



AUSTIN FREE-NET NEWS

SPRING 2007

www.austinfreenet

Mission:

To ensure that under-served communities can access and effectively use the internet and computer technologies in public spaces throughout Greater Austin.

Austin Free-Net Staff

- Dale Thompson
Acting Executive Director
- John Neale
Technical Services Manager
- Christie Carr
Program Manager
- Drew Glass
Admin. Assistant
- Antoine Curry
Computer Lab Monitor

OFFICES:

2209 Rosewood, 2nd floor,
Austin, Texas 78702
512-236-8225

Inside this issue:

- AFN Board Notes 2
- From the Trenches 2
- AFN Partner Sites 2
- Volunteer with AFN 3
- Computer Clinics 3
- What the Heck is Fix-Net? 4

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND CHANGING LIVES THROUGH EQUITABLE ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

After the Libraries: A Little Fun History and What's Next for AFN

Austin Free-Net's first project was placing public computers in the 21 Austin public libraries with the help of a large grant from the Texas State Library. Over 1996 and 1997, we installed about 50 of the original Pentium class computers in the libraries on ISDN 64 – 128 kbps Internet service (state of the art at the time!). By April 1997 all but one of the libraries had public computers and those computers averaged 11,500 user sessions per month. This model was quite different from other original Free-Nets in the United States who generally provided a free Internet connection from your home on dial-up for an hour or so a day.

Free-Net was also steadily adding community computer labs in low-income neighborhoods in partnership with various community organizations and city facilities with the help of grants from the Department of Commerce, the Department of Education, the Telecom Infrastructure Fund, and various private and corporate foundations. Most of those government grant opportunities no longer exist - unfortunately for communities and community technology providers all over the United States. Eventually the library system developed its own tech staff, Internet service graduated to high



Dale Thompson, AFN Acting Executive Director, seen here last year at the Convention Center, providing 180 volunteers to help Katrina survivors connect to relatives and friends via the internet.

speed, and computers were added with grants designed specifically to help libraries create public access to computers and the Internet from the Gates Foundation and the Texas Telecom Infrastructure Fund. Grande Communications

. . . continued on page 3

From our Technical Expert John Neale

Back from the Brink -

AFN is technically robust once again thanks to timely grants, a change in the City of Austin's connection strategy, and fortuitous PC availability! We hit a low spot last summer ('06) when our pre-turn-of-the-century PC's just couldn't keep up any more. Some were just wearing out, while the rest couldn't keep up with an operating system mainly composed of updates. In late summer we were able to purchase 30 refurbished Dell Dimension 3000's, and distributed all but a handful into the field immediately. What a difference! Service calls went down, and lab usage went up as people found the new machines more responsive and more reliable. In March of '07 we purchased 10 more for backups and expansion. The future looks bright (at least for a couple more years!).

Small Lab Renovation at Dewitty Center -

The small lab at the Dewitty Center, the "training" lab, has undergone renovation. Ideas from staff led us to place all the PC's on rolling tables and switch to wireless access. This allows us to reconfigure the lab to meet different classroom layout needs by simply unplugging each table's electric connection and rolling it where needed. Our trainers and class participants are as pleased as we are with the new layout. -JN



Board of Directors Benefits from USA Leadership Corps Project

Current AFN Board Members:

Peter Bradford
 Martha Fuentes-Bautista
 Denise Guckert
 Ravi Narayan
 Kathy Robinson
 John Sirman

If you've ever been a board member for a nonprofit or a staff member working with a nonprofit board of directors, you know that there is a lot more to it than just showing up for meetings. Here's a quote from nonprofit consultant, Kim Klein, in her great book

"Fundraising for the Long Haul":
"...the most common complaint about an organization – whether from board members, staff, or volunteers not on the boards – is something about the board – its performance, composition, lack of involvement or over-involvement with program, or relationship to staff."

We had heard all of these complaints over the years and wanted to make our directors' and staff's experience better and as productive as we possibly

could. Enter Chicago-based USA Leadership Corps. It is a national network of talented business volunteers who help local nonprofits and small businesses achieve greater success from their fundraising, marketing, and other management areas.

