

# YMCA, Allequippa Terrace Community Outreach Program

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YMCA at Allequippa Terrace (YMCA-AT) is a community outreach program sponsored by the YCMA at Centre Avenue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. For the past three months, I have been working with the Site Director of YMCA-AT, Orlando McGill, to improve his understanding of the computer facilities available at the center. The following is a detailed analysis of my observations and experiences with McGill and the rest of the staff at YMCA-AT.

## **Situational Analysis**

### **Organization**

The YMCA-AT program aims to serve the needs of the community by promoting honesty, caring, respect, and responsibility in children between the ages of five and eighteen. The Wadsworth Hall Community Center, of the Allequippa Terrace housing project (Hill District of Pittsburgh), co-sponsors the YMCA-AT program, which has been in operation since September of 1998, having replaced another community outreach effort by the Hill House Association. YMCA-AT is currently in the process of enriching its existing schedule of organized activities (programs) under the supervision of Site Director Orlando McGill. Onsite facilities include a full-sized kitchen, a stage, a basketball court, a weight room, a computer lab with eight workstations, and a few multi-purpose rooms that serve as either classrooms or office space. YMCA-AT uses these facilities free of charge, since they are providing a much-needed service for the residents of the area. Wadsworth Hall, which also the location of the Allequippa Terrace Residency Council, is owned and maintained by the Housing Authority of Pittsburgh.

Site Director Orlando McGill reports to Margie Ingram, Childcare Director for the YMCA Center Avenue Site. She, in turn, reports to Paul Stoney, Executive Director of YMCA Center Avenue, who is responsible for acquiring grants and charitable donations. Currently, funding for YMCA-AT comes directly from YMCA at Centre Avenue in the form of loans, which are reimbursed once grant money is obtained.

It turns out that about three years ago the residents of Allequippa Terrace petitioned the Residency Council to find an organization to run the youth program at Wadsworth Hall. , They were tired of the poor quality of recreational facilities provided by the Housing Authority of Pittsburgh. Consequently, they have been trying out different organizations for the last three years, starting with the Boys and Girls Club, then Youth Place, and finally YMCA. The Residential Association will evaluate YMCA-AT in March, at which point it will be determined whether or not they may continue the outreach program. The staff of YMCA-AT is still settling into their new location, and there are problems with processing paper forms and keeping track of inventory.

## **Program**

As mentioned above, the staff of YMCA-AT is still settling in, so the schedule of programs for the center changes often. Many of the regular activities that they provide at the center are physical in nature, such as basketball, soccer, baseball, weightlifting, and dance. YMCA-AT also sets aside space, daily, for kids to do their homework right after they get out of school.

In addition to these on-going programs, YMCA-AT offers many special, one-time, events for the children. These events cover a wide range of activities, from video game tournaments, to field trips, to knowledge contests, etc.

