



Monterey Bay Economic Partnership to Honor Cruzio Internet and Comcast for Expanding Access and Digital Equity

*Cruzio and Comcast Recognized with Public-Private Partnership Award;
Sister Rosa Dolores Rodriguez to Receive Alfred Diaz-Infante Community Impact Award*

MARINA, CA, UNITED STATES, December 10, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Monterey Bay Economic Partnership](#) (MBEP) will recognize Cruzio Internet, Comcast, and longtime community volunteer Sister Rosa Dolores Rodriguez for service and leadership when MBEP President and CEO Tahra Goraya and MBEP Board Chair and UC Chancellor Cynthia Larive present its 2024 Public-Private Partnership Awards and the Alfred-Diaz Infante Community Impact Award during a Dec. 12 Holiday Mixer in Marina.

Public-Private Partnership Awards: Internet service providers Cruzio Internet and Comcast will be honored for leveraging public-private partnerships to expand broadband access and digital equity in the Central Coast region.

Through its initiatives, Cruzio Internet has made transformative contributions to digital equity through programs addressing critical broadband challenges in underserved regions, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach locations exposed by the pandemic.

In Equal Access Monterey Bay, Cruzio, in collaboration with the County of Monterey, Monterey Bay Economic Partnership, and Central Coast Broadband Consortium, focuses on expanding affordable, high-speed internet access through infrastructure projects. The San Jerardo housing cooperative, built by farm workers in the 1970s, is home to 250 permanent residents and up to 100 seasonal workers who have long faced significant infrastructure challenges. "By collaborating with MBEP, CCBC, the County of Monterey, and the CPUC, Cruzio successfully connected every resident with world-class gigabit broadband at no cost," said Cruzio COO James Hackett. "This incredible project exemplifies the power of targeted connectivity solutions and represents a remarkable example of public and private entities coming together to solve a real-world problem."

Leveraging a \$5,650,000 California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) Infrastructure Award for its ["Equal Access Summit to the Sea"](#) (EAS2C) project, Cruzio aims to connect rural and remote communities along the Highway 1 corridor and provide low-income residents with affordable internet plans. "The EAS2C project is a game-changer, promising to bring high-speed internet to

expansive areas of San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, and Monterey counties where internet service has been inadequate,” said Hackett. “The support of MBEP and CCBC was crucial in transforming this project from concept to approved grant, potentially bringing improved internet to thousands of residents in these regions.”

Similarly, Equal Access Santa Cruz County, co-led by Cruzio alongside partners including Santa Cruz County, Community Foundation Santa Cruz County, Santa Cruz Office of Education, and Pajaro Valley Unified School District, aims to expand broadband access to low-income families and students.

“Public-private partnerships are integral to solving issues of digital equity, allowing us to combine local knowledge, technological expertise, and community resources as we seek to prevent monopoly control of essential infrastructure and transform internet connectivity from a privilege to a fundamental right,” said Hackett.

“Cruzio’s efforts represent the best of public-private and cross-sector collaboration, addressing critical broadband challenges and enabling meaningful economic and educational opportunities for underserved communities. We deeply appreciate Cruzio’s leadership in advancing digital equity and fostering economic development throughout our region,” said MBEP President and CEO Tahra Goraya.

Comcast’s impactful Lift Zones initiative is a program that exemplifies innovative public-private partnerships to address digital inequities. This initiative establishes free, Wi-Fi-connected spaces in community centers across Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, providing essential internet access to individuals and families facing challenges like housing insecurity or lack of in-home broadband. In collaboration with trusted community partners such as Community Bridges at two Santa Cruz locations and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County in Seaside and Salinas, Lift Zones offer not only connectivity but critical resources in accessible locations. These include free access to hundreds of hours of educational, workforce development, and digital-skills content, empowering students to participate in online learning and families to navigate the digital economy effectively.

Through strategic partnerships and innovative programs, Comcast’s Lift Zones not only meet immediate needs but also lay the groundwork for lasting digital inclusion in our region.

“By offering connectivity and access to hundreds of hours of educational and workforce development content, Comcast’s partnerships have created essential opportunities for underserved families and students in our community to thrive,” said Goraya. “Comcast’s work exemplifies the power of public-private collaboration in addressing digital inequities and fostering inclusive economic development.”

“At Comcast, we believe that public-private partnerships are the cornerstone of bridging the digital divide here in California,” said Alejandra Garcia, Government Affairs Manager at Comcast

California. "Our continued collaboration with the Monterey Bay Economic Partnership has allowed us to provide the resources, expertise and commitment to investing in technology, infrastructure, educational programs and workforce development opportunities, so we can help empower underserved families, individuals and students with the tools they need to succeed. These collaborations such as our Comcast Lift Zone initiatives and many others not only bridge gaps in access but also create lasting opportunities for local communities to thrive in an increasingly digital economy."

Alfred-Diaz Infante Community Impact Award: Sister Rosa Dolores Rodriguez, Executive Director of Casa de la Cultura, and Chair of the Pajaro Disaster Long Term Recovery Alliance (PDLTRA), has demonstrated unwavering dedication to the Pajaro community, especially in the aftermath of the flood disaster. Her leadership has been instrumental in mobilizing resources, fostering collaboration among local organizations, and advocating for the most vulnerable residents. Through continuous weekly meetings at Casa de la Cultura, Pajaro residents and businesses are building a stronger sense of community specifically for the Latino and Mixteco farmworking community ensuring that this historically underserved group has a platform to voice their needs and access culturally and linguistically appropriate resources. These efforts not only offer immediate relief but also empower Pajaro's residents to actively shape their future by giving them agency.

The late Alfred Diaz-Infante, former president and CEO of CHISPA, an MBEP board member, and longtime public servant and housing advocate, was both a colleague and friend, says Sister Rosa, and receiving an award that carries his name is particularly moving.

"This award is very personal for me," she says. "I worked with Alfred throughout the years, and he did a lot for the community. Anytime I had a problem or question about housing, I would call him and he was always gracious and helpful. He was such a special person." Diaz-Infante, the son of immigrant farmworkers, led CHISPA for 24 years, helping develop thousands of housing units geared mostly to farmworkers on the Central Coast. He died in a fatal car crash in 2021.

Join us in celebrating each of these community leaders: MBEP's Holiday Mixer takes place at noon on Dec. 12 at MBEP's headquarters, 3180 Imjin Road in Marina. Reservations are available online at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/mbep-holiday-mixer-tickets-1048253924707>.

About Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP): Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) is a regional member-supported nonprofit organization consisting of public, private, and civic entities located throughout the counties of Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz. Founded in 2015, our mission is to improve the economic health and quality of life in the region.

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