

Gilroy plays host to a growing number of Wi-Fi hotspots

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By Melissa Flores (mflores@gilroydispatch.com.)

Gilroy - Garlic city is slowly become a high-tech city with more than 12 locations where wireless Internet junkies can log on to get their fix.

It's a Grind Coffee House and Panera Bread Bakery-Cafe both offer free wireless access in their Gilroy locations, and most locations nationwide. All customers need to do is stop in with a laptop computer that has a wireless network adapter and they can pick up an Internet signal for free.

"We have a lot of clients who use it," said Kassi Swalboski, an employee of It's a Grind. "We have regulars who use it to play games."

"It provides such a great opportunity for people to come in, relax, enjoy our food and go online." said Jeff Burrill, owner of Panera Bread's Gilroy location.

Panera has 10 and 30 customers a day who use the Internet, he said, and most log on for about an hour. The shop even has a "smart room," a corner of the dining room with comfortable arm chairs that invite customers to settle in for long work or study sessions.

"It's a simple extension of excellent customer service," Burrill said. "I don't believe customers should have to pay."

The cafe's free Wi-Fi, as wireless Internet is known to techies, draws locals as well as passersby. Traveling through Gilroy on vacation from Florida, Christal and Matt Layman searched out free locations, to e-mail friends and search for information on each city as they arrive.

"I'm searching for places to camp out," Christal said, whose Web browser was open to a site listing South County campgrounds. "I like the convenience of it. We can sit here, have coffee and everything at the same time."

RV owners and other campers are finding that more sites are offering wireless Internet access, some for free and some for a charge. The Garlic Farm RV Park, off Monterey Road in Gilroy, uses LinkSpot to offer wireless Internet to their clients. The Internet service provider offers service at campgrounds throughout the United States and allows customers to buy subscriptions by the month for \$35 or the hour for \$2.95, depending on their needs.

Thousand Trails in Morgan Hill, a members-only campground and RV park, offers free wireless access to visitors. The access is not available throughout the park, however, so users will need to trek up to the adult lodge to get online.

First Street Coffee and Sue's Coffee Roasting Company also offer free Internet access for customers while they sip on a cup of java or nibble on a snack in the shops.

Owner Sue Shalit sees the service as a way for customers to get online quickly to send an e-mail they may have forgotten to send from home or check for directions if they are on their way to business appointments.

"If they are on the road, on the way to a meeting, they can make a stop and check something quickly," Shalit said. "It's great to stop and log on."

There are also plenty of places in town for customers who are willing to pay for a connection, including most Starbucks locations, McDonald's and Barnes and Noble. Costs range from as low \$3.95 for two hours of access up to \$35 for unlimited monthly access.

Scott Waller spends time at Starbucks in the Gilroy Crossing Shopping center, but it isn't the Internet access that brings him there.

The businessman who lives in Hollister but travels from Salinas to South San Francisco for work still stops in at the coffeehouse, but his company pays for its own wireless service and a special adapter that allows his laptop to pick up a signal in most places he happens to be.

"I used to use it, but it's not that beneficial," Waller said of the T-mobile Hotspot service offered at Starbucks. "It added up too quickly for me."

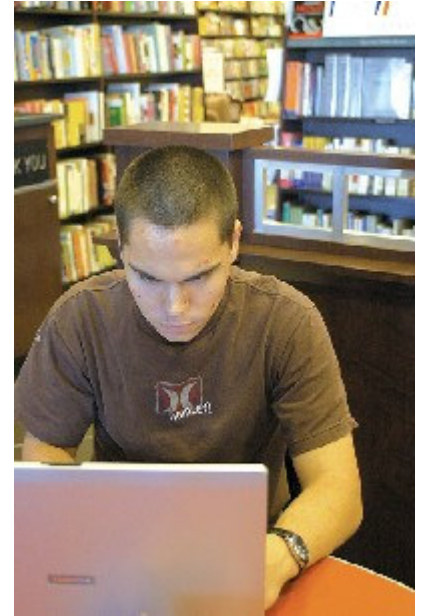
But if Jim Carillo has his way, locals like Waller will have plenty more places around Gilroy to surf the Web from wireless-equipped laptops free of charge.

Carillo, a Morgan Hill resident started the Public Wi-Fi Project as a way to show businesses that there is an effective way to cover the costs of access without charging customers.

He came up with the idea of integrated advertising - merchants pay for advertising and while customers log on to the Internet, a 90-pixel high banner flashes a new ad every 10 seconds.

"We did a lot of market research to determine how large we could make it," Carillo said of the ad banner. "The top [of the screen] was acceptable without too much of a negative reaction."

While Morgan Hill is up and running with the project, Carillo has just started working with Gilroy, making presentations to Gilroy's City Council



Craig Johnson, of Hollister, came to the Barnes and Noble on 10th Street and Camino Arroyo to test his laptop, which he bought just the day before. Places like Barnes and Noble and Panera Bread Company offer wireless Internet connections to attract customers and business.

Photo by: Ali Sajjadi / Staff Photographer

and the Downtown Business Association.

"We are definitely interested in it," said Larry Mickartz, vice president of the business association. "It makes a lot of sense and more and more people are using Wi-Fi."

Find your Wi-Fi spot

Wi-Fi junkies can check out the following Web sites to find wireless Internet locations, but are cautioned to call ahead before heading out, as the sites are not always updated.

- <http://wififreespot.com/ca.html>

Offers a list of free locations throughout California but is missing a couple of the recently opened Wi-Fi hotspots in Gilroy.

- <http://www.jiwire.com/>

Visitors can search for a city or zip code nationwide for a list of locations. The site offers information on cost and a comparison chart so users can pick the best location for their needs.

Get on the World Wide Web via Wi-Fi in South County,

Free Wi-Fi Hot Spot:

- Panera Bread Bakery Cafe, 6865 Camino Arroyo
- It's a Grind Coffee House, 890 Renz Lane, Suite 100
- Sue's Coffee Roasting Company, 7501 Monterey Street
- First Street Coffee Exchange, 1211 First St.
- Thousand Trails: Members only campground and RV park offers access in their adult lodge to visitors, 12895 Uvas Road, Morgan Hill, CA 95037

Locations that offer Wi-Fi at a cost:

- Barnes and Noble 6825 Camino Arroyo

SBC Freedomlink Wi-Fi network: \$3.95 for two hours up to \$19.95+ for unlimited monthly access

- McDonald's 797 First St. and 6990 Chestnut St.

Wayport: \$2.95 for two hours

- Starbucks - 6865 Camino Arroyo, 8375 Arroyo Circle and 795 First St.

T-Mobile Hotspot: \$6 an hour, \$9.99 a day and \$29.99 a month

- Garlic Farms Plaza and RV Park - 5920 Travel Park Center

LinkSpot: \$2.95 an hour, \$5.95 a day, \$25 a week and \$35 a month

Melissa Flores

Melissa Flores is an intern, who recently graduated from the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles. Reach her at 842-6400, ext. 207 or mflores@gilroydispatch.com.