and ensuring that every family, no matter where they live, has the tools they need to succeed. I commend County Executive Adam Bello for his steadfast leadership and dedication to bridging gaps in our community.”

“Our libraries are innovative and progressive community anchors, where families can access valuable resources and equitable opportunities,” said **Mayor Malik D. Evans**. “Offering the Udemy learning platform is yet another meaningful way we are supporting digital equity and empowering our community. Thank you to our federal delegation, Senators Schumer and Gillibrand and Congressman Morelle, for prioritizing and investing in the lives of our residents and helping develop confident contributors to our society.”

In the coming months, *Wired for Opportunity* will continue to expand services, including the installation of solar tables that provide 24/7 internet access and device charging capabilities, the development of computer classes, and the opportunity for students to receive free laptops upon completing a series of classes.

“Wired for Opportunity is another example of how the Monroe County Library System provides our citizens with an array of valuable resources beyond books,” said **Emily Clasper, Director of the Monroe County Library System**. “We will be rolling out new

initiatives and programs for our residents in the coming months, and we are grateful to County Executive Adam Bello and our entire federal delegation, Congressman Morelle, Senator Schumer, and Senator Gillibrand, for making this possible.”

Expanding equity, closing the digital divide, and providing educational opportunities to grow digital literacy for City and County residents were recommendations contained within the RASE Report.

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