

## eTAB and Digital Sisters, Inc. Provide Women with High-Tech Skills

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Women residing at Edgewood Terrace can learn basic Web-design skills when they join the Working Mothers Web Team program, a collaboration between the Edgewood Technology Advisory Board (eTAB) and Digital Sisters, Inc., a D.C.-based nonprofit that promotes and provides technology education and enrichment for young girls and women of color. The Working Mothers Web Team teaches women marketable technology skills. The course began in late January and will conclude in April when the 10 participants develop a Web site for their class. Both eTAB and Digital Sisters, Inc. hope that the Web Team will be the first of several joint programs to benefit Edgewood Terrace residents.

According to Shireen Mitchell, executive director of Digital Sisters, Inc., contacting Edgewood Terrace had been on her list of things to do. While attending a meeting of D.C.-area technology groups, she met Jessica Venegas, community technology coordinator for the Community Preservation and Development Corporation that owns and manages Edgewood Terrace. Venegas invited Mitchell to meet with the officers of eTAB, a nonprofit group of 167 Edgewood Terrace residents that was established to promote a centralized computer network at the development and to encourage residents to use the technology. For a \$24 annual membership fee, eTAB members receive a thin client computer, high-speed Internet access, e-mail accounts, and Microsoft Office 2000 software. During the meeting, eTAB officers expressed interest in initiating several programs, including the Working Mothers Web Team, and a course in financial technology literacy that Mitchell is developing.

The Web Team meets on Saturdays from 10 am to 2 pm in an Edgewood Terrace Gateway classroom. Digital Sisters, Inc. staff and volunteers provide the instruction in Web design. To make it easier for the women to participate, the center holds simultaneously a computer class for children of the Web Team. It also provides lunch which eTAB helps fund. The program is free to eTAB members. Nonmembers can register for \$30. Already, one participant of the Web Team has joined eTAB as result of the program.

According to Mitchell, the participants had a range of experience on computers. The course not only teaches the women technical skills, but it helps them to build self-confidence, which they can transfer to other areas of their lives, she says. While teaching coeducational computer courses, Mitchell found that the women were often embarrassed to speak up or ask questions because they were afraid to appear “dumb.” Therefore, she resolved to create a more hospitable classroom environment for the women. She feels strongly about the importance of them acquiring computer skills. When she teaches the Web Team, Mitchell refrains from using jargon and cultivates a team approach. She teaches women how to design and develop a Web page, and she encourages them to learn by trying and to be comfortable with change. Mitchell wants women to understand that knowing how to use a computer can be a tool for achieving their goals. She hopes that the women on the Web Team will share their knowledge with their children, especially their daughters.

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