The Corps matched us with Sydney Dugan, a local Dell Inc. project manager who had led over 4 major process improvement initiatives. She has experience coaching executives in mergers and acquisitions, as well as annual goal and contingency planning. Lucky us!

With surveys, meetings, and action plans, Sydney created an infectious energy and helped the board members and staff have very productive dialogues de-

signed to align us all in our strategies and vision for making Austin Free-Net even better at serving our community with our specific expertise. We cannot express how wonderful this has been. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Sydney.

If you'd like to learn more about USA Leadership Corps visit:

www.usaleadershipcorps.org.

Ana Sisnett Retires

In October, our Executive Director, Ana Sisnett, officially retired. She will return from time to time as a consultant and remains a dear and valued colleague to us.

From the Trenches by Antoine Curry

Austin Free-Net Partners in Community Technology:

- Dewitty Center Community Lab
- ALLGO Community Services
- Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH)
- Casa Marianela
- Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center
- East Side Community Connection
- Garden Terrace
- Huntington Meadows Apts.
- Literacy Austin
- Lyons Gardens Senior Housing Community
- Oak Creek Village
- Resistencia Book Store/Red Salmon Art
- Rosewood Zaragosa Neighborhood Center
- St. John's Community Center
- Trinity Center

Here at the DeWitty branch of Austin Free-Net, we have a diverse group of people who use our services and we do our best to accommodate each individual. The following are some actual comments from our users. These statements were culled from a recent survey about how clients felt about the lab.

When asked "What do you use our lab for?" the following information was given: "Work on my children's book, do some research work in science and bible studies." "[Seeking] employment with City of Austin and other companies." "Internet browsing and typing classes." "Check email, games, and online applications"

Here are some additional comments about the lab:
 "Outstanding service!" "Always space, clean. Very quiet and nice." "I think it's good for people who have no access to computers such as myself." "Nice lab, quiet, supervisor runs it

well." MS PowerPoint and Word are computer classes participants would like to have available.

These are only a fraction of all the people who use the labs here. As you can plainly see, there are many uses for our computer labs. Come by and take a look, take a class, improve your computer skills, and see what we have to offer.

Wish List!

- Office Supplies
- Collating Copier
- Reams/Cases of White Paper
- Diskettes/Blank CDs
- Flat LCD Monitors
- Rolling Desk Chairs

Call to Donate:

512-236-8225



... After the Libraries (continued from page 1)

donated high speed service to 3 of the locations in their service area.

On November 1, 2001, the City of Austin's Mayor Kirk Watson publicly recognized the founders and sponsors of Austin Free-Net, saying: *This is a classic example of citizens of Austin, Texas, who saw a need that frankly may not have been seen by everybody. And they stepped into that in a way that was very creative, very imaginative; and it really has... become a national and international model.... I want to say a special thank you for all you've meant to Austin, Texas and what you've done.*

In April 2006, the libraries had about 350 public computers online on most days and averaged **70,000** user sessions per month. The city perfected its network security and switched the public access computers' Internet service from private industry providers to their huge fiber network. We bid a fond farewell to our first project as it reached total self-sustaining status.

Our community computer labs are much smaller, targeting the segments of our community who are least likely to have access to computers and the Internet in their homes or at work, or the skills to use those tools for improving their lives, communities

and general well-being. These labs, growing community technology in Austin, and providing technical assistance to our local nonprofit community, are the focus of our programs now.

We are working with astounding volunteers and funders - corporate, university and private citizens - who lend us their time, their expertise and their boundless generosity in our daily programs and special needs like Katrina evacuee assistance, and owe many

thanks to continued support from the City of Austin. Please read on and join our efforts to level the technology playing field for all of our citizens and the small, but very important local nonprofits working to make Austin a better place for all of us.

On November 1, 2001, the City of Austin's Mayor, Kirk Watson, publicly recognized the founders and sponsors of Austin Free-Net

Volunteer with Austin Free-Net and change lives!

What can you expect from volunteering with Austin Free-Net? Besides networking opportunities, interaction and friendships with others, there are so many different ways our volunteers describe their

experiences with us. Each site we serve has a life and opportunity of its own. Volunteers can either assist participants at our classes and clinics at our main location (The DeWitty Center), or at our various part-

ner sites in Austin. Volunteers help participants effectively use computers and technology.