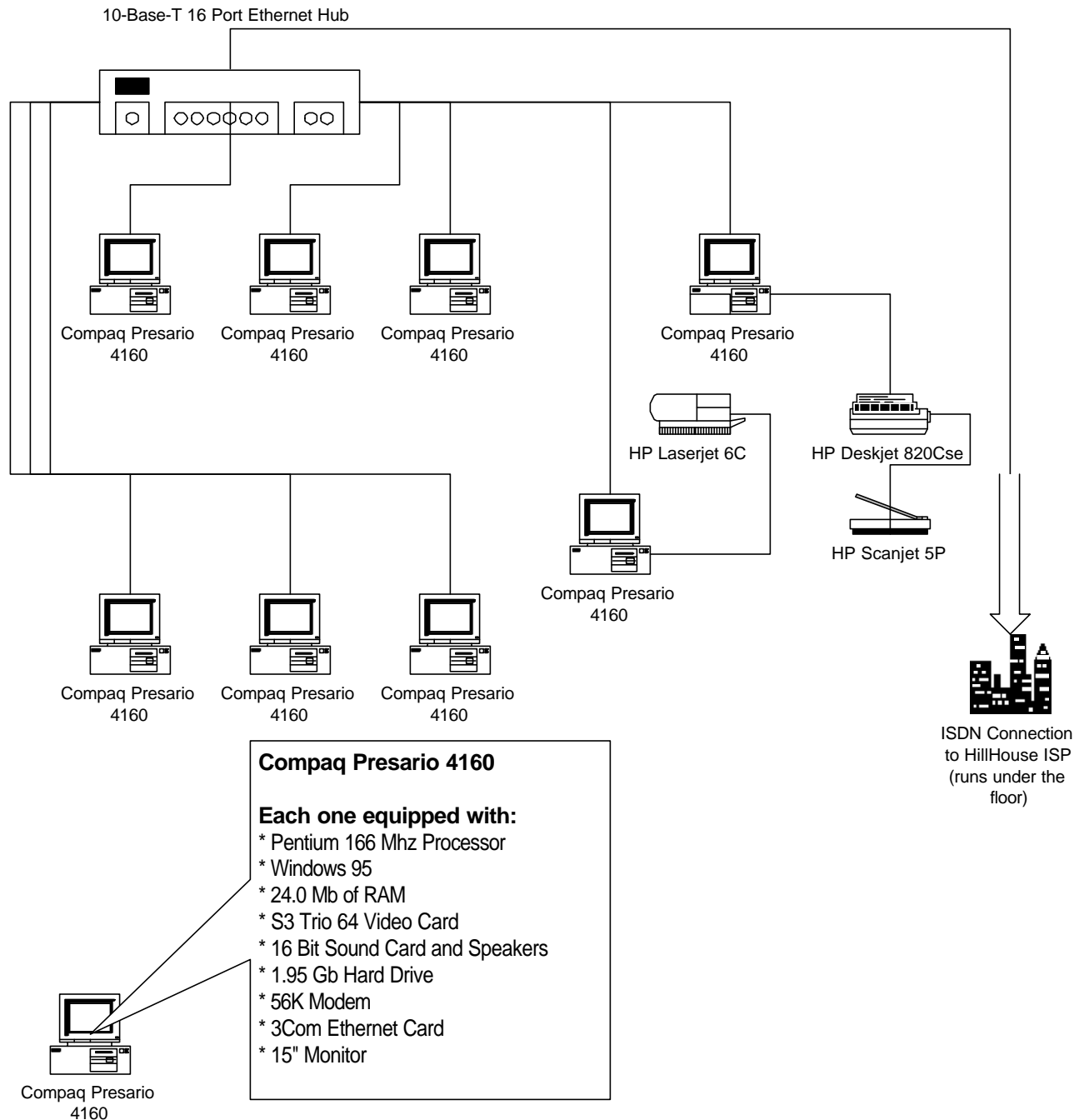
YMCA-AT occasionally offers classes in the computer lab on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Another outreach program sponsored by Carnegie Mellon University and the Peace Corps, holds computer and Internet training sessions from 1pm – 3pm on those days. YMCA-AT

## **Staff**

There are four full-time employees and one part-time employee working at the Allequippa Site. Three teaching assistants, Adrian Williams, Michael Thomas, and Lisa Coleman assist Orlando McGill, the site director of the program. Every Tuesday and Thursday, Darlene Hopkins comes to teach the children computer skills.

# Technical Environment

## The Computer Lab



• Figure 1 Network Diagram of the Computer Lab

Ethernet cable connects each of the eight computers to a 16-port hub, located in the corner of the room. The hub, in turn, connects to an ISDN line supplied by Hill House Association. This connection runs under the floor of the computer lab and into the residential office.

Each computer in the lab is housed on its own wooden desk, equipped with a sliding drawer for the keyboard / mouse, shelf space for speakers, and an ergonomic desk chair. A single printer shelf houses the HP LaserJet, HP DeskJet, and HP ScanJet, as shown in the diagram above. Hard copies of software, storage media, manuals, and lightweight equipment (headphones, etc.) are all housed in large cabinet in the back-right corner of the lab. The site director holds the key to this cabinet.

The lab also contains a table, which two or three people could use for study/project work.

The Site Director's office contains a computer with the same setup as the ones listed above, and an HP Deskjet Printer. Currently, his computer is not networked to the Local Area Network (LAN) in the lab or the ISDN connection.

