

PALOS VERDES PENINSULA NEWS

Serving the Communities of Palos Verdes Estates, Rancho Palos Verdes, Rolling Hills,
Rolling Hills Estates and the Palos Verdes Peninsula
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New Center Opens Doors to Cyberspace

By Chris Boyd News Staff Writer

Suffering from an acute case of cyberphobia? Or simply looking for a place to try out the latest software before you spend a bundle?

The new Computer Technology Center, located next to City Hall in Rancho Palos Verdes, may provide answers to computer users' frequently asked questions and concerns.

The once-vacant recreation center that currently houses 18 computers will open to the public on Jan. 7. The city is not paying any money to operate the facility, said Marilyn Lyon, RPV councilwoman. Currently, residents who wish to use the center must pay a fee for six months of service.

"It's an area where people can come in contact with computers and the Internet, and learn from each other," Lyon said. "The public sector and the private sector have come together for the good of the community."

Lyon hopes that the center will help RPV improve lines of communication with locals. The RPV city budget is available in short form on the Internet, and the city newsletter will soon go on-line.

"One of our goals of having better communication with residents is being realized," Lyon said.

Three to 3 1/2 years ago, the city looked into using grant money for a telecommunications center, Lyon said. However, the council shelved the idea because it was not feasible at the time, she added.

When the recreation building was available for use, the city tried to rent it out but received no response.

Along came Ted Vegvari, owner of PC Labs in Torrance. He has started the center with local volunteers, software and equipment donations from well-known companies, as well as some of his company's equipment.

Although the city may eventually approve the building of a golf course on the site that currently houses the center, the technology center should have no trouble finding a home, said RPV Mayor John McTaggart.

"If it's established, it's going to have a constituency that will support its move," McTaggart said.

Of the current location, McTaggart explained, "It's a proving ground for Ted's dream, frankly."

Vegvari and Palos Verdes on the Net representatives presented a plaque to the city of RPV on Saturday because the city allowed them to use the recreation center. "I don't recall being this satisfied with anything I've ever done," Vegvari said.

A crowd of people gathered in Rancho Palos Verdes' new computer technology center on Saturday. Larry Goldsmith looks on as Richard Zigrang tries his hand at the computer.

According to Vegvari, "We're now able to have a location where we can meet the needs of the entire community."

Vegvari looks forward to helping local users with their computer needs. "We want to provide them with access to computers and training that you can't receive anywhere else in the country."

The technology center is the only place in the country where a local community has access to a T1, which is a data-conversion device that is 15,000 times faster than a standard modem, Vegvari said. A download that takes about two hours with an average modem eats up only about 28 seconds of time with a T1, he added.

Users at the center can receive the most basic computer instruction or go as far as mathematical modeling and computer aided design (CAD), Vegvari said.

Technology center volunteers will teach workshops and classes for children and adults interested in computers.

Computer teleconferencing, high-end web servers, on-line research, report creation and printing and professional graphic art capabilities are some of the services the center will provide, Vegvari stated. Users can also send E-mail and publish web pages on-site.

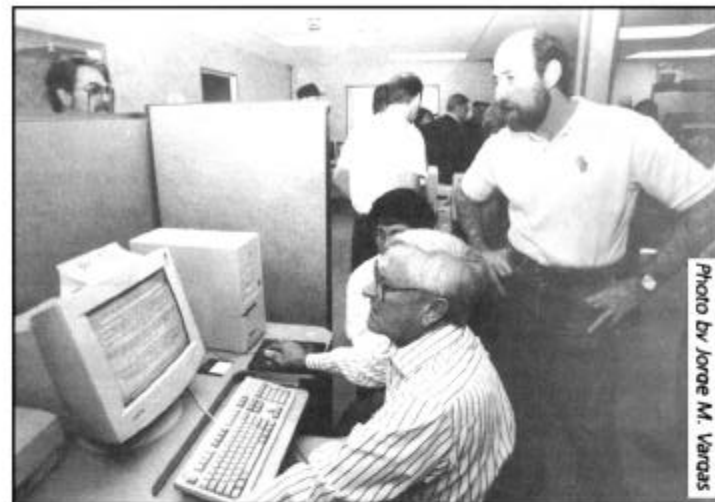


Photo by Jorge M. Vargas

Vegvari said that, recently, a retired volcanologist who lives in the area used the center to obtain information in 15 seconds that would have taken him two hours to receive on his home computer.

The center will also strive to plant seeds for a computer technology base on the Hill, Vegvari noted. "We want to develop a regional support structure for [environmentally] clean, computer-based businesses to grow," he said.

During the past year, Vegvari and his colleagues have been teaching many local companies about the Internet, he said. Vegvari has helped a local travel agency to complete a makeover of its web site design.

Local businesses aren't the only ones looking to the center for advice. Schools from other areas are receiving assistance from Vegvari and his team of computer gurus.

Anza Elementary School in Torrance sent its technology committee to speak with the center's representatives.

The most important issue is letting the interested parties know how to start up their own computer centers, Vegvari said. "Sometimes we can cut the completion time by

three to six months just by helping them get started," he added.

In addition to helping businesses and schools, the center will allow people to test software packages before they purchase them, McTaggart said. "It gives the public an opportunity to try it before you buy it," he added.

Volunteers will give tips about how to understand the nuances of a given program to help users from going crazy, McTaggart said. "It will be a drop-in center where you can come in and use the equipment."

McTaggart, who is involved in the Palos Verdes on the Net steering committee, said he signed up his grandson because there is a great deal that he can learn at the center. People who have home computers can gain a greater knowledge base at the center, he emphasized.

"[The center is] a great example of public and private partnership at work," McTaggart said.

Membership at the technology center is available at a flat rate of \$50 for six months. Call 541-7992 for information or visit the web site at www.palosverdes.com.