

WHAT'S ON WHAT'S ON THE COMPUTER

Technology talk taking over South Jersey

by Jennifer Busa



Dory Mann, Haddonfield's director of Senior Services, uses the computer in the Mabel Kay House. Local seniors are welcome to use the computer, a donation from Camden County, for personal projects, e-mail, or for practice.

■ With a vigorous home exercise regimen of lifting weights, walking the treadmill, and sweating through push-ups and sit-ups, 80-year-old Poppy Brunker strives to keep her body in shape.

Not far from her home gym is another piece of equipment that keeps this Chestnut Avenue resident fit – a personal computer.

"I like to keep physically active, but I also keep mentally active," said Brunker, who jumped on the technology bandwagon 16 years ago. "You *must* keep the mind active. If you don't use it, you live in a time warp."

Because of her keen interest in modern technology, Brunker gave little more than a quick glance to the activities available for Haddonfield's older population ... until she noticed more and more senior citizens signing up for local classes with Computer Generations, a non-profit organization that offers computer instruction for South Jersey seniors and children.

Brunker, whose sister is a member of the Greater Boston Seniors Computer Group, hoped to some day bring a similar club to South Jersey. The recent rise of computer literate seniors in the area signaled to Brunker that now was the time.

"I thought, 'Gee, these people are ready,'" she recalled. "I gave the [Senior Citizen's Advisory Council] the idea and they ran with it."

"It" is the Over 50 Computer Club, meeting for the first time on January 28 at the Mabel Kay House. The first program will focus on how computers work, with future meetings expected to cover popular web sites, digital photography, greeting cards, and anything else club members suggest.

"We feel there is a need for this," said Maureen Heacock, Haddonfield resident and director of adult training for Computer Generations. "Classes can only go so far. We see the potential of seniors, expanding their horizons in the use of the computer."

In the past five years, Computer Generations has trained at least 250 seniors in Haddonfield, said Heacock, with classes ranging from basic computer functions to word processing, spreadsheets, and Internet use.

"They start classes because they 'want to get in the loop,' that's what they say," Heacock explained. "I've heard that term over and over. 'I want to feel like I know what's going on.' They want to learn the correct terminology and eventually how to use e-mail, for staying in touch with their grandchildren."

Poppy Brunker prides on being in the loop, and encourages other seniors to do so.

"I've lived alone now for 20 years, and I've always wanted to keep up with what younger people are doing," she said. "People are living longer now – they shouldn't just sit at home, watching TV. It's no way to live."

Brunker pays her Visa bill online, researches prescription information at WebMD.com, and checks the 10-day forecast at Weather.com, which is "a hell of a lot more accurate than what you get on TV," she opined.

She quit subscribing to newspapers and instead uses Yahoo! News as her main source of national information.

"It's updated every 20 minutes. It's quicker than Fox News. Even on NBC with Tom Brokaw, they tell me things I read the night before or that morning. I think computers are where it's at."

Dory Mann, director of Haddonfield's Senior Services and coordinator of activities at the Mabel Kay House, has seen an increase in computer usage among local senior citizens.

"I've gotten calls from people who are not from the Mabel Kay House who are interested (in the club). Classes are one thing – it's another thing getting together with people who share the same interest."

Retired legal secretary and avid painter Charlotte Johnson is hoping to use the Com-

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puter Club to learn more about art-related programs and web sites.

"I'd love to get a scanner, because when you sketch, you can put it on the computer," she said. "There are endless ways to manipulate it and make it better."

After a 14-year hiatus from painting, Johnson didn't think she'd be able to produce anything fabulous on canvas, let alone on her new computer.

But she became intrigued with something on her hard drive called Microsoft Paint. After experimenting with the program, Johnson, who lives in Haddon Heights near the Haddonfield border, had simulated an oil painting portrait.

"I showed it to my daughter, she said she loved it, she left, and then I lost it!" Johnson recalled. "I didn't know how to save."

But so impressed with her creation was Johnson that she sat right back down and started from scratch.

She couldn't believe it when the final prod-

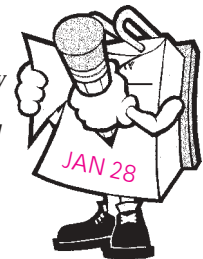
uct, "Shades of a Lady," won first place for computer art in the Camden County Senior Citizen Art Contest, a competition she entered on a whim. The painting then went on to place first in the state.

Now, Johnson uses her Dell PC for not just art, but for e-mail, news, and general recreation.

"I use it daily, in fact maybe a bit too much," she said with a small chuckle. "But it keeps your mind sharp – you're never too old to learn. This is the future, my goodness!"

WHAT'S ON THE CALENDAR

● *The Over 50 Computer Club will hold its first meeting on Wednesday, January 28 at 10am, at the Mabel Kay House (24 Walnut St, next to Acme parking lot). Adults from Haddonfield and surrounding communities are welcome to attend. The topic will be "How do computers work?" Call 354-8789 if you are interested.*



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