## **Technology Management**

Right now, Darlene Hopkins, who is only available on Tuesdays and Thursdays, could be considered the lab manager. She teaches computer classes to the children and keeps track of the software that is being used for her classes.

## **Problems and Possibilities**

### **The Computer Lab**

**Networking problems are prevalent in the lab.** The network setup from computer to computer is neither consistent nor reliable. While it is difficult to pinpoint a common culprit, it appears that wiring may have something to do with these problems.

**When the computer lab is open,** people use it. Unfortunately, due to a lack of staff, the computer lab is often closed. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Darlene Hopkins, the lab administrator for the YMCA at Centre Avenue, teaches computer classes for YMCA-AT from 3:30 pm until the center closes.

**Software and data management is essential in a computer lab setting.** Unfortunately, accurate records of the names/versions of software being used, support information, and purchasing information are not being kept. There are no policies for backing up information in the lab. Neither are there any policies for visitors to follow while using the computers.

## **Problem 2: Computer Savvy Site Director**

Orlando McGill, site director for the YMCA Allequippa center, has had very limited exposure to computers and the software on which they run. He is currently unaware of how a computer can be of benefit to him, and hence, is also unaware of how a networked computer lab can be of benefit to the children at the YMCA. This poses a problem because, as site director, he must champion the different programs that are going on at the YMCA. In addition to that, it would be in the best interest of both the computer lab and the children if the site director was able to handle minor problems in the lab by either using his own knowledge or by having the proper support channels on-hand.

Orlando is eager to learn as much as he can about computers and how they can be used to make his work easier. With practice and a little bit of patience, he will definitely find an increase in efficiency as well as expertise.

## **Possibilities: What the future may hold**

Looking several months into the future, the computer lab will be an epicenter of information among children within the Allequippa Terrace community. They will check e-mail, surf the web, chat online, play games, do their homework, study for the SAT's, research colleges, and more. Classes in intermediate topics such as web design and computer maintenance will be taught to students who are interested. Basketball players will keep track of their scores in a simple Access database, and weightlifters will chart their physical progress using Excel.

Ideally, the networking of both the Allequippa Terrace Site and its parent Centre Avenue Site will create an efficient channel for information exchange. Staff members, who will all have accounts @ymca\_allequippa.org or @ymca\_centreave.org, will be able to discuss more topics via e-mail, eliminating the need for long meetings. Staff members will be hooked into several online community service networks and resources, which will allow them to raise even more funds and provide new services for the children.

In order to see this future, though, each of the problems listed above must be addressed and corrected.

**Fixing the networking problem is the key** to connecting people to a vast world of instant information. Unfortunately, computer labs are inherently unstable because different people are using them constantly. Factor in a child's curiosity and you have an infinite source of minor (and sometimes major) problems. In order to maintain stability in such a situation, three things must be in place:

1. An Internet Service Provider with 99.9% reliability
2. A qualified technician who can insure that the system is 100% functional at the beginning of each week
3. A support channel must be available during all operating hours, so that when a problem occurs with the network, the site director can have the problem fixed within a reasonable amount of time.
4. Also, it is important that all of the YMCA computers be networked. The site director, especially, should have his computer wired to the computer lab's LAN.

**The lab should be staffed during all operating hours**, simply because it doesn't make much sense to have a computer lab sitting around gathering dust. If funds are going to be appropriated to provide software and hardware for the lab, then funds should be appropriated for the maintenance and supervision of the lab. The site director is unable to constantly supervise the lab, given his many responsibilities for the children throughout the center. So, a qualified staff member must be hired to run the computer lab when Darlene Jenkins is working at the Centre Avenue Site. Ideally there would be programs going on throughout the day with intermittent times scheduled for people to freely explore the system.

**Information is power.** The site director should keep an electronic record of each piece of software and hardware owned (or used) by Allequippa Terrace. This electronic record would most likely be in the form of a database containing all necessary support contact information, purchase dates, version numbers, prices, etc. While the site director would maintain this information, lab administrators and technicians would have access to the database. This will have the effect of streamlining the maintenance of the computer lab, which will reduce hassles for everyone involved.

