RPV mapping program gives depth to city

GIS: Interns are developing a catalog of geographical images to post on the Web.

By Shanna Thompson
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Information about parcel boundaries, sewer locations and property topography will soon be just a click away for Rancho Palos Verdes residents.

In its first phase of developing a geographic information system, or GIS, the city has partnered with the nonprofit Palos Verdes on the Web to create a virtual version of the Peninsula city and its infrastructure.

High school interns Michael Miyake, left, Alex Cohen and Daniel Chen create layers for a Rancho Palos Verdes global information system for use by residents and city officials.

When the mapping system is complete -- a long-term plan for its use will be presented to the City Council by fall -- GIS will serve as a tool for both citizens and city officials.

Residents will be able to access public information about property and city infrastructure via computer and the city's Web site. And the city will have a comprehensive database of information to apply to planning and development.

"Although we have the information here, some of it is on plan sheets. Some of it is on a computer. Some of it is in people's minds," City Manager Les Evans said. "What we are trying to do is put it all in one place, where anyone who knows how to use a computer can do it at home."

GIS uses layers of data to construct a computerized mapping system that can be laid over aerial photographs of an area. The layers link together to illustrate the relationship among elements such as zoning, storm drains, street intersections, city-owned trees and horse trails.

"That's valuable information when you are managing a city," said PVNET director Ted Vegvari. "If you have to know how many of something you have (in the city), GIS is really the only way to do it."

Rancho Palos Verdes will join the majority of cities in the South Bay that already use such systems.

Rolling Hills, Rolling Hills Estates, Palos Verdes Estates, Hermosa Beach, Lawndale and Hawthorne have not yet developed mapping systems, although PVNET will eventually maintain a Peninsula-wide GIS system.

The project is a collaboration between Rancho Palos Verdes and PVNET interns who are developing new layers of city information, such as school and park locations, for the system under the supervision of GIS-trained staff.

"It's a bargain for us because it doesn't cost much and it provides a real-life training exercise for students in the PV on the Net summer school," Evans said.

The GIS system will be a dynamic system that reflects the continuous changes that occur within Rancho Palos Verdes.

"It's mind-boggling once you discover how huge the industry is," Vegvari said. "(The GIS) system never ends because you are always adding data. It's a constantly evolving entity."