

Appendix F: Examples of Senior Programs at Neighborhood Networks Centers

Sister Mary Lucy Neighborhood Networks Center

Denver, Colorado

Since many seniors were leaving the workforce just as personal computers and the Internet were gaining a foothold, terms like Web browser, HTML, server, and gigabytes are not part of their everyday vocabulary.

Although many seniors view computer technology as a new technology that is intimidating and overwhelming, senior residents at the Sister Mary Lucy Neighborhood Networks Center were ready to put their fears aside and jump on the information superhighway. To help them, the center staff designed Computer Class for Seniors, an eight-week course that introduced students to the technology culture and demystified all things about the computer.

Developing Computer-Savvy Seniors

After consulting with senior center residents about their program interests, the staff created the class that met on Mondays from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. and included a basic introduction to computers. Mousercise, an online tutorial, was used to teach students how to use the mouse, access and complete forms online, and cut and paste text. Students were also introduced to Microsoft Word and Paintshop. Students became familiar with the Internet, browsing, and performing searches on areas of interest, such as vacation sites, health information, recipes, and pictures of their birthplace. To enable the seniors to communicate with family and friends around the world, class instructors taught students how to establish an e-mail account and send and receive messages.

Seniors Celebrate Achievement

Eight residents ranging in age from 58 to 92 completed the class. To honor their achievement, the center held an awards and graduation ceremony. The graduates received certificates of completion and a portfolio that included their online Mousercise certificate, typing diploma, printed Internet research information, Paintshop pictures, and memoirs and poems typed in Word.

Many of the seniors have expressed an interest in taking additional computer classes, and there is now a waiting list of seniors ready to embrace the computer age. To help teach all who want to learn and keep their computer skills current, several recent graduates have offered to assist with the class.

Plough Towers Computer Learning Center

Memphis, Tennessee

There is a year-and-a-half wait to become a resident of the 11-story, 150-unit Plough Towers senior-housing community. The long wait may be due to the many onsite amenities offered to residents, such as the Plough Towers Computer Learning Center, a Model Classification status Neighborhood Networks center.

Created in 1997, the six-computer Plough Towers Computer Learning Center was made possible through a partnership with the University of Tennessee's Memphis Educational Computer Connectivity Alliance, or MECCA. MECCA not only helped the center obtain all of its Apple eMac computers, it also provides technical support and discounts for high-speed Internet connection.

Each weekday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., the center offers both open lab time and a basic computer class. The class covers everything from using the mouse and keyboard to learning word processing, navigating the Internet, creating an e-mail account, and scanning and touching up photos. Residents are presented with a certificate of completion at the monthly resident meeting once they finish the class. About 19 residents have already completed the class and received their certification, and there is a waiting list to take the classes.

To further maximize its resources and deliver technology access to more residents, Plough Towers Computer Learning Center joined the Computer Literacy Initiatives, Inc. Initiated in July 2003, Computer Literacy Initiatives, Inc. was formed when members of the West Tennessee Neighborhood Networks Centers Association agreed to develop a nonprofit entity that could seek funds and provide technical assistance to all of its centers.

Use It or Lose It

To help residents continually expand and improve their computer skills, the center formed a stationery creation and production business. Using the skills they learn in class from working with the various software programs, the residents create a variety of products that are sold to the community. These items include greeting cards, personalized labels, note cards, and business cards. The residents also scan old photographs and retouch them on the computer for use in their creations. The center displays samples of the various items the residents produce. Clients can come to the center and place their orders. All of the money generated by this business is invested back into the center.

Hotel Oakland Computer Learning Center Oakland, California

After a multi-million dollar retrofit in 1993, the 315-unit Hotel Oakland became home to many

local seniors. Four years later, with the support of its property management company, A.F. Evans, the Hotel Oakland Computer Learning Center opened its doors and became one of the first computer centers in senior housing in the Bay Area.

When the Hotel Oakland Computer Learning Center first opened, it offered senior residents use of its four computers. Because using a computer was something new to many of the residents, the center offered classes in Microsoft Windows. However, it did not take long for center staff members to realize that a change was needed if the center was going to survive.

Adapting to the Needs of Residents

Because acquiring computers and workforce skills was not the top priority of residents, participation in computer classes that taught residents how to use Windows was low.

Today, a computer instructor is available at the center 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and Saturdays to help residents access the Internet and use e-mail. The instructor also teaches the seniors how to download music and save it to a CD so they are able to listen to it in their apartments.

Wellness Center of Good Shepherd Neighborhood Networks Center

Little Rock, Arkansas

To enhance communications among residents of the Good Shepherd Ecumenical Retirement Center's four buildings, the property's board of directors and chief executive officer, along with the staff of the Wellness Center of Good Shepherd Neighborhood Networks Center, established Channel 39. A free, in-house, 24-hour television channel, Channel 39 provides residents easier access to information about community events and improves staff-resident communication.

Live from Little Rock

To get the in-house television channel going, center staff contacted the Visitor and Community Television Corporation (VCTV) about the idea. VCTV staff then contacted Comcast Cable and worked with them to secure and install the needed equipment and devices.

The center used \$8,000 from its operating budget to establish the channel, which included purchasing the equipment, setup, and instructional classes. Comcast and VCTV technicians came to the center one day, and in a matter of hours, the channel was set up and ready to go live.

Providing More than Just Information

Good Shepherd's in-house television channel is a repository of information for its retired, predominantly female residents. Information can be shared with residents almost instantly, which keeps them more informed and interested in center goings-on. Daily announcements, as well as postings of special events and classes, such as bake sales, painting classes, and yoga sessions, are broadcast on Channel 39. The channel also provides weekly breakfast, lunch, and dinner menus; lists residents' prayer requests; outlines program and activity schedules; broadcasts daily weather forecasts and severe weather information instantly; and offers orientation information and welcome messages for new residents. Information to be broadcast is sent to the center director by news

gatherers located in all four buildings. The director ensures that the information is aired and updated daily.

In addition to providing information, it is also a source of entertainment for residents. Channel 39 plays music for their listening pleasure, allows viewing of new film releases on either DVDs or VHS videotapes, and has the capability to allow residents to view live events, programs, and religious services.

Benefits to the Center

Channel 39 has bridged the communication gap between center staff and residents. It has also reduced the amount of paper notifications needed, such as events flyers. Instead of creating flyers and slipping them under residents' doors or posting on bulletin boards on each floor, the center staff get the word out through Channel 39.

In addition to strengthening its community through its in-house television channel, the Wellness Center of Good Shepherd Neighborhood Networks Center offers a variety of programs and activities for seniors. When they are not tuning in, senior residents can participate in the quilting club, work out at the state-of-the-art fitness center, attend to their plot in the community garden, join social outings, or sign up for craft classes, computer classes, and health and nutritional programs.