Finally, **at the helm of this will be the site director**, who must have an understanding of how to use his computer. There are many ways that a computer could enhance the job of Allequippa's site director. For instance, storing scheduling information in Outlook might make it easier to plan out events in the long term. Emergency contact information for the children could be stored electronically, so that it may be accessed at the press of a button. The site director may even be able to locate websites with information about other non-profit community service organizations to see what kinds of programs they are doing and get some new ideas. The possibilities are only limited by the imagination of the site director. He must also be aware of the difference between good service and bad service. If a technician comes in, but nothing gets fixed, then it's time to find a new technician.

## Scope of Work

**The following list outlines the topics that we went over during the course of the semester. We met twice a week, on Thursdays and Fridays, from 3:00pm – 4:30pm:**

**1/25/99 – 2/22/99**

Orlando and I spent this time learning about the computer lab. Orlando and I went through each piece of equipment that makes the lab work, from the Monitors to the Modems to the Hub and even the cabling that connects to the ISDN connection.

During this time Orlando had the opportunity to configure network settings, install drivers, wipe a bad system and then reinstall the operating system, and more.

**2/22/99 – 3/12/99**

Orlando and I spent some time learning how to use Microsoft Word to create the many flyers, lists, tables, and charts that he is required to make during the daily operation of the outreach program.

**3/12/99 – 3/19/99**

Microsoft Access is a powerful, yet inexpensive computer application for creating and maintaining databases of information. I wanted to give Orlando a taste of the powerhouse that sits on his computer desk by demonstrating the ease with which a computer can manipulate information. While creating databases is a



little advanced right now, Orlando was able to pick up on several of the key issues.

**3/19/99 – 4/22/99**

We spent this time learning to use Microsoft Outlook to manage contacts, e-mail, inventory information, schedules, and more.

**4/22/99 – 4/30/99**

The last thing Orlando and I went over was Microsoft Excel, which is a powerful tool for displaying information and doing calculations in the form of spreadsheets.

We also spent time throughout all of this, discussing ways in which the computer lab could be improved, and how the Site Director's position fit into the scheme of things.

## **Outcomes**

### **Evidence of Increased Capacity**

Orlando began this partnership having only used his computer to play Solitaire. In fact, that is what he told me on my first day. He now uses his computer to create flyers, team rosters, maintain his contacts, and organize his schedule. Most importantly, he is not afraid that he will break his computer by exploring the system and customizing the operating system to his preferences. He has changed screen savers, added password protection, and installed updated printer drivers onto his computer.

As far as the lab is concerned, I have made a few recommendations below. We were able to improve stability of peer – to – peer networking somewhat, but given the time constraints, I chose to focus more on Orlando's computer abilities. I have made several recommendations for improving the lab in the sections below.

### **Evidence of Sustainability**

Orlando has displayed that he will continue learning more about his computer by doing things that I never told him to do. He now makes flyers on a daily basis for the various programs going on at the center. He has also made sign-in sheets for the center using MS Outlook --> MS Excel --> MS Word mail merge, which is an advanced task. He has been able to resolve minor hardware problems, such as unplugged keyboards, with

ease. I am confident that he will continue learning about these topics if given the proper support.

In order to continue his progress, he will need to make use of some of the resources below. Learning about computers is a never-ending process, which takes a lot of patience. It can be tremendously rewarding, however, so he should make every effort to get some training.

## **Recommendations**

### **Staff Recommendations**

#### **Site Director**

The site director should receive beginner and intermediate training in the use of Outlook 98 for information management purposes. He/she could use Outlook as a “friendlier” database application because the interface is intuitive, yet flexible. By making use of custom/user-defined fields and outlooks many options for customizing the view settings, you can present almost any kind of data. In addition to that, Outlook provides tools for creating forms that staff members can use to input information into the system. With an intermediate understanding of forms in Outlook (and some networking between his computer and the lab), the Site Director can use forms to collect information from and distribute information to both students and staff members.

In addition, the site director should make a point of visiting web sites that have information about using computers and the Internet in a community service venue. Web sites such as <http://www.idealists.org> (there are many more web sites listed below) contain vast databases of information about everything from creating “vast databases” to fundraising to getting people to use your computer lab. Of course, this will not be possible until his office has been wired to the LAN and to the ISDN connection.