For additional information about our volunteer opportunities, call Christie Carr, Program Manager, at 236-8225 ext. 14.

AUSTIN FREE-NET — WHAT WE DO:
WE PROVIDE TRAINING & ACCESS TO ADULTS WITH LIMITED COMPUTER EXPERIENCE/SKILL
WE ARE A HUB FOR COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY ACCESS/RESOURCES FOR GREATER AUSTIN

Computer Classes & Clinics at the DeWitty Center 2007

Last year in the spring, an idea blossomed between our Acting ED and a UT Volunteer and our Beginner's Computer Clinic was born! The concept was simple: let people just come on by to learn how to use a computer, the internet, and email. The clinic was opened on Wednesdays from 6-8pm and had three to four participants over the course of a couple of months. Even though only a few people

came, those that did were thrilled with the results. Participants received individualized instruction from a volunteer.

Today, this concept is now a full-blown year-round computer clinic serving many. Once the word got out, participants flowed through our doors. More volunteers were recruited. This open door clinic concept then expanded to Friday mornings for seniors

and others who could not get here at night. The small lab overflowed into the big lab on occasion and as long as there were available computers, we used them!

This spring and summer of 2007 we are once again offering our Beginner's Open Door Computer clinics along with our regularly scheduled classes. Visit the DeWitty Center to pick up a schedule.





PMB 226, P.O.Box 2013
Austin, TX 78768-2013



What the heck is Fix-Net?

Fix-Net is Austin Free-Net's program to support local nonprofit, community-based and faith-based organizations and public agencies with affordable, dependable, professional tech support and software training.

We have several wonderful folks who have all worked in nonprofits and either travel around the city to save the day for people who serve our community or pass on their skills in classes. Occasionally we call in private sector contractors who have agreed to

work for nonprofit rates once in a while. Most especially we want to recognize the L&P Group (otherwise known as the server gods, Johnathan and Ian) for offering their amazing services from time to time.

There have been studies galore about how these kinds of services to nonprofits simply can't exist without subsidies and support from public and private partners. It's true. There are very good reasons why the private sector has to charge so much.

We are constantly writing grants and knocking on corporate doors for this support. The organization who immediately "got it" and supported this program was The City of Austin Telecommunications and Regulatory Affairs Department headed by Ron-

della Hawkins. Next was the University of Texas Red McCombs Business School Community Consulting Program. Later, the SBC Foundation (now the AT&T Foundation), Applied Materials, the Austin Community College Center for Community-Based and Nonprofit Organizations and the Texas Association of Nonprofit Organizations came on board. Huston-Tillotson College and Literacy Austin contributed their computer labs for our first classes for nonprofits.

It would be nice if someone would just give us a million dollars to do this great work for free, but we think we've worked out something everyone can live with for now. We'll do it for as long as we can and as long as it makes financial sense.

AFFORDABLE AND PROFESSIONAL HANDS-ON SOFTWARE CLASSES TO NONPROFIT, COMMUNITY-BASED AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC AGENCIES

Spring 2007 Classes:

(Classes Meet 1:00 – 4:00)

- Intro. to Dreamweaver: 3/27 & 3/29
- Photo Editing: 4/10
- PowerPoint: 4/12
- Excel Basics I: 4/17
- Excel Basics II: 4/19
- MS Word Special Features: 4/24
- Introduction to MS Publisher: 4/25
- Getting the Most out of Excel: 4/26
- Introduction to MS Access: 5/8 & 5/10
- Introduction to FrontPage: 5/15 & 5/17
- Introduction to Outlook: 5/22

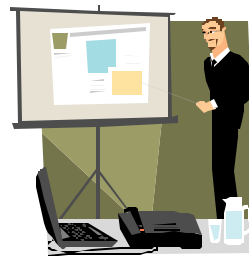


Please visit our website for additional information about each class.

Register online at:

<http://www.austinfreenet.org/classes/NonProfitClasses.htm>

For additional information, call 236-8225 Ext. 14



These classes are offered with support from Applied Materials and the City of Austin.

A Special Thanks to our Generous Sponsors

Lola Wright Foundation

City of Austin

AT&T Foundation

Wells Fargo

H-E-B

Microsoft

IBM

Applied Materials

AMD