

AmVets 9-1-1 giving away refurbished laptop computers to disadvantaged students in Atlanta

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By Terry Shropshire | The Atlanta Voice



Commander Ronnie Ogletree, the four computer recipients, and schoolteacher Montez Collins. AmVets Post 9-1-1 is giving away 40 refurbished computers to underprivileged students in Atlanta to help students with their schoolwork during these tumultuous times. (Terry Shropshire / The Atlanta Voice)

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The giveaway, orchestrated by AmVets 9-1-1 Commander Ronnie Ogletree, is apropos for these precarious times due to the global pandemic born from the novel coronavirus. Most schools are facilitating virtual learning classes which makes the acquisition of viable laptop computers paramount to keep up with their peers.

“Normally what we do is we do a back-to-school drive,” Ogletree said, which the post has done for nearly 30 years. “But with COVID-19 this year, we decided it will put laptops in the hands of kids that needed because there was a shortage of laptops.”

Ogletree and AmVets are partnering with Montez Collins, a technology instructor at Southside High School in the Atlanta Public School System, to provide free and refurbished or reconditioned laptops and present them to the schools for the next several weeks. During a brief ceremony at the post,

Ogletree and Collins, a graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology and a computer connoisseur, presented the first four to students during a brief ceremony at the AmVets post.

“So basically what’s happening is we are rebuilding donated and surplus laptops and the Post is providing funds for hard drives, batteries, power cords, screens if they need them — all the pieces to get them up and running. And (Collins) is donating his time to rebuild the computers,” Ogletree said.

As part of the ceremony, the AmVets post presented Collins with a \$2,000 check to offset the costs to rebuild the computers.

The computer giveaway is part of the AmVets’ community outreach and philanthropy. The organization conducts a monthly clothing drive for the homeless — pre-COVID, that is. AmVets

The American Veterans Post 9-1-1 in Atlanta is harmoniously connected to the community, can hear the melodies from their jam sessions blaring from outside of the Club 291, which houses the AmVets post.

They are also inextricably intertwined in other important ways within the neighborhood on Campbellton Road in Southwest Atlanta.

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will also be giving away 250 meals on Saturday, Sept. 5, 2020, in conjunction with the Labor Day holiday weekend.

Partnering with Hope Atlanta, the meals will be given out between the hours of 2 to 5 p.m. while exhorting all in attendance to maintain proper social distancing.

Collins, who built his first computer in 1999, was already teaching computer courses online. However, when COVID-19 struck America and most schools remained closed, Collins learned through his colleagues that some students were not able to get any work done.

“Of course, when the pandemic came down, (most schools) moved online. And the kids in this area, they’re not doing the work because all they got was a phone,” Collins explained. “And you can get online with your phone and listen to your teacher, but you can’t type up anything. You can’t really do any assignments.”

Collins and Ogletree’s AmVets Post convened to discuss a solution. Collins’ is offering his computer expertise and time, while the AmVets are providing the funding so that forty students will get free laptops that will work sufficiently to enable students to get all of their required coursework completed.

“These laptops will do everything those kids need to do. They have Windows 10. They have Microsoft Office on there. They have antivirus on so if they get viruses, they can take them off,” Collins reassured the students in attendance. “They’ve been completely refurbished. They’re like nine years old, but they will run perfectly.”

Collins is imploring Vets and others in attendance, as well as others in the community, to donate old computers to the AmVets Post 9-1-1, even if they don’t believe it works anymore.

“Let me say this,” Collins concluded. “Even if you have something old that you think you can’t use, just bring it to us. We can try to turn it into something. Like a lot of people don’t understand this, but the reason why you can’t use old computers is not that they are bad, but because of the software. So I can turn an old computer into a (workable) laptop, and the kids and do their homework as long as they have an internet connection.”

The ramifications for a student who doesn’t have a laptop, Collins said, is that the kids who won’t be able to keep up with his peers.

“We’re gonna try to get these kids up so they can get some work up because if we don’t, they’re gonna get left behind. It’s just as simple as that,” Collins said.