#### **Lab Manager/Computer Teacher**

A Lab Manager/Computer Teacher should staff the lab at all times. Right now, Darlene Hopkins acts as a computer teacher for YMCA-AT on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but not during all operating hours. When the computer lab is not staffed it poses a security risk to the hardware, media, and furniture. However, keeping the lab closed is an unacceptable waste of resources, not to mention a disservice to the community. Therefore, sufficient staff members to supervise the lab during all operating hours should be hired. The lab manager would not need to be highly trained in computer maintenance, although that would be a plus. These lab managers would be responsible for the following things:

- Keeping an inventory of all hardware and software in the lab. They should alert the Site Director immediately if anything turns up missing or broken.
- Signing out pieces of equipment and media that are easy to steal, such as CDs, headphones, manuals, joysticks, etc.
- Assisting computer users with software.
- Coming up with ideas for classes and youth programs that make use of the computer lab.
- Teaching or facilitating programs, classes, and information sessions
- Making suggestions to the site director for purchases/upgrades of software and equipment.
- Lab manager should be aware of all customer support phone numbers and e-mail addresses, in case anything breaks down.

### **Computer Technician**

System stability is the key to a good computer lab. You really need a technician to come in once or twice a week to guarantee that all of the computers are working properly, network connections are sound, printers are functioning, etc. The computer technician will be responsible for more advanced lab management tasks, such as

- Setting up security software.
- Configuring security policies for the operating system.
- Checking the hardware for problems and doing system diagnostics.
- Setting up/Configuring any software/utilities that the Lab Manager is unfamiliar with.
- Training Lab Managers on new software.
- Making suggestions to the site director about purchases/upgrades of software or equipment.
- The Computer Technician should also be aware of all customer support phone numbers and e-mail addresses, in case anything breaks down.

The reason behind making a distinction between the Lab Manager and the Computer Technician is mainly a cost consideration. Highly skilled computer technicians can be very expensive, and are usually not necessary for the day-to-day upkeep of the lab. Their expertise will keep

the lab running smoothly the same way your family physician keeps your body running smoothly – by providing periodic check-ups and diagnosing problems before they can get out of hand. Any problems that the Lab Manager notices but is unable to fix should be communicated to the Computer Technician, who would be responsible for handling the problem, either by fixing it or sending it out to a computer shop.

Here is an example of how a computer technician might be of use. Just recently, a computer virus called Melissa crippled the e-mail systems of several large corporations across America. The virus hid itself in a macro that could infect any Microsoft Word document. Victims would receive a message containing an infected word document and unknowingly open the document, instantly infecting their system. Melissa would then raid the victim's address book and send off several bogus messages, each containing an infected Word document. Melissa was contained only because of the quick reaction time of computer technicians around the country. YMCA-AT's lab could rely on the Computer Technician to respond immediately to this kind of problem, explaining the details to the Lab Manager, safeguarding the computers, and taking steps toward removing the virus if any of the computers had been infected.

The Lab Manager, on the other hand, should be more skilled in teaching. Their main responsibility will be to make sure that people get the most out of the computers in the lab. By designing classes and information sessions, this person will play an essential role in attracting users to the lab and getting them to incorporate computers into their daily lives. They will also deter users from taking advantage of the expensive equipment by providing constant supervision of the facilities in the lab. With training from the Computer Technician or from elsewhere, the Lab Manager could learn to perform some of the tasks of the Computer Technician, but this would not be a requirement.

The Site Director's responsibility in all of this would be to make sure that both the Lab Manager and the Computer Technician are doing their jobs properly. I recommend that the three meet at least once every two weeks to go over what's being done in the lab and what they could do (as a team) to improve things. In addition to these team meetings, the Lab Manager and Computer Technician should keep a daily log of what goes on in the lab, which the site director can refer to when making evaluations.

