



HP marks East Palo Alto computer initiative

NEARLY 50 LOCAL BUSINESSES BENEFIT FROM PROJECT LED BY HEWLETT-PACKARD

By **Thaai Walker**
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Early Monday morning, on their way to address a gathering of small business owners and city leaders in East Palo Alto, Hewlett-Packard Chief Executive Carly Fiorina and President Michael Capellas made a quick stop at the city's Latte Dah Cafe.

They were there to get a fix for Capellas' admitted caffeine addiction but also to hear from Laverne Bryant, co-owner of the drive-through espresso stand on University Avenue. About a year ago, Hewlett-Packard outfitted Bryant's business with a computer, a color printer, a copier, a scanner and other technology goodies, and they wanted to know how things were working out.

Pretty good, Bryant told them as she served up steaming cappuccino to the high-tech celebs. She uses the technology in every aspect of her

business — from printing color menus, to crafting timesheets to handling her business accounts.

"I work the hell out of that computer," Bryant confided in Fiorina.

Latte Dah is just one of nearly 50 local businesses benefiting from an project led by Hewlett-Packard. The project, known as the Small Business Development Initiative, provides computers, free e-mail, tech support and much more to local entrepreneurs like Bryant so that they can launch and grow their businesses and contribute to the city's economy.

Fiorina and Capellas journeyed to East Palo Alto on Monday for a celebration of the project, now entering its third year. The initiative is part of a larger effort known as the Digital Village project which seeks to make technology accessible to the city's residents.

Supporters of the small



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Laverne Bryant, co-owner of a drive-through espresso stand on University Avenue, serves customer Sereptha Strong. HP outfitted the business with a computer and other technology goodies.

business initiative say it is a particularly meaningful endeavor in a city where many mom-and-pops have been displaced by redevelopment projects launched in an effort to bring in big-box stores and build the city's tax base.

Bryant had nothing but

praise for the project that brought the leaders of one of Silicon Valley's most powerful companies to her small, spick-and-span stand, where she also sells sandwiches and barbecue. She fixed a double-shot, no-sugar cappuccino for Capellas. Fiorina just had a few

sips of a regular one.

"She said she can't drink too much coffee," Bryant explained. "She gets the jitters."

Bryant shared future plans for online merchandising. Then she handed Fiorina a menu and asked for her autograph.

Hewlett-Packard is collaborating with Start Up, a non-profit business incubator that has produced hundreds of entrepreneurs, including Bryant. The local merchants' association and Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Push initiative are also involved.

Fiorina also gave Hewlett-Packard's promise of commitment to the community and its small business base, which she called "an untapped power."

"The progress you've made is homegrown, bottom-up, grass-roots," she said. "We may have added fuel to the dream, but the dream started with you."

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