## **Technology Environment Recommendations**

### **Change Internet Service Providers**

If there is a problem connecting to the Internet, it means that computer users are cut-off from an entire world of knowledge. Although my

experiences with the lab have been limited, I have had an opportunity to witness the poor quality of service that the current ISP is providing. For three weeks, Noah Rose (Peace Corps) and I attempted to fix a problem with the Internet connection that was preventing four (half) of the computers in the lab from connecting to the Internet. The current ISP investigated the matter, and after examining the system, told us that they were not sure what was wrong and it was probably a configuration problem on our end.

Unfortunately, we were witnessing computers with the exact same configuration where one computer could connect to the Internet and the other could not. Eventually, Noah brought in a graduate student and computer technician from the Heinz school at Carnegie Mellon University. This technician determined that the connection problems were due to poor wiring, a problem that the ISP should have caught when they inspected the computer lab.

So, the lesson learned here is that you need an ISP that can respond to and resolve problems from the ISDN connection down to cabling issues and even network configuration issues in a timely fashion.

I recommend looking into the services provided by Information Renaissance (<http://www.info-ren.org>), at least as a starting point. Appendix A has more information about their ISP services, which is not currently on the web site.

### **Software Tools to make the Technology Environment more Stable**

#### **Windows 98 Upgrade (\$54.00 for Open License Upgrade)**

This latest version of the Windows 9x series is a lot more stable than its predecessor. It contains more drivers, and supports more plug-and-play devices than ever.

#### **Internet Explorer 5.0 (free downloads from <http://www.microsoft.com>)**

Windows 98 comes with Internet Explorer 4.0, which is cool but definitely not the hands down leader in the browser market. This latest release of MS Explorer, though, beats all other browsers in performance and utility. Look nowhere else for a browser. Explorer 5.0 is the Netscape killer.

### **Outlook 98**

This product is great Personal Information Manager, but the staff can also use it to manage important information about the computer lab and the youth program in general. Applications include things such as lists of all children that participate in the program and all of their contact information, or the inventory of software and hardware. Moreover, you get e-mail, calendar, notes, and journal entries.

### **Fortress / Cooler package (<http://www.fortres.com>)**

These two applications will allow the Lab Manager to say exactly what people can do on the computer. If they don't have permission to do something and they try to do it, a message box pops up saying that they are not allowed to do it. This is one of the best tools for preventing unwanted or accidental corruption of system files, and is essential for maintaining system stability.

### **Net Nanny (<http://www.netnanny.com>)**

Keep little kids from looking at naked pictures and crazy kids from looking up directions for making bombs. This piece of software is also essential in any setting where children are given internet access.

### **Launchpad (<http://www.pocketkaos.com>)**

One of the biggest problems with having a nice computer lab with lots of software to offer is that it is often difficult for users to know just what applications are available on the system. Launch pads, in general, help to solve this problem by serving as an alternative to the start menu. What I like about this program, in particular, is that it allows you to configure the launch pad and then prevent users from making changes to the settings. This keeps things consistent --> stable. In addition, the program lets you configure tool tips for each icon, so users can get a description of each piece of software.

## **Program Recommendations**

- Create Posters, them, and put them up in the Computer Lab. Make users aware of the power that they have at their fingertips. There are

many positive message on the walls, but not much information about what the lab has to offer.

- Have people e-mail suggestions for new software to the Computer Lab Manager.
- Offer more classes and programs. Here are a few suggestions:
  - Networked Video Game Contests
  - Quake, Witchcraft, Starcraft
  - How to make your own home page for free at (<http://www.geocities.com>)
  - The wonderful world of free e-mail on the internet at (<http://www.hotmail.com>) .
  - How to study using the internet... tips and tricks to get you better grades on your homework, papers, tests, and more.
  - Where the sites are... (see list of sites everyone should know below) Have a program that introduces people to these sites, and shows them where to find them in the Favorites menu.
  - Where the sites are part deoux (for adults)... more sites, but stuff that adults would be interested in, like jobs, cars, homes, etc.

## Resources

### Staff Resources

<http://www.microsoft.com/office/>

This page contains news and information about the Microsoft Office suite of products, straight from the source. Visit this page to find out the latest updates, bug fixes, new releases, special offers, and more. For instance... right now the page contains a few articles explaining how to protect your computer from the notorious Mellissa Virus!

<http://www.coyotecom.com/tips.html>

Has a lot of tips for people in non-profit organizations who are just getting started on the internet. Learn how to raise funds on the internet, or how to set up a database, where to look for the information you need, how to get on all the good newsletters etc.

<http://www.idealists.org/>

<http://www.idealists.org/newsletter.html>

A huge website, with a database of over 16,000 non-profit organizations! They have advice, information, news, examples, you name it. Find tips on fundraising, finding other non-profit orgs, technical consultation, volunteerism. It's got it all.

**Books (can be purchased at <http://www.amazon.com>)**

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- Office 97 for Dummies
- Networking for Dummies
- Windows 95 for Dummies
- Outlook 98 for Windows for Dummies

I personally recommend the "for dummies" series. I use them frequently in my efforts to learn more about computers. The language is simple and entertaining, and if you are just beginning to learn about a topic the book will "hold your hand" all the way through it.

## **Technical Environment Resources**

[http://www.compaq.com/athome/support/serv\\_desk.html](http://www.compaq.com/athome/support/serv_desk.html)

Attention! If you have computer problems, be aware that you are not on your own. The name brand of your computers is Compaq Presario 4160. If you ever have any problems with the computer, go to the above website. There you will find lists of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), downloadable device drivers, support phone numbers, and more. Have the serial number and the model number (4160) on hand if you decide to make a phone call.

<http://www.hp.com>

Guess what? All of your printers and scanners come from one place... Hewlett Packard!

<http://www.hp.com/cposupport/prodhome/dj820cz.html>

Your color printers are HP Deskjet 820Cse  
Above is a link to the HP Deskjet 820Cse support page, containing a community forum, device drivers, free software and more.

<http://www.info-ren.org>

I am recommending that you switch your ISP service to a company that can provide more support services. Info-ren is the company that already provides the connection that HillHouse sublets. Go straight to the source for faster connection times and service that is more comprehensive.



## Program Resources

People who surf the web a lot often have a grab bag of web-site URLs that they can recall off the top of their head. If you are just getting started, though, it can take a while to build up a trusted group of sites for getting the information that you need when you need it. So, to give you a jumpstart, here's my personal list of...

Websites that I think everyone should know about:  
(add these to your web browser's favorites menu)

<http://search.msn.com/>

I haven't seen a search site better than this one yet, so I'm recommending it as a resource. If you have to search for anything, go to this website. It has tools for finding people, places, websites, newsgroup messages, anything... and everything else. It looks really simplistic at first, but press the More Searches... button on the left panel, and you will realize just how useful this site can be.

<http://home.microsoft.com/>

Okay, I'm a friend to all things Microsoft, but I like the way this site looks and feels. It's a portal web site, which means that it has links (a lot of them) to other websites of interest. What makes portal websites cool is that they are usually configurable. This one, in particular, will allow you to display things such as the weekly weather forecast in your area, local and national news, stock market prices, daily quotes, horoscopes, and other cool stuff. This isn't the only portal site around, though... there are tons, but it's the one that I use.

<http://pittsburgh.sidewalk.com/>

Find out what's going on in Pittsburgh! Has information on events, movies, performances, etc.

<http://www.m-w.com/>

This is a complete online edition of Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus. You should make this resource available to all of the children in the lab. A wonderful resource provides quick searches and hypertext links to synonyms and antonyms. It's better than using the paper version... I use it whenever I have to writing reports or papers.

<http://encarta.msn.com/>

This is an online, concise, and free version of the best selling software Encyclopedia. It is a perfect solution for the small lab scenario because it doesn't take up any hard drive space and you don't have to worry about people losing, breaking, or stealing the master CD. You can upgrade to the deluxe version of Encarta Online for a small fee. A 3 year subscription comes at a price of approx. \$30/year or \$90. This encyclopedia will be updated on a regular basis, so you won't ever have to purchase new software.

<http://www.hotmail.com/>

Everybody wants e-mail these days. Hotmail dot Com is a website that offers free e-mails service to anyone. Even better, this service allows you to integrate mail from other POP3 mail accounts. I have my mail from work and my mail from school all going into the same inbox on hotmail, errenl@hotmail.com . Recommend this service to people who use the computer lab.

<http://www.when.com/>

Need a personal planner? When dot com offers a free service (like Hotmail) to anyone. The best part about this website is that it allows you to view your personal schedule from any browser, wherever you go. So, recommend it to people who use the computer lab.

<http://www.amazon.com/>

Buy all of your books from this site! Discounts can be up to 40% off the normal price. Plus, most of the books receive ratings based on reader feedback, so you can tell how good the book is before you buy it.

<http://www.buy.com/>

If you have to buy anything else... such as computer equipment, software, games, etc., take a look at this site. I recommend it as a resource because the URL is easy to remember, and the deals are pretty good.

<http://www.cnet.com/>

Finally, if you want to find out whether or not that piece of equipment or software is any good before you buy it? Check out this website. They are always evaluating new software and computer hardware, often doing comparisons across multiple brands. Consult this website before making purchasing decisions.

## Appendix A – Information Renaissance

### Products and Services - November 1998

#### Computer Related Assistance for Non-Profit Organizations

Phone number: 471-4636  
Contact: Gene Hastings (hastings@info-ren.org)

Information Renaissance is a nonprofit corporation that promotes the development of regional networking infrastructure in support of education, community development and economic revitalization. We work in three primary areas: community networks, on-line resources and policy issues, such as improving public participation in government.

One segment of our programs provides a range of computer support services for non-profit organizations. These services include Internet connectivity, training, and the staffing of community computer labs. Non-profit organizations interested in these services should join Information Renaissance as affiliates. Each affiliate is entitled to free e-mail for its staff and three hours of Info Ren's training or consulting services, as described below.

#### Internet Connectivity Services

... Internet Access Accounts: These accounts provide an e-mail address with your organization's own Internet domain name (such as info-ren.org or abc.org) and dialup access for a graphical interface to the World Wide Web, FTP and other Internet applications. The fee for each Internet Access Account is \$200 per year. Each account will be billed on an annual basis in advance.

... Network Design and Consulting: Info Ren offers design assistance for Local Area Networks (LANs) and recommendations for the most effective means for connecting an organization to the Internet. Info Ren can also give a "second opinion" for computer-related planning. The fee for Info Ren's design and consulting services is \$100/hour.

... LAN - Internet Gateway Service: This service connects all computers on your network to the Internet. It is appropriate for computer labs and organizations that have several computers requiring simultaneous Internet Access. The cost for LAN - Internet Gateway service is \$3000 per year plus a one time setup fee of \$700.

... Virtual Host Service: This service gives your organization its own identity on the Internet. Included in the \$2000 annual fee are a domain name for your organization, a Web site in your organization's name, 5 Internet Access Accounts for staff in your organization and training in the use of these facilities.

... Real Host Service: This service gives your organization its own server, located on your own premises. Such a server provides your organization with virtually unlimited Web space and as many e-mail accounts as you may require. Info Ren provides system support for your server and trains your staff to provide local user and account support. Pricing is dependent upon the hardware configuration which you select with Info Ren's assistance.

... Online Seminars: Info Ren can help your organization to organize online seminars on special topics of your choosing. Support includes the preparation of background materials for online access, training of a moderator and a facilitator to conduct the seminar, mailing list and Web archive software and ongoing technical support. Fees depend on the length of the seminar and the size of the intended audience.

### **Training Services**

Training is available on various computer-related topics. Each class lasts 2.5 hours; maximum class size is six students. Each student has exclusive use of a computer. The fee per class is \$30 for each student.

Current classes include:

- ... Introduction to the Internet - the World Wide Web
- ... Introduction to the Internet - Using Electronic Mail
- ... Introduction to Community Computer Lab Management
- ... Intermediate Community Computer Lab Management

Special training can be arranged to meet individual and group needs.

### **Staffing Services**

Info Ren can provide on-site management and supervision of your community computer lab. Lab management includes regular, basic maintenance of computers and support for media-based tutorial instruction. Full administrative and technical support is provided for an on-site staff person. The fee for providing staffing for your community computer lab is \$25 per hour (based on a 20 hour per week work schedule).